

BETWEEN THE SYMBOLIC AND THE SUBLIME:
SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK IN FILM STUDIES... AND OUT

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ABSTRACT

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The following dissertation examines film theory's contribution to the Marxian theory of ideology. I argue that while early film theorists sought to develop a theory of *film*, film theory better serves the study and critique of *ideology*. I claim that the study of film and spectatorship can add to knowledge of ideology and subjectivity. To this end, I examine the relevance of the Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek, for contemporary film studies.

I locate Žižek's place within film studies through a debate between himself and the prominent American film scholar, David Bordwell. Bordwell is well known for his advocacy of cognitive and middle-level research in film studies, and for his criticism of film theory (or, 'Theory'). He is one of the leaders of a movement in film studies known as post-Theory. I take up the debate between Žižek and Bordwell, and argue that the post-Theory rejection of Theory is an ideological effect of the class struggle.

After carving out a place for Žižek in film studies, I examine the relevance of his psychoanalytic interpretations of cinema for a critique of ideology. Žižek is known for using examples from films as tools of exegesis for an interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, I argue that while this is true of some of his writing on film, Žižek also practices a psychoanalytic interpretation of cinema that reveals something about the function of ideology.

Referring to Žižek, I also argue against early film theorists who thought it possible to interpellate political subjectivities through alternative or avant-garde cinema. In contrast, I argue that the work itself is not powerful enough to interpellate political subjectivity. It is, rather, the interpretation that politicizes the work. I claim that films do not create subject-positions, as early film theorists argued; rather, they reproduce the already existing subject-positions of the spectators by reproducing pleasure or desire. However, without rejecting the efforts of early film theory, I conclude, against Bordwell and other post-Theorists, that Theory is still important in film studies, particularly in the area of political critique, and that Žižek's work is exemplary of the kind of political criticism needed in film studies.

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION – THE CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY: DIALECTICS, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA	1
CHAPTER ONE – FROM THEORY TO POST-THEORY... AND BACK	19
Žižek and Lacanian Film Theory	23
‘First Wave’ Psychoanalytic Film Theory	30
Post-Theory in Film Studies	35
Cognitivism, Middle-Level Research, and the Critique of Theory	37
Film as Exegesis	42
CHAPTER TWO – CLASS STRUGGLE IN FILM STUDIES	52
The Missing Term Between Theory and Post-Theory	54
On Class Struggle ‘In’ Theory	58
Discursive Formulations in the University	64
Dialectical (Re)Mediations	70
David Bordwell: Say Anything	75
Comprehensibility and the End of Narrative	80
The Hegemony of Science and Post-Theory	85
CHAPTER THREE – TOWARDS A ‘FILM THEORY OF IDEOLOGY’	99
Psychoanalysis, Between Cinema and Ideology	101
What is So Perverse About Žižek’s Guide to Cinema?	110
Ideology, Between the Master-Signifier and the <i>Objet Petit a</i>	114
Fantasy, Ideology, and the Fetishism of the Cinema	119
‘Rape in Fantasy’	126
Universality and its Exception(s)	130
Ethical Choices and Their Alternatives	133
Gaze, Voice, and the Foreclosure of the Master-Signifier – Examples of a ‘Psychotic’ Cinema	137
Hysteria, Perversion and Psychosis in the Cinema	143
The ‘Family Myth’ in Hollywood Cinema	147

CHAPTER FOUR – ENJOYMENT IN THE CINEMA	157
‘Jolts of Enjoyment’	165
Fetish/Symptom	169
Which Notion of the Subject	174
Psychoanalysis and the Self	181
<i>Cogito</i> and the Forced Choice of being	183
Conditions of (Im)Possibility	187
The Symbolic Mandate	190
Parallax View	193
Interface	196
Enjoyment in the Cinema	200
CONCLUSION – FILM THEORY, BETWEEN DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM	207

INTRODUCTION

THE CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY: DIALECTICS, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA

A single problematic occupies the field of the Marxian theory of ideology. As Fredric Jameson puts it, “if the world is as Marxism describes it” – that is, if society really is organized along the lines of domination and exploitation; if capitalism really does divide society into antagonisms between the class that rules and the class that is exploited; if all of the legal, social and cultural formations in the superstructure really are determined by the relations of domination and exploitation in the mode of production, etc. – “if this particular ‘truth’ about the world has finally been revealed to us in modern times, how is it that people continue to refuse it and insist on seeing the world in quite different terms?”¹

The Marxian theory of ideology has developed, in various different guises, by way of various different methodologies, in order to answer the question as to why its particular ‘truths’ have been encountered with so much resistance, especially by those whose interests it asserts. What is therefore at stake in the Marxian theory of ideology is not simply the ‘truth’ value of that which it reveals about the world, but rather the extent to which its revelations have enough force to actively transform the existing conditions of domination and exploitation. The theory (or ‘Theory’) of ideology suggests that this ‘truth’ alone is not enough to generate a ‘class consciousness’ capable of transforming the existing conditions of existence.

One of the main problems facing Marxian theorists of ideology is that, as Colin MacCabe notes, Marx abandoned the subject of ideology after 1846.² Thus, no such theory exists in Marx's later work. In an effort to build an understanding of why the Marxian critique of capitalism was met with so much resistance, Marxian scholars such as Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukács returned to the problematic of ideology. Gramsci, on the one hand, sought an answer in his conception of 'hegemony'. Post-Marxists, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, have taken up Gramsci's conception of hegemony as a way of elaborating upon a non-dialectical theory of ideology. However, I claim that non-dialectical perspectives devalue the determining role of the class struggle in ideology. Lukács, on the other hand, built upon the Marxian philosophy of dialectical materialism by examining the 'antinomies of bourgeois thought' from a Hegelian perspective. In the following, I seek to extend the tradition of dialectical materialism, against a myriad of 'post-' perspectives (i.e., post-Marxism, postmodernism, post-structuralism) in a manner similar to that of Lukács.

Bourgeois thought, for Lukács, is strictly Kantian, and is thus incapable of perceiving its excesses as a result of its own system of rationalism. In the Kantian paradigm, the subject is capable of understanding everything about reality, except for the fact of its own existence, or the form of its own thought.³ Bourgeois thought perceives excesses (the existence of the proletariat, for example) as instances of irrationality that trouble established rationality. As Lukács puts it, "Kant did not go beyond the critical interpretation of ethical facts in the individual consciousness... these facts were thereby transformed into something merely there and could not be conceived as having been

‘created’.’⁴ The Kantian approach, in other words, does not account for the historical development of objects of thought and their relation to the form of consciousness.

The difference between bourgeois and proletarian consciousness, according to Lukács, is not a difference between two different versions of objective reality. Objective reality ‘in its immediacy’, as Lukács puts it, is the same for both the bourgeois and the proletariat. What is different is the particular, historical, subjective position from which each engages with objective reality. In other words, there are not two different *versions* of objective reality. There is just one reality (or ‘Real’) that is split internally. At stake in the class struggle is the form, or meaning of ‘reality’ – bourgeois or proletariat – that will organize society. From the Marxian perspective, the form of the social coincides with the dominant form of thought.

Unlike the Kantian problematic, whereby the subject is capable of understanding all experience, except for the contingent fact of its own existence, Hegelian dialectics, according to Lukács, allows the subject to comprehend the limits of thought as an effect of the historical *form* of thought itself. Hegelian dialectics allows the subject to comprehend her own existence in its historical contingency – that is, change in history means a change in the form of thought. Dialectics allows the subject to understand her own position in a totality, not by accounting for the irrational as an excess of the rational, but by understanding the rational *from the perspective of the irrational*, or from a perspective that is inaccessible to the dominant form of thought. The ‘irrational’ represents that which the dominant form of thought cannot explain in its own terms; it is that which contradicts the dominant form of thought, and in order to be operative, the dominant form of thought must rid itself of contradiction. It is the irrational, the

exception, that speaks to the (false) universality of the form. Put differently, there are not two universalities/totalities – that of the rational and that of the irrational. There is one universality, split between the particularity of the ‘rational’ and the singularity of the ‘irrational’. One cannot understand the fallacies of the ruling ideology, one cannot understand the faults with its ‘rationalism’, according to Lukács, unless it is viewed from an external position in a totality – that is, unless it is viewed from the position of the ‘irrational’, what the ruling ideology cannot understand in its own terms. For Hegel, however, historical transformation is one by which it is the concept, rather than objective reality that gets changed. History, from a Hegelian perspective, is the history of ideas. The shift from Hegel to Marx is simply an extension of this logic. From the Marxian perspective, the subject must transform the objective conditions of existence in order to develop an equal transformation in herself. In other words, a change in the concept is contingent upon a transformation of material reality. This, in a nutshell, is how the Marxian philosophy of dialectical materialism should be understood.

Dialectical materialism, I claim, is best rendered as a move from the Kantian transcendental subject to the historical subject in Hegel, and finally to the revolutionary subject in Marx, which destroys the limits imposed on its own subjectivity by transforming the objective conditions of its existence. A dialectical materialist critique of ideology is not just epistemological, it is, more importantly, ontological. Non-dialectical perspectives – even those that are in solidarity with Marxism (i.e., the Marxism of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) – fail to make the ontological connection between the class struggle and ideology.

The dialectical method of historical transformation, I claim, is mirrored in the transformation of the subject in the psychoanalytic cure. For both Marxism and psychoanalysis the point is not simply to change the perspective from which one perceives her own objective conditions of existence; it is, rather, to change the objective conditions of one's existence in order to then reconstitute oneself anew. According to each, change is only possible when there is a coincidence of subject and object. In Hegelian terms, this is the position of 'Absolute Knowing' (as opposed to 'Absolute Knowledge'); in psychoanalytic terms, this is the position of 'subjective destitution' – when the subject gains consciousness of the fallacies concerning the Symbolic (as opposed to the objective) conditions of her existence, or the Symbolic 'co-ordinates' of her existence. 'Subjective destitution' represents the 'ends of analysis'. At this point, one can act in one of two ways. The subject can either reconstitute the fantasy that structures the Symbolic co-ordinates of her existence, or she can 'traverse the fantasy' and change the objective conditions of her existence. Both the Marxian revolutionary subject and the psychoanalytic cure require an (ethical) act in concordance with the second option. The first is an operation of ideology.

This provides one answer to the Marxian problematic of ideology. Resistance to the 'truths' of Marxian criticism, I claim, is pathological in the sense that the subject of capitalism is too firmly attached to the fantasy that structures the co-ordinates of her own existence within the Symbolic. In ideology, the subject is still too 'passionately attached' (Butler) to her Symbolic identity. My thesis, like that of Lukács, is that the subject of capitalist society is still too Kantian. This is a subject that is inherently pathological, and for me, all of the non-dialectical theories of ideology and subjectivity are susceptible to

perverse, psychotic, and/or neurotic conceptions of, and relationships to power/authority. These pathological perspectives on power/authority are prevented from perceiving their own subjection as a result of the class struggle. In other words, they all suffer by ignoring the ontological attachment of the subject to authority. The subject, as a result of her 'passionate attachment to authority', is incapable of seeing beyond the confines of her own form of thought.

The dialectical critique of ideology, I argue, seeks to dissolve this ontological deadlock. Unlike other philosophical 'systems' – systems that reproduced dogmatism – the dialectic in Marxism and psychoanalysis is better understood as a unity-of-theory-and-practice. Its goal is not to create certainty about the world, but to constantly revise and recreate new conditions of subjectivity. But does this theory give too little credit to the subject? Is this just another theory of 'false consciousness'?

It is often claimed that Marx treated workers as objects, ignoring the fact that workers are living human beings, with consciousness, and have the ability to articulate ideological, political and economic preferences. They are people who are capable of adapting to different kinds of situations and are able to compromise. They also have the ability to 'wage war' to protect their rights.

Marx, it is claimed, also tended to impose "theoretical constructs upon historical realities and so distorted history."⁵ Furthermore, the theoretical constructs that Marx applied to historical reality reflected, not the actual practice of capitalism, but merely capitalist ideology. Critics also claim that, in practice, the dynamics of workers' resistance have helped to transform capitalist practice, turning it into a terrain of compromise. As David Harvey points out, not only do these criticisms challenge the

basic elements of Marx's theoretical and historical interpretation of capitalism, they also challenge the basis for his revolutionary politics.⁶

These criticisms, Harvey notes, are not entirely untrue. However, Marx's claim, significantly, was that the world cannot be understood by way of simple, subjective experiences and interpretations – this, of course, is the error in the Kantian perspective. In order for the working class to realize its 'historical mission' and to understand its own enslavement it must have access to a particular kind of knowledge, grounded in scientific understanding. This claim does not deny the subjective experiences of workers their own validation, nor does it claim that their own personal experiences are unworthy of consideration. It is, as Harvey points out, important to understand how workers 'cope' with their situation. It is necessary to understand something about the activities in which they take part, the games they play, the forms of entertainment they consume, the kinds of friendships they have, the dynamics of family life, the ways in which they co-operate with each other, the ways in which they confront and deal with authority, and the particular aspirations and senses of morality they promote in their everyday lives – all of which play a role *in making the labour process bearable*. The question that Marx asks, however, is, 'what is it that workers are being forced to cope *with*?' What types of conflicts and forms of domination are workers dealing with that result in all of these various cultural constructs from below?

Marxian Theory "holds up to workers, as in a mirror, the objective conditions of their own alienation, and exposes the forces that dominate their social existence and their history."⁷ But the major dilemma of theory is that it does not present itself well to the consciousness of the proletariat. Political class consciousness, Harvey asserts, is not

‘forged’ by some appeal to theory. The roots of political class consciousness are formed within the fabric of everyday life, and (importantly) within the subjective experiences of ordinary people. This is both a barrier to and the *raison d’être* of ‘the Theory’, for it argues that the realities of exploitation under capitalism are obscured by fetishisms, for both the worker *and* the capitalist. What is obscured is the origin of surplus-value in exploitation. There is thus a gap between what subjective experience teaches and that which theory seeks to reveal. Nevertheless, despite the achievements of theory, Marx could not solve the problem of political class-consciousness, a problematic that has been the single greatest challenge and undertaking for Western Marxists.

Beginning in the 1930s, Western Marxists started taking an interest in psychoanalysis. Like Marxism, psychoanalysis also takes into consideration resistances to its teachings – which are often unpleasant, painful, and difficult to absorb – within the terms of its own systematic accounts of power and repression. It is therefore easy to understand why Marxian theorists turned to psychoanalysis in order to build upon the theory of ideology. Psychoanalysis proved to be quite influential for several key figures in the Frankfurt School, including Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse. These thinkers focused primarily upon the teachings of Sigmund Freud, and their work is often dubbed ‘Freudo-Marxism’. However, one of the most important configurations of psychoanalytic Marxism developed in the work of the French Marxian philosopher, Louis Althusser.

Althusser’s theory of ideology is often the starting point for contemporary theories of ideology. Althusser’s psychoanalytic Marxism differs significantly from the Freudo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School. In contrast to the Freudian influence of the

earlier versions of psychoanalytic Marxism, Althusser's work draws its influence from the teachings of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. From the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, Lacan was most famous for re-interpreting Freudian psychoanalysis by way of structural linguistics. He is most famous for arguing that the unconscious is structured like a language. The Lacanian influence in Althusser's work comes across in his most well-known essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)". Here, Althusser claims that ideology 'interpellates' individuals as subjects in 'ideological apparatuses', such as the school, the church, the media, etc. Althusser's essay on ideological state apparatuses proved to be rather influential in several disciplines and fields of critical study in the 1970s, particularly because it introduced a conception of the subject into the Marxian theory of ideology. The Lacanian inspired theory of the subject gained significance for critical theorists by way of Althusser, but its influence was perhaps strongest in film studies and 'film theory'.

Following the influence of Althusser, Marxian and Lacanian perspectives on ideology and subjectivity began to enter the field of film studies. Film theorists in the 1970s approached the study of cinema as an ideological apparatus. The theory of ideology became an area of interest for film scholars interested in spectatorship. However, film scholars in the 1970s were less interested in the study of *ideology*. They were more interested in understanding something about the way in which films function as ideology, and how spectators are interpellated as subjects. They sought, therefore, to develop a theory of film, rather than a theory of ideology. In the following, I argue that, instead of trying to use Marxism and psychoanalysis to understand something about film and spectatorship, Marxian theorists of ideology should try to further their understanding

of ideology by studying film and spectatorship from a psychoanalytic perspective. Film in particular, and mass culture in general, is of interest because it is an aspect of everyday life and part of the culture from below that makes it possible to understand how people cope with the deadlocks of power and repression, and of exploitation. Film theory, I argue, adds significantly to the theory of ideology, but not only for intellectuals. Film is of interest because it speaks in a popular language. Therefore, if theorists could speak in the language of cinema, perhaps, I claim, it could be possible to relate that which is necessary to understand in theory. This, for me, would be a way of building towards a popular class-consciousness.

My claim, here, is that psychoanalysis is useful for studying film and spectatorship, and for adding to the Marxian theory of ideology. However, I seek to amend certain conceptions of film and spectatorship developed by early psychoanalytic film theorists. Primarily, I argue that the subjective position of the spectator is developed prior to cinematic spectatorship, and thus, films *do not* interpellate individuals *as subjects*. Quite the opposite. Ideology, in contrast to the teachings of Althusser, always interpellates *subjects* as *individuals* (or as ‘identities’). As I argue below (in chapter four), ideology interpellates subjects through the reproduction of desire. This claim is significant for two reasons. First, it challenges the notion that the spectator always and necessarily identifies with the ideological content of the cinema – this account, therefore, allows for the possibility of a failed interpellation, where desire is *not* reproduced. Second, this claim challenges the notion that films are capable of interpellating political subjectivities. Films are neither overly ideological in the sense that ideology can simply

be ‘zapped’ into the mind of the spectator, nor are they powerful enough to enact political subjectivization, even in the case of avant-garde, or modernist cinema, through the *production* of failed interpellation – that is, through the production of rupture or ‘distanciation’ in the spectator. Early film theorists, such as Laura Mulvey, supported this conception of avant-garde or ‘alternative’ cinema as a reaction to mainstream/Hollywood cinema.

Mulvey argues that, in contrast to Hollywood cinema, avant-garde cinema is capable of destroying pleasure. Alternative cinema, she claims, “provides a space for a cinema to be born that is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of mainstream film.” According to her, the “formal preoccupations” of mainstream cinema “reflect the psychical obsessions of the society that produced it...”⁸ My objective is not to dispute the latter, but instead to claim that alternative cinema produces pleasure in exactly the same way as mainstream/Hollywood cinema – even if its objectives are to induce a failed interpellation. Failed interpellation does nothing more than induce hysteria, but still fails to evoke a political act from the spectator. This perspective is still too Kantian, and perhaps accounts for an element of elitism in the advocacy of a political avant-garde.

Here, my aim is not to downplay the significance of avant-garde and alternative cinema. I argue, instead, that film and spectatorship can only truly be politicized by way of interpretation. This is the role of theory, and involves a level of practice. Theory operates as a kind of Hegelianization of the Kantian subject. Spectatorship is Kantian, and operates in the same way as bourgeois thought – that is, as it is described by Lukács. It does not interpellate subjectivity, but it does reproduce a ‘unified subjective

experience’.⁹ It is also ‘perverse’ in the strict psychoanalytic sense. Pleasure in cinema is derived from the reproduction of surplus-enjoyment, or desire. Through the reproduction of desire, the subject holds onto and stays attached to her particular subjective position, as well as the objective conditions that guarantee this subjective position. This, perhaps, is one way of interpreting the Lacanian phrase, “Kant *avec* Sade”.¹⁰ The Kantian subjective perspective is inherently perverse in its unwillingness to pass through the fantasy that makes the subject submissive to the reigning ideology. The same holds true for spectatorship, and this is the reason why pleasure (as opposed to enjoyment) is derived from the cinema. There is, of course, nothing original about the claim that cinema reproduces pleasure for the subject. My claim, however, is that ideology reproduces pleasure for the subject in exactly the same way that cinema produces pleasure.

I do not want to suggest that there is absolutely no interpretation at the level of the Kantian, perverse, subject-spectator. However, the kind of interpretation that exists at this level is not enough to politicize the subject. What is required is a form of interpretation that allows the subject to perceive her own historical *objectivity*, including the historical objectivity of desire – a topic that is perhaps far too large to engage in the present work. This kind of interpretation, however, is only a first step towards politicization, and neither the cinema, nor interpretation is capable of revolutionizing the objective conditions of existence. This is the part to be played by the historical subject, which, again, is a topic far too large to fully engage with here. Here, however, I argue that film theory adds to a theory of ideology. But early film theory, which is not without its critics, still needs to be amended in order to live up to the potential for which it has

been ascribed. I have found the work of the contemporary Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek, quite useful for this task.

Despite some disagreements that I have with Žižek's recent political orientation, which I will not discuss here, what interests me most in his work is his methodology. Žižek is well known for his re-interpretations of Lacanian psychoanalysis from a Kantian and Hegelian perspective, which are perhaps better rendered as Lacanian re-interpretations of Kant and Hegel. With this task, Žižek has also sought to rethink the contours of dialectical materialism from a perspective rooted in German Idealist philosophy, yet articulated in psychoanalytic terms. Žižek is also well known for elaborating upon complex theoretical concepts in his work through the use of examples from popular culture, and film in particular. For this reason, Žižek's relevance to film studies has been advocated *and* questioned.

He is advocated by Lacanian film theorists, such as Todd McGowan, seeking to amend earlier errors in Lacanian film theory, from a strictly Lacanian perspective. However, his relevance is questioned by film scholars such as David Bordwell, who is one of the leading figures in the anti-theory, or 'post-Theory' movement in film studies. Bordwell and his colleague, Noël Carroll, are the editors of a volume of essays titled *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), which argues for the end of film (capital 'T') Theory. In this collection of essays, Bordwell and Carroll, among others, are at pains to put an end to 'orthodox film theory', which for them refers, primarily, to the psychoanalytic and Marxian influence in film studies. This position, I claim, is indicative of a counter-political (or counter-revolutionary, if one wishes to use such terms) current in contemporary academia. This is also a current that has not gone unnoticed by Žižek

who, in his book *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001), seeks to reclaim the importance of theory, primarily psychoanalysis, for film and cultural studies. Žižek uses psychoanalysis, and an interpretation of the films of the Polish filmmaker, Krzysztof Kieslowski, to highlight the political conflict at the heart of the Theory versus post-Theory debate. This debate serves as the starting point for the present investigation of the relation between Marxism, psychoanalysis and film theory.

Three objectives occupy the terrain of what follows. First, I aim to develop a conception of political conflict in academic discourse by investigating the post-Theory rejection of Theory in film studies and Žižek's counter-offensive against Bordwell and Carroll. This is the focus of the first part of the present study in chapters one and two. Here, I develop a short history of early psychoanalytic film theory and the objection to the latter by the post-Theorists in order to open up a space for introducing a Žižekian perspective into film theory. In chapter two, I outline the contours of the debate between Theory and post-Theory in terms of Žižek's critique of the latter in *Frigh of Real Tears*, and Bordwell's subsequent reply. I claim that Bordwell's perspective is one that is fully grounded in Kantian subjectivism, whereas Žižek's Hegelian perspective is one that is adequate for the political task of interpretation. The conflict between the two, I claim, is an example of class struggle in academic discourse – between the reigning ideology and its theoretical subversion.

Second, I seek to demonstrate Žižek's importance to film theory by investigating his psychoanalytic interpretations of films. In chapter three, I examine the way in which Žižek's interpretations of films speak to the analogous forms of film and ideology. By

using psychoanalysis to interpret films and film form, Žižek, I argue adds to an understanding of the form of ideology.

Here, it is important to add a distinction between ideology critique and discourse analysis. The former, I claim, is concerned with ideological *form*, whereas the latter is concerned with ideological *content*. When considering the form of ideology, one must be careful not to confuse overt ideological content with the covert form of ideology. It is often the case that the overt ideological content of a text is critiqued without necessarily uncovering its ideological form. Take, for instance, the case of racism. One does not counter the ideology of racism by claiming that a certain group of people is being misrepresented – ‘No. They are really not like that. They are really ‘warm human beings’, etc..’ The critique of ideology should not necessarily seek to prove what is false at the level of content – this, of course is one of its objects. The critique of ideology, I claim, must also seek to demonstrate what is false at the level of form.

The case of Nazi anti-Semitism is exemplary here. One cannot counter Nazi anti-Semitism simply by claiming that Jews do not really run the banks or the media, etc., or by claiming that not all Jews are Communist ‘agitators’. There is, of course, an element of racial profiling in these claims. But the content of these claims can often be true. What is untrue is the *form* of the content, blaming Jews for the economic crisis of the 1930s, rather than the system of capitalist exploitation itself. My point is that, even if the claims of ideology were false at the level of content, this in itself would do nothing to end anti-Semitism. This is the highest form of populism, blaming some ‘enemy’ figure or ‘intruder’, someone who disrupted the system (a point of irrationality), rather than the system itself. The anti-Semitic figure of the Jew functions as a fetish that allows the

reigning form of rationalism to explain contradictions within the system of exploitation in its own terms. This figure is a fetish that gives closure to the form. It fixes the field of meaning. As Terry Eagleton puts it, ideology is not “a particular *set* of discourses,” it is “a particular set of effects *within* discourses.”¹¹ The form, I claim, rather than the content of ideology produces these effects. It is the form that is often misrecognized, and which thus makes ideology much more difficult to bring to consciousness. This is precisely what a psychoanalytic interpretation adds to the Marxian theory of ideology – that is, an understanding of its misrecognized form. By locating the fetish, psychoanalysis seeks to dissolve the symptom. It is here, at the level of methodology, that I find Žižek most useful for film analysis and the critique of ideology.

Returning, then, to the present analysis, I develop a psychoanalytic conception of film spectatorship that speaks to the form of ideology. This is accomplished by applying Žižek’s theory of subjectivity to the form of cinematic spectatorship. In chapter four, I outline a theory of spectatorship that, on the one hand, claims that cinema interpellates subjects through the production of surplus-enjoyment, or desire, and on the other hand, emphasises the impossibility of either the production of subject-positions or the production of political subjectivity in cinema. What I hope to make clear in the following is that cinema in particular, or art in general, is not enough to enact political subjectivization. Politics – particularly radical politics – requires a theory and a method of interpretation capable of transforming the perspective through which the subject engages with objective reality by elaborating upon the form of thought. Interpretation is always a political act, and contrary to the claims of post-Theory, there is no neutrality. Interpretation is what makes the work truly political. In order to understand the politics

of cinema it is important to understand the politics of interpretation. Film is of interest because it allows the subject to elaborate the terms of her exploitation in the language of the everyday. Žižek's work, I claim, is therefore significant because he speaks in the language of theory *and* film.

NOTES:

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 318-319.

² Colin MacCabe, "Realism and Cinema." In *Tracking the Signifier – Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 52.

³ See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 185.

⁴ Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat." In *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Rodney Livingstone, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1971), p. 123.

⁵ David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 111.

⁶ Ibid, p. 112

⁷ Ibid, p. 113

⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film and Theory: An Anthology*. Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 484.

⁹ MacCabe, "Realism and Cinema," p. 52.

¹⁰ See Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade." In *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Bruce Fink, trans. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 194.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THEORY TO POST-THEORY... AND BACK

One cannot say with certainty whether Slavoj Žižek is a political philosopher or a cultural critic; it is more difficult to say whether or not he is a film theorist or simply a pop culture enthusiast. Some might also argue that Žižek creates a field of his own. In many ways, and paradoxically so, this most modernist of thinkers is truly the most postmodern thinker to date. The world with which Žižek engages is one that is, on the one hand vividly familiar and quite representative of the images we confront daily in our consumerist, ‘society of the spectacle’, yet on the other hand is painfully obscure. In a single sentence, Žižek can pass from details in the films of Alfred Hitchcock and David Lynch to the most complex conceptualizations of the mind, the Self, and the unconscious in the works of Kant, Schelling, Hegel and Lacan (amongst others). He is a thinker capable of conceptualizing variations in European ideology simply by making observations of the mundane details of toilets in Germany, France and England. He is, also, at the same time, a well-known ‘joker’ and, for some, the most dangerous philosopher writing today. It is often difficult to keep up with Žižek as he has been averaging about two books per year for the last twenty years (and in the time between the completion of this dissertation and its defence, he will probably write two more). This is either the product of a prolific genius or the work of an obsessional neurotic, never ready – or, perhaps, afraid – to settle on any one ‘answer’.

Žižek is also a figure who reaches beyond the confines of academic elitism. His appeal stems, partially, from his appearance *as* image. He is the subject of a

documentary, *Žižek!* (2005), directed by Astra Taylor, and the writer and host of the film, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006), directed by Sophie Fiennes. A simple search for Žižek on Google.com or Youtube.com also results in an un-ending stream of images, videos and texts. Commenting on an interview she conducted with Žižek for the Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue, which, as she notes, is “well known in the United States for selling clothes by featuring barely clad teenage bodies in highly charged homoerotic photographs,” the political theorist, Jodi Dean writes: “That Abercrombie wanted to feature this philosopher (who later supplied text for a particularly beautiful and risqué edition of the catalogue) testifies to his near pop-star status.”¹

The British cultural theorist, Peter Dews, comments that, “the work of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek seems to offer an irresistible range of attractions for theorists wishing to engage with contemporary culture, without accepting the flimsy postmodernist *doxa* which is often the only available gloss on it.”² The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, adds that, “the brilliant work of Žižek is something like the creation of a conceptual matrix that has the power to shed new light on a great deal of cultural facts.”³

What mostly attracts readers to Žižek's work is his ability to engage and expand upon some of the most difficult questions facing theorists today, such as how to engage a critical theory of ideology at a time when we are said to be living in a ‘post-ideological era’. Such an understanding of ideology is not simply meant to undermine the reigning liberal-democratic *doxa* (which in different variations can also be conflated with neoliberalism or neoconservatism) à la Francis Fukuyama or Samuel Huntington, that with the end of the Cold War we no longer have to be concerned with ideological

warfare, we can simply resort to managing and administering the world as it is in ‘reality’ (an attitude that has been severely questioned, Žižek notes, since the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001 (a tragedy), and the financial meltdown in 2008 (a farce)).⁴ In order to engage in the critique of ideology under the conditions of the so-called post-ideological world, Žižek goes so far as undermining the very (Marxian) notion of ideology as a kind of ‘false consciousness’ – and, for my purposes, I want to consider ideology, less as a form of false, or naïve consciousness, and more as a kind of misrecognition of form. As Žižek puts it, it is important to distinguish between constituted ideology – “empirical manipulations and distortions at the level of content – and constitutive ideology – “the ideological form which provides the coordinates of the very space within which the content is located.”⁵

In his own thought on ideology, Žižek refers to the German Idealist philosophy of Kant and Hegel, and psychoanalysis, in order to understand the operation of ideology when it is no longer a matter of mystification. For Žižek, ideology has less to do with a false representation of reality, and more to do with the ‘primordial lie’ that *constitutes* reality itself. As he puts it, “ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function in its favour.”⁶

Dews notes that Žižek’s writings are “informed by a vivid and sophisticated grasp of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, and are enlivened by constant references to works of fiction, cinema, classical music and opera.”⁷ Terry Eagleton even goes so far as to refer to Žižek as “Lacan’s representative on earth.”⁸ However, to limit Žižek’s work to critical engagements with the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and works of popular culture is to miss out on some of the central features of Žižek’s ‘project’. While both

Lacan and popular culture hold important places in Žižek's writings, they serve merely as linchpins for his broader endeavour to elaborate a theory of ideology and subjectivity that draws heavily upon German Idealism. This philosophical project is accompanied by a strong commitment to revolutionary politics. Žižek often dismisses his own engagements with popular culture as mere examples used for the purpose of more clearly elaborating his philosophical project. Adrian Johnston's book, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (2008), is perhaps the most decisive engagement as of yet with the philosophical underpinnings of Žižek's theoretical task.

In the preface to his book, Johnston writes that, "[w]hen Žižek declares that he employs, for instance, popular culture as a subservient vehicle for the (re)deployment of late-modern philosophy... he is quite serious. The chain Kant-Schelling-Hegel, knotted together vis-à-vis Lacan himself as this chain's privileged *point de capiton* (quilting point), is the underlying skeletal structure holding together the entirety of the Žižekian theoretical edifice."⁹ Johnston is at pains to argue that what he refers to as the 'cultural studies Žižek' is somewhat of an impostor, or 'caricature', and that Žižek's constant references to popular culture should not distract readers from his more philosophical goal of elaborating a 'transcendental materialist theory of subjectivity'.

Contrary to Johnston's claim, Paul Bowman suggests that, "Žižek's disavowal of cultural studies is *deliberate* and *strategic*... Žižek's strategic and apparently belligerent relation to cultural studies actually offers something of a 'royal road' for appreciating and understanding his work; and that making sense of this peculiar relation in fact provides us with a number of important insights into his entire orientation."¹⁰

What follows is somewhere in between Johnston's and Bowman's assessments. While the present investigation is developed in solidarity with Johnston's approach, its object of analysis is quite sympathetic to Bowman's comments regarding Žižek's critical orientation and his engagement with popular culture. Although Žižek's orientation is philosophical in stature, one cannot help but consider the central place of culture in his analyses of ideology and subjectivity, particularly his constant and continued engagements with film and cinema. But before I can expand upon the relationship between Žižek and film theory, it is important to understand the historical background of film theory and the debate between Theory and post-Theory.

In this chapter, I provide a brief historical sketch of early film theory, particularly the Lacanian/psychoanalytic film theory of the 1970s, leading up to the post-Theory critique of film theory by scholars such as David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. According to Bordwell, early film theory is characterized by two trends, 'subject-position theory' and 'culturalism'. Both, he claims, are 'Grand Theories'. The former is associated with the film theory of the 1970s in the English journal, *Screen*, and is often dubbed 'screen theory'. 'Culturalism', in contrast, developed organically from 'subject-position theory', mostly by way of criticism of the latter stemming from feminist scholarship, on the one hand, and the influence of British, French, and American cultural studies in the 1980s, on the other. In chapter two, I will focus on the debate between Theory and post-Theory as an instance of class struggle in intellectual discourse, and I will argue that the 'culturalist', or cultural studies position has created a degree of ambiguity for film studies at the level of ideology. Here, however, 'subject-position theory' is the main area of focus.

ŽIŽEK AND LACANIAN FILM THEORY

Many contemporary Lacanian film theorists, such as Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle,¹¹ credit Žižek for the recent re-birth of interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis for film theory. Žižek's philosophical re-reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis has influenced many film theorists towards a re-examination of some of the problematics developed by early Lacanian film theorists, most of whom constructed psychoanalytic theories of film and spectatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Most notable are the writings of Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, Colin MacCabe and Stephen Heath (to name only a few).¹² These early adopters of Lacanian psychoanalysis for a theory of film – and, specifically, film spectatorship – employed a much earlier version of Lacanian theory, developed in Lacan's work in the 1950s.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is predicated upon three levels of inquiry: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Much of Lacan's early work focused on the levels of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, keeping the Real in the background. However, as many contemporary Lacanians will point out – Žižek and Joan Copjec¹³ in particular – beginning with his *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960), Lacan's trajectory started to move away from the Imaginary and the Symbolic, towards a more specialized focus on the Real, as well as other important concepts like the Thing (*das Ding*) and the 'object' of psychoanalysis, the *objet petit a*, and later on, in his last seminars, on enjoyment, or *jouissance*, and the *sinthome* (these concepts will be fleshed out more thoroughly in the chapters that follow).

Despite these advancements in Lacan's own thought, at the same time that many film theorists were beginning to refer to Lacanian psychoanalysis in order build conceptual models for an understanding of spectatorship and ideology in the cinema, Lacan's later thought is absent from early film theory. This has opened up early film theory, especially Lacanian film theory, to a series of critiques. The first of these came from feminist theorists in the 1980s working with concepts in psychoanalysis. Notable are the works of Mary Ann Doane, Constance Penley, Jacqueline Rose, and Kaja Silverman.¹⁴ Rose, for example, was one of the first Lacanian theorists to point out some of the errors of early film theory, particularly with regards to references to the Lacanian 'mirror stage' and the Imaginary in the works of Metz and Comolli. Rose also notes the lack of attention paid to 'sexual difference' in psychoanalytic film theory.¹⁵ Philosophical interventions into Lacanian film theory by Copjec and Žižek, however, have had a more profound influence upon the recent resurgence of Lacanian film theory.

Copjec's book, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (1994) begins with a chapter that examines the misreadings of Lacanian theory found in the film theory of the 1970s and 1980s, which, according to her, too often conflates notions of the Foucauldian 'gaze' and Lacan's own theorization of the 'gaze'. As is now commonly known amongst film scholars, early psychoanalytic film theory focused primarily upon Lacan's conception of the 'mirror stage'¹⁶ in order to interpret the relation between the spectator/subject and the levels of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in cinema. However, as Copjec points out, early film theory "operated a kind of 'Foucauldization' of Lacanian theory; an early misreading of Lacan turned him into a 'spendthrift' Foucault."¹⁷ This 'Foucauldization' of the Lacanian theory of the 'gaze', to which Copjec refers, is most

evident in the works of Metz and Mulvey who, taking their Lacanian theories of the 'gaze' from the 'mirror stage' essay, neglected to consider Lacan's actual theorization of the 'gaze' in his *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1963-1964). Here, Lacan emphasizes that the 'gaze' is of the object, not the subject. The 'gaze' is the *objet petit a* in the scopic drive. Todd McGowan most recently develops this re-thinking of the Lacanian 'gaze' for film theory in his book, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (2007).

Here, as well as in the anthology, *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (2004), co-edited with Sheila Kunkle, McGowan praises Copjec and Žižek for giving 'life' back to Lacanian film theory. Žižek, in particular, has made a significant impact upon contemporary Lacanian interpretations of films. This is made apparent by the kinds of Lacanian interpretations of films found in McGowan and Kunkle's anthology, as well as a recent issue of the *International Journal of Žižek Studies*,¹⁸ edited by McGowan, which focuses particularly on Žižek's relevance for film studies.

As McGowan points out in his introduction to the *IJŽS* issue on Žižek and cinema, there are many who object to the kind of engagement with cinema that Žižek practices in his work, one that has a tendency "to obliterate the specificity of the text he is interpreting in order to advance some aspect of his theoretical framework".¹⁹ Žižek is well known for referring to films primarily as an exegetic tool in his explanations of Lacanian theory. Many of his early books, such as *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (1991), *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (1992), and the anthology, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan... (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992), attest to this fact in

Žižek's work. As he points out, himself, his use of popular culture and films is purely strategic: "I resort to these examples above all in order to avoid pseudo-Lacanian jargon, and to achieve the greatest possible clarity not only for my readers but also for myself – the idiot for whom I endeavour to formulate a theoretical point as clearly as possible is ultimately myself."²⁰ McGowan notes that, "Unlike thinkers who explore different texts on their own terms... Žižek always finds within the texts he analyses the presuppositions of his own theory."²¹ The culmination of this kind of Žižekian referencing of films is his collaborative work with director Sophie Fiennes in the film, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006), wherein Žižek, serving as 'host', proceeds to analyse films, on film, and even within particular scenes from films that readers of Žižek will surely recognize: scenes from Hitchcock's *Psycho* and *Vertigo*, as well as the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*, and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. *The Pervert's Guide* appears to be a perfect extension of Žižek's work since, as Fiennes puts it, "Žižek's own writings are film-like," and "in film Žižek finally has found an adequate medium to fully express his thoughts."²²

Many feel that Žižek's relevance for film studies is thus limited to his re-thinking of Lacanian theory, which has enabled film scholars to re-appropriate Lacan in recent times. As McGowan and Kunkle point out in the introduction to their anthology, new Lacanian film theory tends to focus more specifically upon *textual interpretation*, rather than *empirical research* into spectatorship and film reception.²³ This kind of textual interpretation surely gets its influence from Žižek's myriad of Lacanian interpretations of films. Yet, despite this influence, many still reject Žižek's relevance within film studies. Bordwell, in particular, has criticized Žižek's place in film studies.

Bordwell is one of the cognitivist film scholars who, beginning in the 1980s, led a project to debunk the older paradigms of film theory, particularly psychoanalytic film theory. Bordwell's anthology, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), co-edited with Noël Carroll, represents the zenith point of the cognitivist movement in film studies (this perspective is outlined below). Here, Bordwell and Carroll attempt finally to exorcise the demons of 'orthodox' film 'Theory'. The position of each is represented in their own articles in *Post-Theory*, in which they take aim at 'Grand Theory' and advocate for more middle-level film scholarship, or *theories* (plural, as opposed to – capital 'T' – Theory). *Post-Theory* has subsequently developed into a whole movement away from film Theory, towards more strictly film-based scholarship, such as studies of genre, national cinema, authorship, audience studies, etc., as opposed to 'Grand Theoretical' projects in the study of ideology and society. These are, of course, important avenues for film scholarship; however, the direction away from theory leaves little room for what is, perhaps, one of the most significant realms of film theory: the study of ideology. This, to be sure, is Žižek's primary concern.

As a Lacanian theorist who unapologetically practices precisely what the post-Theorists despise – an interpretation of cinema for the purpose of theoretical 'mise-en-scène' – Žižek has caused further divisions between the cognitivist and psychoanalytic camps in film studies with his book, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001). This is a book that makes a significant contribution to Lacanian film studies by defending film theory against the cognitivists; but more importantly, I claim, it represents an important stage in what is arguably a Žižekian approach to film studies. Bordwell has recently criticized Žižek's rejection of

the post-Theory argument at the end of his book, *Figures Traced in Light* (2004), and on his ‘website on cinema’, emphasizing the lack of ‘serious’ film scholarship in Žižek’s work – a claim that re-iterates arguments made by Bordwell and Carroll in *Post-Theory* against film ‘Theory’. As Bordwell puts it, Žižek “is an associationist *par excellence*. His use of films is purely hermeneutic, with each film playing out allegories of theoretical doctrines.”²⁴

Film scholars have tended, traditionally, to consider first and foremost the relevance of Marxism and psychoanalysis for *film* Theory and scholarship. In Žižek’s case, I argue, we see how film scholarship informs a Marxian Theory of ideology, passing through psychoanalysis. I claim, then, that Žižek’s relevance for film studies is not simply confined to his contribution to Lacanian film scholarship. Rather, here, I argue that film scholarship is relevant to Žižek’s critique of ideology.

Such a position thus begs the question: what is ‘film studies’? Is it a field of study? A discipline? Two contemporary film scholars, Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, argue that a ‘discipline’ is constituted by the institutionalization of scholarship and should be understood as a procedure that confers authority, the locus of which is the university.²⁵ (This, of course, marks the university as a ground for the struggle over political hegemony. See chapter two, below). However, the variation of film scholarship would suggest that there is still a lack of unity – at least enough to call into question film studies as a discipline. Disciplinarity, I claim, suggests a methodological, and not just an objective, unity. Here, it is perhaps more appropriate to designate film studies as a multi- or inter-disciplinary *field*. As such, film scholarship is at liberty to assume different forms. In contrast to much contemporary film scholarship, the kind of film scholarship

practiced by Žižek centres not so much on adding to the knowledge of its object (film, cinema, spectatorship); Žižek's film scholarship, as I argue in chapters three and four, takes greater aim at knowledge about ideology and subjectivity.

Žižek, I claim, is simply building on a project that emerged in the 1970s (primarily in 'screen theory'), and continued throughout the 1980s, and is again re-emerging with enthusiasm in the work of contemporary Lacanian film scholars. The latter, however, still seem to be following a trajectory that aims to add to knowledge of the film-object, as opposed to ideology and subjectivity. Below, I argue that it is in the early attempts to confound a unified approach to film scholarship in the 1970s, particularly in *Screen*, a scholarship that focused on the film-object, that we find the latent debate between Theory and post-Theory.

'FIRST WAVE' PSYCHOANALYTIC FILM THEORY²⁶

It is important to recall that the first wave of psychoanalytic film theory followed very closely the 1968 political movements, particularly in France. At this particular moment, film scholarship was called upon to enable a particular kind of political criticism. But what, exactly, did film theorists hope to accomplish by their political analyses of films? Film and media scholars have long been engaged in political analyses of media texts and reception. From the early studies on media propaganda and the social psychological approaches to media study, to Adorno and Horkheimer's 'culture industry' model, all the way to Herman and Chomsky's 'propaganda model', media studies seem generally to follow a political trajectory. At the same time, scholars have attempted to understand something of the utopian potential of media, and film in particular. Such was

the objective of scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan, the latter of course focusing more on television. The political reactions to film in post-1968 scholarship can thus be seen within the same kind of bifurcating (the ideological and the utopian) trajectory.

The years following 1968 are sometimes referred to in the context of the ‘Leftist Turn’ in cultural and social theory. Influential texts included Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and Louis Althusser’s trilogy: *Reading Capital* (1965), *For Marx* (1965), and *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (1969). The latter had, perhaps, the most profound effect upon the film theory of the time. In France, the influence of the post-1968 ‘Leftist Turn’ and Althusser’s writings on ‘symptomal critique’, ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), and the theory of ideological interpellation and subjectivity, allowed film scholars to ask new questions regarding the relationship between film art and spectatorship. The French journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*, started focusing on more political reading of films, influenced by Althusserian structuralist Marxism. An editorial in *Cahiers* from the late 1960s, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism”, written by Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni, indicates a particular change in the journal’s focus. Here, they argue that the purpose of film criticism is necessarily one of ideology critique. They state that, “the job of criticism is to see where [filmmakers] differ, and slowly, patiently, not expecting any magical transformation to take place at the wave of a slogan, to help change the ideology which conditions them... *every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it.”²⁷ Other scholars, such as Edward Buscombe and Stephen Heath agreed, that “directorial consistencies [should] be understood as effects of society and history rather than personal expression.”²⁸ What

followed in the field of film scholarship was a whole host of theories working towards these objectives. However, the late 1960s and early 1970s also saw the beginnings of institutionalized film scholarship. As a result, divisions started to arise in film studies between more or less ‘educationists’ and ‘radical materialists’. These two trends are arguably the seeds of the contemporary divide between Theory and post-Theory, the former siding with the political (i.e., radical materialist) approach to film scholarship, while the latter tends towards the apolitical (seemingly neutral) educationist rationale.

Some of the earliest attempts towards political theories of film grew out of the structuralist writings of Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Film theorists were also influenced by the fields of linguistics and semiotics, and tried to come up with a theory of film ‘language’. It is in this context that film scholars began to look towards psychoanalysis for a theory of film and spectatorship. Lacan, at the time, seemed to be an obvious choice for moving from a theory of film ‘language’ to a psychoanalytic theory of film. He was, after all, most well known for conceiving a structuralist theory of the unconscious by famously arguing that the unconscious is structured like a language.²⁹ However, this was not the first time that psychoanalysis was called upon to develop an understanding of film, culture, ideology and spectatorship. Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse, as well as Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, all referred to Freudian psychoanalysis in their research, often attempting to bridge Marxism and psychoanalysis. As well, many American scholars developed theories of cinema by referring to ego-psychology.

The Lacanian influence in film theory was largely announced by the publication of a 1975 issue of the French journal *Communications* which took as its theme the

relationship between cinema and psychoanalysis. The English counterpart to this development was a series of articles published in *Screen* in the late 1970s, by authors such as MacCabe, Metz, Mulvey, and Heath. Metz and Mulvey are perhaps the most well recognized for their use of the Lacanian theory of the ‘mirror stage’ in their writings on film spectatorship, while MacCabe focused on cinematic realism, and Heath, writing on the filmic ‘suture’, drew upon Jean-Pierre Oudart’s interpretation (as it was developed by Jacques-Alain Miller)³⁰ of the Lacanian ‘*point-de-capiton*’, or the ‘quilting point’, in order to advance a theory of film narrative and spectatorship.

As noted above, the Lacanian influence also came by way of Althusser’s essay on ideology and the theory of ideological interpellation, which drew heavily upon the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’, as well as his articles on Freud and Lacan, and on Freud and Marx.³¹ Althusser’s writing on ideology also introduced a conception of subjectivity into Marxism. As it is commonly known, today, Althusser argues that, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,”³² and that, “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.”³³ These statements presented film scholars with a model for examining the cinema as an ideological apparatus for the interpellation of individual spectators into subjects of ideology.³⁴ Although, as Fredric Jameson points out, in these statements, Althusser identifies a relationship between the Imaginary and the Real, bypassing the Symbolic.³⁵ Althusser’s focus on the Imaginary, I claim, helps us to account for film theory’s focus on the level of the Imaginary, particularly in Metz’s account, which argues that films are ‘imaginary signifiers’, obviously conflating the Lacanian *objet petit a* and the (Symbolic) Master-Signifier (see chapter three, below). Through these and other various modalities of integrating

Lacanian psychoanalysis into film theory, there still seems to be some confusion as to why film scholars opted for the psychoanalytic reading of ideology in cinema.

Richard Allen suggests that psychoanalysis appealed to film scholars “because cinema seems to display a fundamental kinship with the irrational that psychoanalysis seeks to explain.”³⁶ Carroll similarly argues that film theory approached psychoanalysis in order to understand something of the irrationality of the unconscious,³⁷ while Bordwell asserts that film theory attempted to understand big problems about society and the mind through a study of the cinema.³⁸ Janet Bergstrom is, perhaps, much closer with her argument that much of the focus of screen theory was to the question: ‘What is ideology?’³⁹ In this sense, the reason why film scholars began to refer to psychoanalysis was not, entirely, to study the ideological *effects* of films or cinema *on spectators*, but primarily, to study *ideology*. The cinema, I argue, functions as a ‘laboratory’ for the understanding of ideology. In order to understand the relationship between film and psychoanalysis, I argue that it is necessary to reverse the formula: *the point is not to search for a psychoanalytic theory of film; it is, rather, to search for a psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity and ideology*. The study of film and spectatorship, thus, serve as exemplary instances of ideology and subjectivity in material form. The form of cinema and spectatorship is of interest to critical theorists of ideology because it is analogous with the form of ideology and subjectivity.

Nevertheless, early psychoanalytic film theory is not without its faults, and is itself responsible for some of the confusion that has arisen in debates over the meaning of film theory. It is in their highlighting of some of the errors of ‘screen theory’, or ‘subject position theory’, that the post-Theory criticism is most valuable for our understanding of

the relationship between film theory and psychoanalysis, particularly in its venture towards an understanding of ideology.

Stephen Prince is, perhaps, the harshest critic of psychoanalytic film theory in this respect. As he points out, film theory often neglects empirical data regarding audience interpretations of films. He argues that questions, “about how people process, interpret, and respond to cinematic images and narratives are empirical questions,” and that theory-building should pursue empirical investigations of spectators, rather than dogmatically informing interpretations of spectatorship.⁴⁰ The conception of spectatorship found in the Theory, according to Prince, falls short of focusing on actual real-life audiences, referring only to some conception of the ‘subject’, or the ‘ideal spectator’. The greatest problem with psychoanalytic conceptions of spectatorship, for Prince, centre on what he sees as the unreliable data produced by psychoanalysis. This has to do, mainly, with the fact that the published psychoanalytic case studies are incomplete – that is, analysts do not publish their actual notes from clinical sessions; and, there are no established standards of practice in psychoanalysis, so that each analyst can interpret data differently. For this reason, Prince argues that there is no basis for film theorists to refer to psychoanalysis for a theory of spectatorship. Prince’s critique of spectator theory is significant and raises some of the central concerns of post-Theory. Below, I elaborate on the post-Theory perspective.

POST-THEORY IN FILM STUDIES

David Bordwell and Noël Carroll’s anthology, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), I argue, is a manifesto of sorts, arguing for the end of Theory (capital

‘T’). The book, they claim, does not signal the end of theory, or *theorizing*. Instead, they allege to be bringing an end to ‘Grand Theory’. What they call ‘the Theory’ is “an abstract body of thought which came into prominence in Anglo-American film studies during the 1970s,” and, “The most famous avatar of Theory was that aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism.”⁴¹ ‘Theory’ refers to what Bordwell and Carroll term the ‘orthodox’ view of film studies, which their project seeks to end.

The goal of post-Theory, according to Bordwell and Carroll is to demonstrate that film research can proceed without reference to Theory, and that a kind of middle-level research is more appropriate for developing *theories* of film. The post-Theorists are particularly interested in demonstrating that film research can go on without references to psychoanalysis.⁴² The organizing principle of the anthology, as they put it, “is that solid film scholarship can proceed without employing the psychoanalytic frameworks routinely mandated by the cinema studies establishment.”⁴³ In this respect, it appears that the central organizing principle of post-Theory is not simply a rejection of Theory, but psychoanalytic film Theory in particular.

Bordwell and Carroll suggest that the best alternative to Theory is a kind of ‘middle-range’ or ‘middle-level’ inquiry that resists making connections between films and the broader social and political context (or totality), which the ‘orthodox’ view prided itself on developing. Instead of building upon ‘big questions’ (or ‘big explanations’), the avenue of ‘Grand Theory’, post-Theory, they claim, is a kind of ‘problem-driven’ research that operates by way of dialogue, testing, and empirical research.

The essays presented in *Post-Theory* converge on the area of ‘cognitivism’, arising mainly from a rejection of the psychoanalytic conceptions of film spectatorship. However, Bordwell and Carroll claim that cognitivism is, itself, not a Theory. It is best characterized as a ‘stance’. As they argue, cognitivist analysis “seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency,”⁴⁴ as opposed to the irrational agency of the unconscious in psychoanalytic theory. Perhaps the best way to characterize the divide between Theory and post-Theory is through what appears to be the points of ‘suture’ in each respective project: a theory of spectatorship and subjectivity taking psychoanalysis as its highest point of reference, in the case of Theory; and, an object-based study of films, filmmakers, genres, narrative, etc., developed in reference to cognitive theory, in the case of post-Theory. What the Theory/post-Theory debate amounts to, on one level, is a debate between psychoanalysis and cognitivism (this division is further addressed below, and in chapter four). But I claim that the terms of the Theory/post-Theory divide are also symptomatic of another dispute.

The Theory versus post-Theory debate is indicative of the divide between the criticism of ideology (or, ideological hegemony – ideology in general) and the rational, empirical study of (particular) ideologies. Post-Theory, in this sense, can be seen, not as a reaction to Theory plain and simple. It is more significantly a reaction to critical theories of ideology and subjectivity. Post-Theory, I claim, is the highest form of contemporary bourgeois thought. It is, I argue, a political reaction to Theory, and one that is presented without seeming overtly political. It seeks to present cinema as something purely objective. This is an ideological gesture *par excellence*.

COGNITIVISM, MIDDLE-LEVEL RESEARCH, AND THE CRITIQUE OF THEORY

I want, now, to add some comments on the project of post-Theory, particularly as it is related to cognitivism and what Bordwell calls ‘middle-level research’. The branch of film studies referred to as ‘cognitivism’ began to take shape in the mid-1980s. Since that time it has developed into one of, if not *the* leading avenues of film scholarship in the field of film and cinema studies. The ‘cognitivist’ momentum has been gaining a lead over other methods of film scholarship due, particularly, to its rejection of film Theory. Though cognitivists tend not to single out Lacanians, as some have claimed (Žižek), they do hold a particular disdain for the grouping of film Theory, inclusive of Lacanian psychoanalysis, developed in reaction to, or in tandem with structuralism, post-structuralism and Althusserian Marxism. Yet still, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory does seem to hold a high place on the cognitivist ‘hit list’. This makes sense if we consider the fact that ‘cognitivism’ refers to a specific refusal of psychoanalytic interpretations of film spectatorship. As Carroll puts it: cognitivists “take their task to be a matter of answering certain questions about film, especially about film reception and comprehension, most of which have already been asked or at least acknowledged by psychoanalytic film theorists.” However, Carroll also contends that, “cognitivists claim to do a much better job answering those questions than psychoanalytic film theorists have.”⁴⁵

The gaining momentum of cognitivist film scholarship, some would say, has managed to displace the leading role of film Theory. McGowan even goes so far as to suggest that, today, film theory is “almost nonexistent.”⁴⁶ However, others, such as

Gregory Currie, claim that film theory is still the leading (hegemonic) realm for film scholarship, arguing that cognitivism is “often dismissed or ignored, sometimes castigated from a supposed adherence to positivism and hence for a betrayal of the new, radical insights of those approaches to film that have emerged in the wake of structuralism.”⁴⁷

Cognitivism, it is claimed, is often difficult to define since it does not seem to present a unified, coherent set of scholarly principles; however, according to Currie, this difficulty can be alleviated if one is to consider cognitivism as a ‘program’ rather than as a theory. This program, for him, has to do with two central themes (or what might be considered ‘rules of investigation’) in cognitivist thought. The first has to do with an attempt by cognitivists to make sense of films at various different levels of presentation, such as “sensory stimulus in light and sound, narrative, and object charged with higher-order meanings and expressions.” The second line of reasoning in cognitivist thought considers that the ‘perceptual resources’, those that people use to make sense of films, are the same as those used to make sense of the real world. In other words, cognitivists emphasize the resemblance between one’s experience of cinematic images and narratives, and one’s perceptual understanding of events in reality.⁴⁸ Psychoanalysis, to be sure, shares some of these concerns, however, a key distinction between the two centres on the difference between *comprehension* and *meaning* (this difference is of interest to the debate between Žižek and Bordwell, and is discussed in chapter two, below).

Since its inception, cognitivist film scholarship has been a leading challenger to Marxian theories of ideology and psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship in film studies. Other contentions that cognitivists have with ‘the orthodox view’, are thus, concerned, on

the one hand, with its particularly political (and, perhaps, often polemical) approach to film scholarship, and on the other hand (and more importantly), with its tendency towards ‘Grand Theory’. Bordwell argues that film Theory is ‘Grand Theory’ in the sense that it tends to discuss film and cinema within schemes that seek to explain very broad and general features of society, history, language, and the mind. For him, cognitivism represents a push towards ‘middle-level’ research in film studies, which does not attempt to make big claims about films and spectatorship. Instead, middle-level research is more ‘localized’. It focuses on ‘film-based’ problems rather than larger social, political and psychical problems. The most prominent areas of middle-level research, according to Bordwell, have been “empirical studies of filmmakers, genres and national cinemas,” traditions which have been “enriched by gay/lesbian, feminist, minority, and postcolonial perspectives.” As well, middle-level research has helped film scholars to highlight other areas of film study that have been ignored by ‘orthodox’ film theory, such as the works of filmmakers in the developing world, or the global south.⁴⁹

Despite their hard-line disdain for psychoanalytic film Theory, cognitivists, according to Currie, are not simply at odds with psychoanalysis, *per se*.⁵⁰ In fact, some cognitivists refer to versions of psychoanalysis to explain patterns of irrationality in film reception.⁵¹ Cognitivists, rather, hold to a particular kind of psychoanalysis that is central to understanding the ‘psychology of film’. Folk psychology and perceptual psychology are two of the most common psychological approaches referred to by cognitivists. The ‘brand’ of psychoanalysis-applied-to-film contested by cognitivists, would thus, more clearly, appear to be the Freudian-Lacanian branch of spectatorship-ideology studies, or what Bordwell refers to as ‘subject-position theory.’

‘Subject-position theory’, according to Bordwell, can be understood as asking the question: ‘what are the social and psychic functions of cinema?’ In order to answer this question, film theorists, Bordwell argues, “built conceptions of cinema upon some basic assumptions about social organization and psychic activity.” ‘Subject-position theory’, as Bordwell explains, perceives the subject/spectator as “neither the individual person nor an immediate sense of one’s identity or self. It is rather a category of knowing defined by its relation to objects and to other subjects... Subjectivity [in this sense] is constructed through representational systems.”⁵² Or, as Stephen Prince puts it, film theorists, “with little tradition of work in (and little respect for) empirical procedures, have constructed spectators who exist in theory; they have taken almost no look at real viewers.”⁵³

Many of the criticisms waged against psychoanalytic film theory by cognitivists are not completely unfounded. As McGowan points out, the problem that most cognitivists and middle-level researchers have with film Theory is “its proclivity to apply psychoanalytic concepts to the cinema without regard for empirical evidence that didn’t conform to the theory.”⁵⁴ For Carroll, there is also evidence that demonstrates a confusion by some film theorists between ‘theory’ and ‘interpretation’. There are many film scholars, he argues, who “imagine that they are producing film theory when they are actually merely contriving interpretations of individual films, albeit in arcane, ‘theoretically’ derived jargon.” He adds that,

often film exegetes proceed by reading the Theory into a film, as if the presence of subject positioning – putatively a causal process – could be confirmed by hermeneutically alleging to find the allegory of the Imaginary retold in a selected film... Not only do contemporary film

scholars pretend to find technique after technique and film after film that exemplify this or that general pattern... film scholars also claim to find films that *express* the theories in question...⁵⁵

It is hard *not* to imagine that Carroll is, here, speaking specifically about Žižek.

FILM AS EXEGESIS

Before going any further, I want to highlight an example of Žižek's exegetic use of cinema as a point of contrast for what I will later develop as a Žižekian method of film interpretation. For many, films serve merely as tools of exegesis for Žižek's larger project of elaborating upon the more complex concepts in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Consider, for example, Žižek's reference to David Lynch's film, *Lost Highway* (1997), to which he refers in order to discuss the difference between desire and drive in Lacanian Theory, and the psychoanalytic process. Here, he employs the science-fiction convention of the 'time-loop' to make his point. In the 'time-loop', "the subject travels into the past – or the future – where he encounters a certain mysterious entity that eludes his gaze again and again, until it occurs to him that this 'impossible' entity is *the subject himself*, or – the opposite case – the subject travels into the past with the express purpose of engendering himself, or into the future to witness his own death..." Obvious examples of this procedure include films such as *Back to the Future* (1985), Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* (1996), Simon Wells' *The Time Machine* (2002), etc. But how does this procedure work in *Lost Highway*?

According to Žižek, one of the crucial elements of all of Lynch's films is a phrase, or a 'signifying chain', "which resonates as a Real that persists and always returns

– a kind of basic formula that suspends and cuts across the linear flow of time: in *Dune*, it is ‘The sleeper must awake’, in *Twin Peaks*, ‘The owls are not what they seem’, in *Blue Velvet*, ‘Daddy wants to fuck’; and, of course, in *Lost Highway*, the phrase which contains the first and last spoken words in the film, ‘Dick Laurent is dead’, announcing the death of the obscene paternal figure (Mr. Eddy) – the entire narrative of the film takes place in the suspension of time between these two moments.”⁵⁶ For Žižek, the film is based on the impossibility of the hero ever encountering himself, similar to the time-loop structure. But for Žižek, the time-loop shares a procedural element with psychoanalysis: at the beginning of analysis, “the patient is troubled by some obscure, indecipherable but persistent message – the symptom – which, as it were, bombards him from outside; then, at the conclusion of treatment, the patient is able to assume this message as his own, to pronounce it in the first person singular.” According to Žižek, the temporal loop that structures *Lost Highway* re-enacts the ‘loop’ of psychoanalytic treatment where, after a long detour, the subject ultimately returns to the place from which she began, although from a different perspective. This, according to Žižek, is how we have to understand the difference between desire and drive: desire comes at a price – the symptom – which is maintained by the subject’s attachment to the fantasy; however, once the subject has ‘traversed the fantasy’ – that is, once she has let go of her ‘passionate attachment’ to the fantasy – she is able to understand the substance of her being in a new way, as drive (desire and drive are, thus, two different ways of understanding the Lacanian *objet petit a* – they are just two different ways of perceiving the same substance). One has to ask, however, what does this conflation of Theory and interpretation – as Carroll suggests – have to do with *film* analysis? Is this really *film* Theory?

In contrast to Carroll, I argue that film theory *is* interpretation. In other words, interpretation is essential to theory. Interpretation is what allows the subject to bring to consciousness the conditions of her own ‘subjectivization’. However, the example of Žižekian interpretation above does address a particular dilemma – that is, the difficulty in claiming that Žižek does more than simply use film as a tool of exegesis. Here, Žižek does use film to more easily define some of the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, it is important to keep in mind that this explanation of Lacanian psychoanalysis adds to Žižek’s theory of ideology. The above example is provided in order to posit an image of Žižekian critique that is often rejected. However, as I demonstrate in chapter three, Žižek’s interpretation of film is useful for identifying similarities between film and ideology at the level of form. Before I consider Žižek’s method of interpretation in chapter three, I will highlight Žižek’s place in film studies by looking at his debate with David Bordwell.

In the following chapter, I propose a method for analysing the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory by way of Lacan’s University discourse. This is a methodological approach that I take from Žižek as a way of positing the divide between Theory and post-Theory as an instance of the class struggle, at the level of ideology, within the field of film studies.

NOTES:

¹ Jodi Dean, *Žižek’s Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. xi.

² Peter Dews, “Tremor of Reflection: Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian Dialectics.” *Radical Philosophy* 72, 1995, p. 1.

³ Alain Badiou in A.S. Miller and Badiou, “An Interview with Alain Badiou: Universal Truths and the Question of Religion.” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 3(1), 2005, p. 41.

⁴ See Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

⁵ Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 55.

⁶ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 49.

⁷ Dews, “Tremor of Reflections,” p. 17

⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 139.

⁹ Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), p. xiv.

¹⁰ Paul Bowman, “Cultural Studies and Slavoj Žižek.” In *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, G. Hall and C. Birchall, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 163.

¹¹ See Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2007). Here, McGowan claims that, “With the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989, Slavoj Žižek introduced a new understanding of Lacan, focused on the importance of the real to the English-speaking world. As a result of this book and the many that followed in its wake, he is, of course, the pioneer in the dissemination of this ‘real’ Lacan – a grasp of Lacan that captures the latter’s radicality as a (political) thinker in ways that no one prior to Žižek ever imagined. Žižek even brings his version of Lacanian theory to bear on film. But because Žižek’s numerous discussions of film often

focus on filmic content rather than form or spectatorship (at least prior to the publication of *The Fright of Real Tears* in 2001), some critics have dismissed his forays into film theory... This objection centres on Žižek's very way of talking about film. Instead of engaging Lacanian theory to facilitate a new way of approaching film, film seems to be, for Žižek, nothing but a source for fecund examples that demonstrate the truths of Lacanian theory. But if Žižek has not fully elucidated the importance of the emphasis on the real for film theory as such, it is nonetheless implicit throughout his work" (pp. 213-214, n. 19).

See also, McGowan and Sheila Kunkle, eds., *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (New York: Other Press, 2004). In the introduction to this anthology, McGowan and Kunkle return to Lacanian thought centred on the Real, noting Žižek's influence in this particular avenue. Their anthology, they claim, does not focus on ideology and film, per se, but on "the disruptive and radical power of film" – that is, instead of focusing on the subject as "the apogee of the ideological processes" the analyses in this book "view the subject as the point at which ideology fails" (p. xvii). For them, however, Žižek contributes to a Lacanian theory of film.

¹² Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." Alan Williams, trans. *Film Quarterly* 28(2): 39-47, 1974-1975; Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism." In *Movies and Methods: Vol. 1*. Bill Nichols, ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1976); Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film and Theory: An*

Anthology. Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Colin MacCabe, *Tracking the Signifier: Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985); Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space." *Screen* 17(3): 68-112, 1976, and "Notes on Suture." *Screen* 18(4): 48-76, 1977-1978.

¹³ See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*. (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT, 1994).

¹⁴ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator." In *Film and Theory: An Anthology*. Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988) and Penley, *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London and New York: Verso, 1986); and, Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁵ See Rose, "The Imaginary" and "The Cinematic Apparatus – Problems in Current Theory." In *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Bruce Fink, trans. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

¹⁷ Copjec, *Read My Desire*, p. 19. Here, Copjec argues that the 'mirror stage' gaze is conflated with the Foucauldian notion of 'panopticism'. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1977). See also Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1993). Friedberg considers the relevance of the Foucauldian 'gaze' for film theory.

¹⁸ See the special issue on "Žižek and Cinema" in the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1(3), 2007. Available at <http://Žižekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/issue/view/5>.

¹⁹ McGowan, "Introduction: Enjoying the Cinema." *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1(3): 1-13, 2007. p. 1.

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 175.

²¹ McGowan, "Enjoying the Cinema," p. 1

²² Sophie Fiennes, interview with Srećko Horvat. "The Pervert's Guide to Cinema" *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1(0): 1-3, 2007. P. 2.

²³ McGowan and Kunkle, *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, p. xxi

²⁴ David Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything." *David Bordwell's website on cinema*. Available at <http://www.davidbordwell.com/essays/Žižek.php>.

²⁵ Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham and London: Duke, 2008), p. xi.

²⁶ Here I draw primarily upon Robert Stam's book, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), as well as Dudley Andrew's recent article, "The Core and Flow of Film Studies." *Critical Inquiry* 35: 879-915, 2009, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake's book, *Film Theory: An Introduction*. 2nd Ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), and two articles in Grieveson and Wasson's anthology, "Screen and 1970s Film Theory," by Philip Rosen, and "(Re)Inventing

Camera Obscura,” by Amelie Hastie, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, and Sharon Willis, for an historical overview of film Theory and film studies.

²⁷ Comolli and Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” p. 24

²⁸ Rosen, “*Screen*,” p. 268

²⁹ As Lacan puts it in *Seminar XI*, “The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language.” In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 149.

³⁰ See Jacques-Alain Miller, “Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier),” and Jean-Pierre Oudart, “Cinema and Suture.” *Screen* 18(4): 24-47, 1977-1978.

³¹ See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” and “Freud and Lacan.” In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Ben Brewster, trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]). See also Louis Althusser, “On Marx and Freud.” In *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, Jeffrey Mehlman, trans. (New York: Columbia, 1996).

³² Althusser, “Ideology,” p. 109

³³ Ibid, p. 115

³⁴ This is particularly evident in the works of Baudry and Metz. See note 11, above.

³⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” *New Left Review* I 146: 53-92, 1984. Pp. 91-92.

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- ³⁶ Richard Allen, "Psychoanalytic Film Theory." In *A Companion to Film Theory*, Toby Miller and Robert Stam, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 124.
- ³⁷ Noël Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment." In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), p. 62.
- ³⁸ David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory." In *Post-Theory, op cit.*, p. 6.
- ³⁹ Janet Bergstrom, "Introduction: Parallel Lines." In *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, Janet Bergstrom, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 3.
- ⁴⁰ Stephen Prince, "Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator." In *Post-Theory*, p. 72.
- ⁴¹ Bordwell and Carroll, "Introduction." In *Post-Theory*, p. xiii.
- ⁴² The essays in *Post-Theory*, they claim, "demonstrate that film research can proceed sans psychoanalysis." Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, p. xvi
- ⁴⁵ Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory," p. 62
- ⁴⁶ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, p. ix
- ⁴⁷ Gregory Currie, "Cognitivism." In *A Companion to Film Theory, op cit.*, p. 105
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 106
- ⁴⁹ Bordwell, "Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," p. 27
- ⁵⁰ Currie, "Cognitivism," p. 107

⁵¹ See, for example, Sebastian Gardner, *Irrationality and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵² Bordwell, "Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," p. 6

⁵³ Prince, "The Case of the Missing Spectator," p. 83

⁵⁴ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, p. 4

⁵⁵ Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory," p. 43

⁵⁶ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 299.

CHAPTER TWO

CLASS STRUGGLE IN FILM STUDIES

Žižek begins his introduction to *The Friction of Real Tears* (2001) by stating that, had the book been written twenty-five years earlier, at the high point of ‘structuralist Marxism’, at a time when both psychoanalytic and Marxian film theory were booming, then perhaps its subtitle would have been ‘On Class Struggle in Cinema’. The book’s actual subtitle, however, ‘Krzysztof Kieslowski between Theory and Post-Theory’, indicates, as I will argue in this chapter, something about the way in which Žižek perceives the ideological displacement of the Marxian criticism of ideology in contemporary film studies, not to mention the entire institutional (the university) apparatus as such.

In this chapter, I investigate the debate between Theory and post-Theory as an instance of a political battle for the hegemony of intellectual discourse. The post-Theory rejection of film Theory, I argue, not only seeks to rid the latter from film studies, but also to rid the university of the entire project of ideology critique. I begin with a discussion of ‘class struggle’ in order to indicate how I use the concept in this chapter. This is a conception of class struggle that builds upon Žižek’s own references to ‘class struggle’, however, here I develop this concept further in order to argue that the debate between Theory and post-Theory is an instance of class struggle at the level of ideology. I then develop a methodology for studying class struggle at the level of the institutional apparatus of the university using the Lacanian ‘University discourse’. Again, this is a methodological approach that I borrow from Žižek; however, I add some additional

elements that are useful for studying the relation between ideology and discourse in postmodernity. Finally, I move on to consider the debate between Žižek and Bordwell in order to further elaborate upon the debate between Theory and post-Theory as an instance of class struggle in film studies, at the level of ideology.

Here, I interpret the meaning behind the displacement in the subtitle of *Fright of Real Tears* and argue that post-Theory is of the highest form of counter-revolutionary ideology in the era of postmodernity. It is ideology presented as counter-ideology, somewhat like the ‘rebel-conservative’ in Tim Robins’ film, *Bob Roberts* (1992). This ‘mocumentary’ film follows the election campaign of Bob Roberts, a conservative folk singer running for public office – a kind of ‘bizzaro’ Bob Dylan. Roberts and his campaigners construct an image of the liberal-left as the reigning ideology, thus making it possible for Roberts to present himself as a rebel, out against the mainstream, while at the same time re-enforcing the actual reigning ideology – that is, the dominant form of thought. Post-Theory, I claim, engages in precisely the same kind of campaign, presenting Theory as the reigning ideology, and post-Theory as the ‘rebel’ fighting the Master. Still, I claim that the two are dialectically counter to each other, and that this antagonism speaks to a much broader historical process that neither is capable of articulating on their own. The ‘Thing’ that mediates between the two, I claim, is the political class struggle.

I should point out, though, that the terms of the debate between Theory and post-Theory centre on psychoanalysis in film studies rather than the Marxian critique of ideology. However, I interpret the focus on psychoanalysis as one that speaks more generally to the critique of ideology. As I argue in the following chapter, psychoanalysis

operates within the Marxian critique of ideology, especially for Žižek, as a version of dialectical materialism appropriate for the era of postmodernity. Therefore, I take the post-Theory critique of psychoanalysis equally as a critique of dialectical materialism. Below, I begin to unravel the way in which the class struggle may be seen as the overdetermining principle behind the debate between Theory and post-Theory.

THE MISSING TERM BETWEEN THEORY AND POST-THEORY

‘Theory’, Žižek indicates, generally tends to designate a broad assortment of deconstructionist, feminist, post-Marxist, psychoanalytic, and socio-political cultural studies. Post-Theorists, in contrast, are generally designated by the largely cognitivist, historicist and middle-level researchers in film studies. According to Žižek, post-Theorists acknowledge differences among the various forms of Theory – that is, they generally concede that ‘the Theory’ is not just some monolithic entity encompassing a single trajectory, however uniform its general trajectory; yet, they still claim that psychoanalysis represents a tying thread within the entire field of film Theory, and strike particularly at Lacanian film Theory. The post-Theory project is, ultimately, a negative one, defining itself in its opposition to psychoanalytic film Theory. This negative project is indicated by Noël Carroll, who claims that cognitive film scholarship (as one instance of post-Theory) “is a stance that has increasingly come to define itself as an alternative to psychoanalysis in film studies.”¹

Bordwell, however, claims that the objective of post-Theory is not to attack Lacanians,² despite the fact that there is still a strong sense in which their project does involve attacking, primarily, psychoanalytic film Theory, if not Lacanians *per se*. The

introduction to *Post-Theory* actually states that, “if there is an organizing principle to the volume, it is that solid film scholarship can proceed without employing the psychoanalytic frameworks routinely mandated by the cinema studies establishment.”³ Here, it is interesting to note that Bordwell and Carroll make a connection between psychoanalysis and the ‘cinema studies establishment’. Clearly, they claim that psychoanalytic film theory holds a dominant position.

Žižek, however, is more interested in the link between psychoanalysis and film theory-read-Lacanian-theory. He reads the post-Theory criticism of psychoanalytic film Theory as a direct attack upon Lacanians, but insists that the theorists whom Bordwell, Carroll and Prince refer to in *Post-Theory* are not true Lacanians. Apart from himself, Joan Copjec, and some of his Slovenian colleagues, such as Mladen Dolar and Alenka Zupančič, Žižek does not believe that there are many film theorists who accept Lacan as their foundational background. Although it is true that Bordwell and Carroll do not directly attack *Lacanian* psychoanalysis, Žižek still feels it necessary to work out a paradox occupying the terrain of psychoanalytic film Theory – that is, the ambiguous relationship between the ‘reference’ to Lacan that has been predominant in psychoanalytic film Theory and the Lacan fully endorsed by Lacanian critics who have engaged in a ‘self-criticism’ of the appropriation of Lacan in film Theory. This includes Lacanian critics, such as himself and Copjec, but also others, such as Jacqueline Rose and Kaja Silverman.

Žižek further approaches the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory as indicative of something that is occurring more generally within the larger field of cultural studies. The underlying question that occupies much of Žižek’s recent criticism of

academia – and here he places post-Theory and cultural studies on equal footings – is: does it “provide an adequate instrument to counteract global capitalism...?”⁴ That is, does scholarship, today, provide an adequate degree of reflection upon the underlying structures of global antagonism. For Žižek, true scholarship cannot proceed without Theory – Theory is needed in order to make sense of the existing conditions of existence. For him, the ‘antagonism’ between Theory and post-Theory is indicative of a general retreat from meaning and understanding within the *political* context of scholarship. This antagonism, he claims, “is a particular case of the global battle for intellectual hegemony and visibility between the exponents of post-modern/deconstructionist cultural studies and, on the other hand, cognitivists and popularisers of hard sciences...” (*FRT*: 2).

However, even within the context of the rejection of Theory-read-cultural studies, a third term is missing. This third, mediating, term provides the background against which the post-Theory stance must be taken into consideration. The cultural studies position, in other words, is not enough to counter the force of post-Theory. Žižek’s position is that the post-Theory argument displaces the radical-political core of Theory, and therefore displaces the “true dimension of the conflict” (*FRT*: 3) – Which conflict? The post-Theory stance, according to Žižek, is reactive and protective. For him, the post-Theory description of Theory is a caricature, designed around simple misunderstandings and misreadings (*FRT*: 5). But these misunderstandings and misreadings come from a particular subjective position within the political class struggle – that is, the position of the reigning ideology.

The post-Theory stance against, not just psychoanalysis, but Theory in general, is, I claim, symptomatic of the postmodern cynicism described by Fredric Jameson as ‘the

end of this or that'. As Terry Eagleton argues, this postmodern cynicism is symptomatic of a supposed defeat of radical movements on the Left. This is a stance that is symptomatic of the post-Cold War era, in which notions of alternative political futures and big emancipatory projects have been jettisoned.⁵ This is a condition in which it is possible for a counter-revolutionary movement, like post-Theory, to prosper, leaving only post-Marxist and postmodern cultural studies (both of which are also sceptical of big emancipatory project and totalities) as its main opponent on the Left. Bordwell and Carroll claim that their book is not about the end of 'theory'. It is, instead, about the end of 'Theory', and after the end of Theory, they urge, there is not to be another 'Theory', but 'theories' and '*theorizing*'.⁶ This is a position that actually builds upon the postmodern rejection of 'Grand Narrative'. The rejection of 'Grand Narrative', I claim, is an ideological symptom of the class struggle.

Theory and post-Theory, I claim, speak from two different subjective positions that are historical and emerge as opposing subjective positions within the class struggle. My thesis in what follows is that knowledge emerging from a particular position in 'society' holds to a particular subjective perspective in the university, which translates into a particular kind of interpretation of film. It is important to point out, though, that post-Theory takes its own knowledge as factual and objective because, from the perspective of post-Theorists, empirical research is the key to understanding the truth of its object. Theory, however, acknowledges its subjective position. Facts and empirical research are important, but it is a mistake to downplay the role of Theory and interpretation. The conception of Theory that I present here speaks from the subjective position of the proletariat. Theory is the scientific discourse of the revolutionary subject.

Post-Theory, in contrast, is the counter-revolutionary discourse of the reigning class (and ‘society’ as such).

ON CLASS STRUGGLE ‘IN’ THEORY

Before moving on to consider the debate between Žižek and Bordwell, in the context of Theory versus post-Theory, I want to comment on the relationship between the Marxian theory of ideology and another ‘post-’ perspective – that is, the perspective of postmodern, post-structural cultural studies. The key difference between the two, I claim, has to do with a politics centred on class struggle. In this section, I argue that, although the Marxian and the cultural studies perspectives share certain stakes in their own political projects, the cultural studies perspective lacks political strength due to its resignation towards a politics centred on class struggle.

It should be pointed out that both the Marxian interpretation and that of the post-Marxist/postmodern/post-structuralist cultural studies interpretation share a perspective that is grounded in a certain kind of historical analysis. Since the late 1960s, both the Marxian *and* the latter assortment of theoretical perspectives in cultural studies have been lumped under the term ‘Theory’. The two, however, are distinguished by an important element. The Marxian perspective contends that there is a link between the historical form of domination and exploitation and the historical mode of production, while the cultural studies perspective does not. The Marxian perspective contends that forms of domination and exploitation rise and fall in conjunction with particular historical modes of production. The cultural studies perspective, however, suffers from a kind of

postmodern cynicism, the most significant symptom of which is a resignation towards a politics centred on big emancipatory projects, or ‘Grand Narratives’.

The way in which I interpret ‘class struggle’ in this section depends largely upon the Marxian conception of history. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the Marxian notion of ‘class struggle’ and the more common, historically static notion of ‘class’ as it has been defined by bourgeois sociology. This, I claim, is the notion of ‘class’ against which post-Marxists, postmodernists and post-structuralists react. As Fredric Jameson puts it, “[t]he difference between the Marxian view of structurally dichotomous classes and the academic sociological picture of independent strata is... more than a merely intellectual one... these two approaches to the social classes – the academic and the Marxist – are themselves class-conditioned and reflect the structural perspectives of the two fundamental class positions themselves.”⁷

Part of the problem, I argue, has to do with two different approaches to the class struggle, one that is dialectical and sees class struggle as part of a larger historical process of domination and exploitation (the Marxian perspective), and the other, which is non-dialectical and sees ‘class’ as something empirical and static (the academic/sociological perspective). Thus, in postmodern society, where space is becoming more important than time, where the synchronic is more important than the diachronic, where the horizontal is more important than the vertical – that is, where history is becoming less visible (postmodernism, as Jameson puts it, is a condition of existing in a perpetual present) – class struggle is becoming harder to see. In this situation, ‘class struggle’ is subordinated to more visible forms of social antagonism, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. In

postmodernism, struggles for ‘national liberation’, for example, often take the place of class struggle.

The ‘post-’ perspectives contend with a notion of ‘class struggle’ that elevates ‘class’ above all other social antagonisms. However, I claim that these more visible social antagonisms are ideological *effects* of class struggle, viewed from a position where the historical process of the struggle is at a dialectical standstill. These other social antagonisms are the content of contemporary political struggle, while class struggle is what gives them their ideological form. This is what I mean when I suggest that class struggle is the ‘overdetermining’ principle of the other social antagonisms. It is not more important than all other social antagonisms; however, all other social antagonisms are effects of the class struggle, which is not simply the struggle of the proletariat for emancipation. Class struggle, I argue, also implies the struggle of the ruling class to forcefully maintain its rule. This is not to suggest that class struggle must take *priority* over all other social antagonisms; rather, it is to suggest that all of the various other social antagonisms are always-already articulated in conjunction with the historical class struggle, even if the form of the class struggle remains invisible.

To put things somewhat differently, one can speak of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. as examples of ideology at the level of representation, and it is important to contend with exploitative stereotypical representations of race, gender, sexuality, etc. Cultural studies perspectives are to be commended for highlighting the fallacies at the heart of these representations. However, to make the same case against something called ‘classism’, I claim, is somewhat absurd (as in the cultural studies mantra, race-gender-class), as if conditions will be ameliorated for the working class

(often the perceived ‘victim’ in instances of ‘classism’) once these stereotypes are destroyed. Following the same kind of logic, one could equally claim that the upper classes are, themselves, often unfairly stereotyped (for example, in films such as Denys Arcand’s *Le decline de l’empire américain* (1986), which portrays the rich upper-middle class as a bunch of liberal-hedonistic adulterers), resulting in another kind of ‘classism’ from below (of course the same argument can be made in bad taste against anti-White racism, or ‘heterophobia’, or anti-male sexism). I consider ‘class’ as the negative term against which the empirical representations of race, gender, and sexuality, etc. stereotypes are articulated in ideology. Class is what divides all of the other social antagonisms, *diagonally*. Representations of race, gender, and sexuality, in other words, are instances of ideology that maintain the class division.

This distinction is important when considering the differences between the Marxian, cultural studies, and post-Theory perspectives. There is no difference between the Marxian and cultural studies perspectives at the level of content. Both assert the political need to combat the reigning, oppressive and exploitative ideology. There is, however, a difference at the level of form. By ignoring the historical principle of the class struggle, cultural studies weakens its position against post-Theory. The cultural studies version of ideology critique, I argue, is one that focuses on the critique of ideology at the level of content, within discourse, and avoids the critique of ideology at the level of form. The latter depends upon an understanding of politics grounded in the class struggle.

I should also point out that the notion of class struggle that I defend here is one that does not necessarily take the ‘working class’ (not to mention the ‘industrial working

class') as the ideal candidate for the revolutionary subject. The 'working class' did hold this position during the earlier stages of industrial capitalism, not because it held some kind of ontological priority over other social identities, but because it held a strategic position within the capitalist relations of production. If Marx's critique of 'commodity fetishism' teaches us anything it is that the *commodification* of labour-power is ontologically prior to capital. Labour-power must be commodified before it can function as capital and generate surplus-value by way of unpaid labour time (this how surplus-value originates in exploitation). Class struggle from below therefore implies the coming to consciousness of a class of subject-object 'commodities' – the coincidence of subject and object, 'Absolute Knowing' – that can transform the society of capital. Marx and most of the Marxian tradition believed that the 'industrial working class' held a strategic position to dissolve capitalism because commodified labour-power was at the centre of capitalist accumulation. Today, however, it is no longer possible to hold the traditional 'working class' in such a position. Nevertheless, capital still relies upon the exploitation of commodified labour-power. The difference, today, is that not just labour-power, but life in general, is becoming increasingly commodified and exploited for the purpose of capital accumulation. Not just the 'working class', and labour-power, but labour in general (including what Hardt and Negri call 'immaterial labour' – that is, labour that does not produce material objects, such as affective labour, or intellectual labour)⁸ is at the heart of capital accumulation. Therefore, I argue that the exploited class is increasing in size, and is not limited to the traditional industrial 'working class'. However, there is a dilemma at the level of class-consciousness.

It is more often the case, today, that many people have yet to recognize their own subjective position in the class struggle. The cultural studies perspective, I claim, is ‘conservative’, or reactionary in this sense. It seeks to ameliorate conditions within capitalism, perhaps, or even inadvertently, rather than partake in the class struggle to end capitalist exploitation. The cultural studies perspective is exemplary of ‘middle class ideology’, which, as Marx puts it, fights “against the bourgeoisie in order to save from extinction its existence as the middle class... they try to roll back the wheel of history.”⁹ Here, again, I do not want to downplay the importance of cultural studies for politics; however, the disavowal of class struggle runs the risk of de-politicizing cultural studies. Cultural studies, I claim, must therefore make a choice between a politics centred on class struggle and a post-politics structured by the reigning ideology. The latter, I argue, is a position occupied by the post-Theorists.

Class struggle at the level of intellectual discourse involves choosing sides between the existing conditions of domination and exploitation, supported by the counter-revolutionary perspective of post-Theory, and truly critical perspective of Theory. However, it is the ambiguous place of the postmodern, cultural studies Left that blurs the lines of this division

Based on the preceding perspective, I argue, below, that the debate between Theory and post-Theory must be seen as an ideological effect of the class struggle at the level of academic thought – that is, it represents a struggle between two different modes of interpretation, one that articulates the position of the subject from below (Theory), and the other, which articulates the position of the subject from above (post-Theory). The antagonism itself, I claim, has arisen against the historical background of postmodern

capitalism – or the financial stage of capitalism. Just as class struggle, according to Žižek, has to do with the meaning of society as such – that is, the struggle “for which of the two classes will impose itself as the stand-in for society ‘as such’, thereby degrading its other into the stand-in for the non-Social (the destruction of, the threat to, society)” – the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory, I argue, has to do with the meaning of film studies ‘as such’.¹⁰

DISCURSIVE FORMULATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY

Before proceeding to further discuss the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory, I want to introduce a methodological consideration. Below I refer to Lacan’s four psychoanalytic discourses from his *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969-1970): the Master’s discourse, the University discourse, the Hysteric’s discourse, and the Analyst’s discourse. I refer, primarily, to the University discourse in order to elaborate further upon the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory, and the relation between class struggle and ideology at the level of intellectual discourse.

The elements of each discourse are the Master-Signifier (S_1), Knowledge, or the Symbolic order (the chain of signification, S_2), the Subject of the unconscious ($\$$), and the *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire (a).

S_1 = Master-Signifier

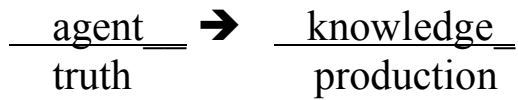
S_2 = Knowledge/Symbolic order

$\$$ = Subject

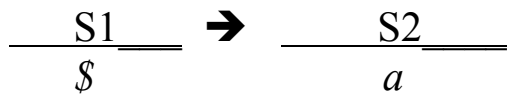
a = object-cause of desire

Each of these elements is placed on one of four co-ordinates, depending on the particular discourse. The top-left co-ordinate indicates the position of the ‘agent’ in the discourse,

the top-right indicates who does the ‘work’ (the other), the bottom-right signifies that which is ‘produced’, and the bottom-left represents the ‘truth’ of the agent.



These co-ordinates are read clockwise, beginning with the position of the agent, so that, in the Master’s discourse, the Master is the agent (S₁), the work is done by those with Knowledge (S₂), the worker produces desire (*a*), and the truth of the Master is that he is split internally (§).



Here, we have the standard relationship of domination and exploitation, most commonly recognized by the political relationship established in monarchy. As Marx puts it in a footnote in *Capital Volume One*: “one man is king only because other men stand in relation of subjects to him [S₁ – S₂]. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king.”¹¹ Here, we have a relationship of reflection whereby the king thinks he is king because he is treated as such by his subjects – because he is recognized as such by the Symbolic order; however, the subjects only perceive themselves to be subjects because they recognize themselves in relation to the king, who stands-in as the ‘suture’ tying together the entire social-Symbolic field. This, of course, is the elementary definition of hegemony, whereby some contingent element within the field of discursive representation comes to stand-in to define the meaning of the field itself; this *contingent* element comes to occupy the position of *necessity*, as the ground that makes everything else *possible*. This is the function of the Master-Signifier: it is the

signifier “*for which* all the others represent the subject” – that is, it comes in to *represent* the gap (\$), the position of the subject, in the Symbolic order (S₂); it is the signifier that masks the Void (\$) in the structure – but it is also the signifier (S₁) that represents the subject (\$) for another signifier (S₂).¹² The bottom level of the Master’s discourse signifies the Lacanian formula for fantasy (\$◊*a* – here, the subject (\$) comes into contact with the *objet petit a*, surplus-enjoyment, or desire). The point to be taken is that fantasy effectively supports the relationship in the upper level of the discourse. Fantasy is the support of ideology; it establishes the co-ordinates in which people imagine their own position of exploitation as valid, as well as their own position vis-à-vis ‘freedom’.

It is the shift from the Master’s discourse to the University discourse that signals the transition from the *ancien régime* to modern capitalist ‘democracy’. Here, Knowledge stands in the position of agency, work is done by (subjects of) desire, producing a hystericized, split, subject (\$), but the truth of the agency of Knowledge is that it is, in fact, holding a position of power, represented by the Master-Signifier (S₁) in the bottom-left co-ordinate.

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

For Žižek, the upper portion of the University discourse represents the contemporary formulation of what Michel Foucault refers to as ‘biopolitics’ (S₂ – *a*), and for him, the University discourse represents “the hegemonic discourse of modernity.”¹³ Biopolitics, for Žižek is indicative of a certain kind of rule in modernity: that of ‘expert administration’.

In the University discourse, agency is given to Knowledge – scientific discourse – representing the empirical ‘truth’ of ‘reality’. Everything from biology and quantum

physics, up to governance, is fully realized by empirical data, giving us the ‘formula’ of the Real. This is what ‘governs’ populations in contemporary biopolitics. In ‘democracy’, we are told, and come to expect, that we no longer have to worry about authoritarian rule – we are now ruled by science and expert administration. The formula on the top level of the University discourse even gives us Foucault’s conception of power and resistance, or of Law and desire. Here, *power is productive of desire*. We are now, according to the ruling ideology, all subjects of desire, no longer repressed, able to fully realize ourselves. Here, the ‘truth’ of the situation is guaranteed by the assertion of a particular form of Knowledge. But where is ideology, here?

With the chain of signification (S_2) occupying the position of agency, all we have is a series of free-floating, unchained, signifiers – very similar to the way in which Fredric Jameson defines ‘postmodernism’ with reference to Lacan’s formula for psychosis: as a “breakdown of the signifying chain” (borrowing a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari).¹⁴ Using the University discourse as a point of reference, I posit the difference between modernity and postmodernity as one between all the co-ordinates of the discourse, in the case of modernity, and one that forecloses (indicated by brackets around the Master-Signifier) upon the bottom left co-ordinate, in the case of postmodernity:

$$\frac{S_2}{(S_1)} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Without a Master-Signifier suturing the field of floating signifiers, all we are left with is a series of free-floating discursive elements without identity. The Master-Signifier is that which ‘quilts’, all of the ‘proto-ideological’ elements into a unified field of meaning.

This is why, as Ernesto Laclau suggests, empty signifiers (the Lacanian Master-Signifier) are important for hegemony.¹⁵

Having now developed some of the methodological considerations that I take into account in the present analysis, I am now in a position to point out what is missing in the ‘post-’ conception of hegemony, and why ‘class struggle’, as I have been arguing, is the overdetermining principle of all other social antagonisms and struggles.

The postmodern perspective misses the bottom portion of the University discourse ($S_1 - \$$). Postmodernism forecloses upon the Master-Signifier, producing what is, in (Deleuze and Guattari’s) Lacanian terms, a ‘breakdown of the signifying chain’. As Žižek has recently argued, the primary feature of postmodernism is that, “it tries to dispense with the agency of the Master-Signifier,” and this, as a result, “leaves as the only agency of ideological interpellation the ‘unnameable’ abyss of *jouissance*: the ultimate injunction that regulates our lives in ‘postmodernity’ is [the superego command] ‘Enjoy!’”¹⁶ The problem here is purely ontological: enjoyment, *jouissance*, is impossible-Real. In order to evade this impossibility, the subject attaches herself to some authority. The subject explains her inability to attain enjoyment by way of the prohibitory Law of the Master. Attachment to the Master is what makes enjoyment perceivably possible, if only it were not prohibited. Thus, attachment to the Master helps to evade the impossibility of enjoyment. But now, in our postmodern, post-ideological era, without traditional authority, we are all supposedly ‘free’ to enjoy – more than that, according to Žižek we are more and more *obligated* to enjoy. We are confronted, then, with the *anxiety* that develops in approaching the Real (the impossibility of enjoyment). That is, until we realize that there *is* still a relation of domination and exploitation in our

liberal-democratic society preventing us from enjoying, there is still a Master who sutures the field of meaning. There are still ideological effects within discourse, related to relations of domination and exploitation. The background, necessary for understanding this predicament, is the global relation of capitalist exploitation. There is, in other words, still a 'truth' to contemporary hegemony. This 'truth' points to capital, as the Real of our time. Capital is the historical background to the class struggle.

Again, going back to the transition from the Master's discourse to the University discourse, it is possible to theorize the transition from feudalism to capitalism in terms of the two different modes of fetishism that define each respective mode of production. In feudalism, relations between people are fetishized, relations of domination and exploitation are all founded upon the fundamental relationship to the 'crown'. However, in capitalism, relations between people are not fetishized because, here, we have 'commodity fetishism', "what we have here are relations between 'free' people, each following his or her proper egoistic interest. The predominant and determining form of their interrelations is not domination and servitude but a contract between free people who are equal in the eyes of the law."¹⁷ This, according to Žižek, is how Marx 'invented the symptom'. In the passage from feudalism to capitalism the relations of domination and servitude are not abolished, but simply repressed, and this repressed truth "emerges in a symptom which subverts the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on."¹⁸ This symptom is developed in the hysterical subject (\$) – the subject without substance (*substanzlose Subjektivität*), Marx's definition of the proletariat – when the relations between people are repressed by relations between things (commodities).

In the preceding, I refer to the University discourse in order to develop an understanding of class struggle at the level of administrative knowledge. As Žižek argues, the University discourse shares certain features with contemporary biopolitics. I argue that post-Theory is the embodiment of the University discourse in film studies. The university, I claim, is one of the most important social-cultural-political institutions responsible for the repression of class struggle. It is at this point that I can now return to the debate between Žižek and Bordwell.

DIALECTICAL (RE)MEDIATIONS

Žižek claims that, for post-Theorists, the end of Theory is perceived as an end to the burden of ‘Grand Theory’, or TOEs (Theories of Everything). Post-Theorists, according to Žižek, reproach Theory with two ‘mutually exclusive’ deficiencies: Theory as a new version of TOE and Theory as “a cognitive suspension characteristic of historicist relativism: Theorists no longer ask the basic questions like ‘What is the nature of cinematic perception?’, they simply tend to reduce such questions to the historicist reflection upon the conditions in which certain notions emerged as the result of historically specific power relations” (*FRT*: 14). In other words, post-Theorists reproach film Theory (and cultural studies), on the one hand, with claiming too much (TOE), and claiming too little (historicist relativism). Is the way out of this impasse (between post-Theorist middle-level empirical research and Theory/cultural studies historical relativism), Žižek asks, a simple return to old-fashioned TOEs? His answer is that Hegelian dialectics offers a solution, but it is important, Žižek adds, to distinguish what he refers to as ‘dialectics’ from the post-Theory version of dialectics.

According to Žižek, the post-Theory approach to ‘dialectics’ proceeds via a “notion of cognition as the gradual process of our always limited knowledge through the testing of specific hypotheses” (*FRT*: 14). Noël Carroll elaborates upon the post-Theory notion of dialectics, claiming that it involves a process of dialogue with opposing theories, what he calls ‘dialectical comparison’.¹⁹ For Žižek, however, a distinction must be made between ‘dialectics proper’ and the cognitivist version of dialectics; this is a distinction that has to do with the inclusion of the subject’s ‘position of enunciation’. As he puts it, “the cognitivist speaks from the safe position of the excluded observer who knows the relativity and limitation of all human knowledge including his own” (*FRT*: 15). He adds that,

while the problem-solution model of historical research can undoubtedly lead to a lot of precise and enlightening insights, one should nonetheless insist that the procedures of posing problems and finding solutions to them always and by definition occur within a certain ideological context that determines which problems are crucial and which solutions acceptable.

(*FRT*: 17)

Žižek’s point, here, concerns the way in which the problem-solution model of post-Theory dialectics necessarily avoids reflecting upon the researcher’s own position of enunciation within the particular relations of ideological contemplation – what I refer to as Kantian subjectivism, above. The post-Theory problem-solution model simply displaces the existing ideological relations of domination and exploitation, something that Theory seeks to extrapolate. Here, I am not necessarily referring to ideology as ‘false

consciousness'. Instead, ideology, here, must be understood as a *misrecognition* of form – particularly, the form of the discourse on film.

Dialectics, according to Žižek, is simply a process of examining the way in which a particular content ideological is elevated to (hegemonizes) the status of universality. Ideology, in other words, has to do with the way in which a particular subjective position is raised to the status of Truth, or what Foucault calls power-knowledge (this is the position of S_2 as the agent in the University discourse). The way to understand this universalizing process is by locating a singular (symptomal/traumatic) element that sticks out, which indicates something about this false universality, what Žižek proposes as “a direct jump from the singular to the universal, by-passing the mid-level of particularity so dear to Post-Theorists” (*FRT*: 25). Here, power-knowledge can be contrasted with the truth of the (excluded) subjective position (\$) that represents the false universality of the existing dominant discourse in the field.

The difference between Theory and post-Theory, I argue, concerns the way in which each approaches its ‘object’. Post-Theory, on the one hand, approaches the film-object as a neutral thing – that is, as something about which objective knowledge is possible. It, therefore, presents itself as a neutral, objective science. Theory, on the other hand, accounts for its own subject-position, and thus speaks to the film-object as a Thing (*das Ding*). Film Theory and post-Theory ultimately speak to and produce knowledge about the same object, but they do so from two particular positions in the ‘class struggle’: one that imagines itself to be neutral, object-based, outside of relations of domination and exploitation – as a discourse that adds knowledge to our understanding of the film-object (post-Theory); and the other which is subject-based, one which takes sides in the ‘class

struggle’,²⁰ which adds to our knowledge, *not of the film-object – but to the way in which the film-object can add to our knowledge of the form of ideology in general*. This is the project with which I engage in chapter three by studying Žižek’s interpretation of films, and in chapter four through the construction of a theory of spectatorship that adds to a general theory of ideology.

Post-Theory can, therefore, respond by asking how Theory can be so sure that it has grasped the correct, singular, position from which to investigate the film-object. Post-Theorists might ask whether it is not necessary to compare different examples, different approaches, and different conclusions in order to speak more generally to the truth-knowledge of film. Should we not, they might ask, make more empirical observations before we come to general conclusions about *film*? The dialectical counter-argument, however, according to Žižek, is that,

all particular examples of a certain universality do not entertain the same relationship towards their universality: each of them struggles with this universality, displaces it in a specific way, and the great art of dialectical analysis consists in being able to pick out the exceptional singular case which allows us to formulate the universality ‘as such’. (*FRT*: 26)

His point is that all of the empirical examples will simply ignore the form of the universality of the reigning discourse on the object. The objective of dialectical analysis is to locate the exception (which varies in different cases) that speaks to the false universality of the form itself. One needs to locate the point of *negativity*, in other words – to ‘tarry’ with the negative – in order to understand the way in which each positive,

empirical example adds to the universality of the form. This is the procedure, I should point out, which is found both in Marxism and in psychoanalysis.

Marxian theory asserts that the only way to understand something about the ‘normal’ functioning of a system is by observing it during a period of crisis – that is, during a period of negativity. Marx’s analysis of capital is premised upon interpreting crises in capital and the way in which capitalists organize to minimize the effects of crisis. A crisis in capital equals a broader ideological crisis; therefore, the need to remedy economic crises is equally the need to remedy an ideological crisis. For Marx, it is the event of crisis that speaks to the universal form of capital. Freud, likewise, was able to interpret the form of the ‘paternal Law’ (the paternal metaphor, ‘Name-of-the-Father’) by observing it in the beginnings of the historical breakdown of ‘Oedipal’ social organization.

Locating exceptions in periods of crisis thus aid in locating the “founding gesture of universality” (*FRT*: 27), and it is the exception that coincides with the universal. In order to understand Žižek’s analyses of film examples, as I argue in the following chapter, one needs to understand the dialectical method of analysis with which he is engaged. The examples to which he refers stand out as exceptions that speak to the universal form, *not of film, but of ideology*. Žižek is concerned, first and foremost, with the form of ideology and subjectivity, and therefore his analyses of films are not object-based, they are not based upon understanding something about the film-Thing; they are, rather, subject-based, and refer to the form of films, to the form of cinema and spectatorship, in order to understand something about the form of ideology and

subjectivity. This, I claim, is something that gets completely lost in Bordwell's reading of Žižek.

DAVID BORDWELL: SAY ANYTHING²¹

Žižek's critique of post-Theory in *The Fright of Real Tears* has not gone unnoticed by its key figures. Bordwell responds to Žižek in two places: at the end of his book, *Figures Traced in Light* (2004), and in an article on his 'website on cinema', "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything" (2005). I will deal with his response in the 'Say Anything' article before discussing his other critique of Žižek in *Figures* because it is more specifically focused on the problem of 'dialectics'.

Bordwell begins his response by referring to what he calls Žižek's 'missed chances'. In the 'Say Anything' article, Bordwell contends that many of Žižek's criticisms against post-Theory do not address the actual arguments made by himself, Carroll and Prince, against psychoanalysis or film Theory. He notes that Žižek could have pointed out elements of 'mischaracterization' in the post-Theory understanding of psychoanalysis, Freud and Lacan. This, for Bordwell, would have been a better way to reject the claims of post-Theory. Žižek, he argues, "could attack my [Bordwell's] characterization of Freud, Lacan, and the rest; my critiques of same; and above all my outline of the two trends [subject-position theory and culturalism]." But, of course, Žižek does not do this – apparently a source of frustration for Bordwell, who states that, "[Žižek] feels no obligation to engage with my [Bordwell's] claims." This is, perhaps, due to the fact that the kind of 'dialectical' program to which Bordwell is committed differs greatly from the kind elaborated by Žižek in his voluminous writings. What is

striking, and apparently aggravating for Bordwell, is that Žižek does not engage him in his (Bordwell's) own terms.

Bordwell wants Žižek to criticize his (Bordwell's) own characterization of Freud and Lacan. He rejects Žižek's criticism because it does not find flaws in Bordwell's own interpretation of these two figures. He also rejects Žižek's criticism because it does not address anything to do with 'subject-position theory' or 'culturalism'. In other words, he wants Žižek to engage in the post-Theory version of dialectics: of compare and contrast; of defending theories "through a dialogue with opposing theories, by demonstrating that they succeed where alternative theories fail" (*FRT*: 15). Consider that Bordwell proceeds in his rejection of Žižek's critique by claiming that he refuses to 'discuss', or engage in 'conversation' or 'debate' with post-Theory:

[I]n Žižek's hands, confirming Carroll's objections once more, Lacanian theory functions as a set of axioms or dogmas rather than working ideas to be subjected to critical discussion.

Post-Theory argues against the very idea of Theory and supports the idea of *theories* and *theorizing*... *Theories* operate at many levels of generality and tackle many different questions. *Theorizing* is a process of proposing, refining, correcting, and perhaps rejecting answers, in the context of a multidisciplinary conversation.

[D]ialectics is an alternative to the method Žižek embraces, that of deriving a film theory from axioms or first principles. Instead, dialectical exchange is a form of debate...

Žižek eliminates the communal and comparative dimensions of inquiry Carroll invokes.

Žižek fails to grasp the intersubjective dimension of theorizing because he doesn't believe in theory as a conversation within a community, a process of question and answer and rebuttal.

In all of these instances, Bordwell advances a rather immature and under-developed conception of dialectics. However, he also proceeds by criticizing, not only psychoanalysis, and not only Theory, but Hegel as well: "To assume that Hegel possesses the only valid concept of the dialectical is something of an undergraduate howler."

In the same manner in which Bordwell rejects Žižek's criticism of post-Theory – in the same way that it frustrates him that Žižek does not engage in a 'dialogue' with the post-Theory interpretation of Freud and Lacan – Bordwell is also frustrated by the fact that, in *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek "nowhere defends Hegel's idea of dialectic against the hosts of objections that have been raised by over a century of critics; nor does he defend his somewhat idiosyncratic version of Hegel." Here, Bordwell has not done his homework – Žižek has, in fact, been defending his reading of Hegel for more than

twenty years. His entire intellectual project has been involved in rethinking Hegel against his critics.

Žižek states in the introduction to *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) that, against Hegel's critics, "far from being a story of its progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts – 'absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity."²² In his work, he has continued to argue for Hegel against well-known theorists and philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and, more recently theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Judith Butler (concerning the latter, Žižek mostly disputes her mode of interpreting Hegel). And as many acquainted with Žižek's work know by now, he is far more Hegelian than Lacanian. His 'project' involves re-actualizing Hegelian dialectics "by giving it a new reading on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis." Žižek argues that the "current image of Hegel as an 'idealist-monist' is totally misleading: what we find in Hegel is the strongest affirmation yet of difference and contingency – 'absolute knowledge' itself is nothing but a name for the acknowledgement of a certain radical loss."²³ It is his new reading of Hegelian dialectics that has allowed him more recently to rethink the contours of a Marxian dialectical materialism (particularly in *The Parallax View* (2006)), thus linking him to figures such as Georg Lukács and, more recently, Fredric Jameson, rather than figures like Louis Althusser (another Marxist who tried, however, not without certain errors, to incorporate Lacanian psychoanalysis into a theory of ideology).

Bordwell, finally, rejects the way in which Žižek appeals to ‘enunciation theory’ since, according to him, this is a theory that ‘relativizes’ human knowledge. Oddly enough, both Bordwell *and* Žižek continue to criticize the relativist argument, particularly in cultural studies. However, Bordwell’s rejection of Žižek’s appeal to (what he calls) ‘enunciation theory’ goes to the heart of Žižek’s dialectical assessment of the ‘class struggle’ in film studies. When Žižek asserts that, “[w]hat separates dialectics proper from its cognitivist version is the way in which the subject’s position of enunciation is included, inscribed, into the process,” he is claiming that Theory takes into consideration its own position within the form of the debate. A theorist knows that she does not speak from a position of objective, absolute Truth; she recognizes her own position within the Symbolic. Post-Theorists, like Bordwell, however, speak “from the safe position of the excluded observer” (*FRT*: 15). Žižek is not being relativistic, he is claiming that there are, essentially, two different positions from which one can speak in the class struggle. One can speak either from the position of the ruling class, or one can speak from the subjective position of the ruled. One can speak from the position of the ruling class overtly or covertly, or even through misrecognition. Bordwell misrecognizes his own position here (what used to be called ‘false consciousness’). He essentially misses the form of the debate particularly in his frustration that Žižek does not challenge him at the level of content, arguing that Žižek finds no faults in his (Bordwell’s) descriptions of Freud and Lacan.

In speaking from the subjective position of the ruled one fully recognizes her place within the relations of domination and exploitation, and the form that structures the content of the argument. Bordwell completely rejects Žižek’s argument on the basis that

he does not engage him on his own terms, and therefore demonstrates the extent to which he misses the core of Žižek's argument. More than that, Bordwell's assessment of the debate is of the highest form of ideological displacement – he takes factual elements within Žižek's argument and manipulates them to fit the terms of his own rejection of Theory. It is almost as if Bordwell and Žižek are each speaking to two completely different topics. But this is, precisely, the point!

Both Theorists and post-Theorists refer to the same object: the film-Thing. One can assert that – along the lines of the Lacanian 'there is no sexual relationship', or the Marxian 'there is no class relationship' – in film studies, there is no Theoretical relationship. Both sides refer to the same object, one which knows itself to be partial, to be engaged in a partial project (the political project of the proletariat), and the other, which takes itself as the 'neutral' observer, that has Knowledge (the position of agency in the University discourse, below) about the object itself. This division between Theory and post-Theory comes across most potently in Bordwell's critique of Žižek in *Figures Traced in Light*.

COMPREHENSIBILITY AND THE 'END OF NARRATIVE'

In *Figures Traced in Light*, Bordwell argues that cross-cultural, or transcultural norms exist in films at the level of stylistic devices and techniques. According to him, there is a 'craft tradition' that "binds filmmakers across cultures," and "helps their films to cross boundaries."²⁴ Yet, despite the existence of this 'craft tradition', Bordwell claims that there are still some media and film theorists who resist the idea of 'transcultural norms', among whom he includes Žižek.

Bordwell notes the distinction that Žižek makes between ‘trans-cultural universal features’ and features that are specific and particular to people, cultures and historical periods. What bothers Bordwell about Žižek’s distinction between the two is that, from his perspective, they appear to be in agreement, yet Žižek continues to criticize Bordwell’s approach (again, a misrecognition of form). But, here, Bordwell confuses Žižek’s distinction between the Universal (style/form) and the Particular (content). The way Bordwell perceives the distinction is tantamount to the central antagonism between the two. From Bordwell’s perspective, Žižek seems to be suggesting that (as Bordwell puts it), “the idea that film style fulfils storytelling needs is somewhat ethnocentric” (*FTL*: 261). This is not altogether false but requires some elaboration since Bordwell’s critique leaves out the ideological implications of Žižek’s argument.

Bordwell cites Žižek from *The Fright of Real Tears*, posing the question: “is not modern (post-Renaissance) Western culture characterized by its own specific notion of narrative (which is why, say Chinese or Japanese novels often strike us Western readers as ‘dull’ and ‘confused’)?” (*FRT*: 16; *FTL*: 261). Bordwell takes issue, on the one hand, with Žižek’s homogenizing notion of ‘modern’ Western culture, which, on the other hand, seems to negate Žižek’s own criticism of Bordwell’s ‘monolithic’ notion of transcultural norms. For Bordwell, it seems as though Žižek is contradicting himself. What is at issue, here, are two different notions of narrative: one which conceives narrative in terms of style and comprehension (Bordwell), the other which examines narrative in terms of cultural/subjective interpretation (Žižek).

Bordwell defends his conception of narrative by stating that, for him, “Virtually all narratives seem to... share some components, such as agents and temporal sequence”

(*FTL*: 261). Here, form and content get reversed. While Bordwell is interested in film and comprehension at the level of form/style, he fails to recognize the connection between the universality of form and the particularity of content. Bordwell takes Žižek's reference to Asian literature – that they appear 'dull' and 'confused' – to mean something along the lines of comprehension and style: recognizing agents, temporal sequences, etc. For Bordwell, "the issue is comprehensibility, and a dull story may [still] be intelligible" (*FTL*: 261). Thus, for him, the issue regarding transcultural norms has to do with style – the manner in which the story, itself, is conveyed. He adds that, often, cultural contexts may be required; however, this should not necessarily 'impede comprehension'.

Bordwell goes on to note Žižek's reference to the supposed 'crisis of narrative'. Žižek asks whether there is such a global notion of 'comprehension'. Here, it may strike Bordwell to consider that, for Žižek, there *is* something emerging along the lines of a global notion of comprehension, but this is at the heart of – what he refers to as – the 'crisis of narrative'. In the passage cited by Bordwell, Žižek asserts that such a homogenizing notion of neutral, global comprehension, is the cause of the crisis of narrative in the sense that films are starting to return to early 'cinema of attractions': "big blockbusters have to rely more and more on the wild rhythm of spectacular effects, and the only narrative which seems still to be able to sustain the viewer's interest is, significantly, that of the conspiracy theory" (*FRT*: 16-17; *FTL*: 262). Žižek goes on to cite James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) as an example of a film that, because of the homogenizing nature of global comprehension, requires the added element of the disaster in order to make the story somewhat interesting – otherwise, without the disaster, the film would just end up being another boring story about an impossible romance. His point is

that there definitely has been a push in narrative cinema towards more cross-cultural homogenization in style, but it is this very push that has caused a crisis in narrative – not in terms of comprehensibility, but in terms of pleasure and enjoyment. There are fewer and fewer good films, according to Žižek, and the only way to resuscitate enjoyment in cinema is through the added element of spectacle.²⁵

Bordwell, however, thinks that Žižek is somehow suggesting that a crisis in narrative means a crisis in comprehension and intelligibility – a cognitivist assumption that could not be further from the truth. Žižek's point is that narrative – in terms of great stories – with culturally specific nuances – are suffering at the hands of a global homogenizing tendency, with capitalism and the pursuit of profit in the background.

Žižek accepts techniques such as depth of field and crosscutting as universal and cross-cultural features of cinema, in terms of style, which, for Bordwell, demonstrates that, at this level, the two are in agreement. Part of the problem stems from Bordwell's misguided interpretation of Žižek, thinking that, like some post-Structuralist thinkers, he is sceptical about universals. For Bordwell, then, on the issue of technique, it seems as though Žižek is in agreement with him, even when he says that he is not (*FTL*: 299, n. 59). But, evidently, in terms of style and technique, *there is no dispute*. Both certainly do hold to universal notions of film style and technique – and to some universal conception of comprehension. The difference is that, for Žižek, things do not simply end there. Bordwell does not consider the cultural-historical level of *meaning*. Meaning is an important aspect of pleasure.

For Žižek, content is still important at the level of the particular – something of which speaks to the *form* of the universal, but also indicates something about the form of

ideology, one of Žižek's primary concerns. This is something that Bordwell completely misses in his critique of Žižek, and in doing so, Bordwell displaces the central concern of Theory. But this, I claim, is precisely how ideology functions. Bordwell addresses, not the central issues in Žižek's arguments, but instead displaces these onto less relevant matters – a 'red herring' if ever there was one! No one is disputing the comprehensibility of films. What is at issue is the form taken by ideology, within the content of films, and the activation of desire producing pleasure (or surplus-enjoyment) for the spectator. This is the historical dimension that Bordwell misses. As I argue in the following chapter, it is the historical form of the narrative that indicates something about the ideological dimension of the film text.

Regarding the notion of cross-cultural interpretation – as opposed to comprehension – Žižek has noted some cultural distinctions in the Japanese and Chinese translations of the conclusions of *Gone with the Wind* and *Casablanca*. These examples demonstrate how elements of content add to the displacement of form. In the Japanese translation of *Gone with the Wind*, Clark Gable's "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn!" is translated as "I fear, my darling, that there is a slight misunderstanding between the two of us," which Žižek claims is a "bow to proverbial Japanese courtesy and etiquette." Likewise, in the Chinese translation of *Casablanca* (in the People's Republic of China), Humphrey Bogart's "This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship!" is translated into "The two of us will now constitute a new cell of anti-fascist struggle!", which Žižek argues asserts the priority of struggle against the enemy over personal relations.²⁶

Another example is given of the censored version of *Ben-Hur* in Communist, ex-Yugoslavia. In order to eliminate the Christian content from the film (a difficult task to be sure), the censor cut out of the first two thirds of the film all of the scattered references to Christ, as well as the entire final third of the film, so that it ends following the chariot race, when Ben-Hur defeats Massala, who then informs Ben-Hur that his mother and sister, whom he believed were dead, are in fact alive and confined to a leper colony. Ben-Hur then “returns to the race ground, now silent and empty, and confronts the worthlessness of his triumph – the end of the film.”²⁷ Here, Žižek contends, the censor’s work is ‘breathtaking’: “although undoubtedly he had not the slightest notion of the tragic existentialist vision, he made out of the rather insipid Christian propaganda piece an existential drama about the ultimate nullity of our accomplishments, about how in the hour of our greatest triumph we are utterly alone.”²⁸ These particular examples of cross-cultural translation speak to the universal form of ideology itself – that is, to the way in which the form taken by ideology ultimately works towards some resolution between power and desire, which is itself cultural and historical. This, I argue, is the dimension missed by Bordwell and other post-Theorists, and it is here, in this lack of historical-cultural interpretation, that the Kantian subjectivism of post-Theory is to be located. This is also where the ‘class struggle’ may be located in film studies, between Theory and post-Theory.

THE HEGEMONY OF ‘SCIENCE’ AND POST-THEORY

Based upon the preceding schematization, I argue that the shift from direct authoritarian rule to the rule of Knowledge, discourse and science, is the perfect context

in which to understand the division between Theory and post-Theory in film studies. Or, more precisely, the two different interpretations of the University discourse – one that effectively misses the role of the Master-Signifier, versus the one that continues to indicate its central importance – provides an indication of where the two different perspectives in film studies fall, politically.

Today, Žižek argues, there is a strong divide between that which counts as knowledge and that which counts as ‘truth’. According to Žižek, science has, for Lacan, the status of “knowledge in the Real”. One could equally claim that the same holds for Marx – *Das Kapital* was Marx’s scientific investigation into the relations of domination and exploitation within capitalism; Marx sought to locate the Real of class struggle within the processes of capital. However, there is a dimension of human reality that science has difficulty in explaining, namely, the human social bond, which according to Žižek is based upon a certain kind of ‘faith’. Faith, or trust, adds a subjective dimension to the engagement with knowledge. For example, there is a performative dimension of faith/trust in language, whereby one takes for granted the fact that the ‘ingredients’ of meaning in her speech are received in the intended fashion by her interlocutor. Scientific discourse, however, reduces this performative dimension to an element of registration in knowledge.

Žižek provides the example of ‘paternal authority’. According to him, paternal authority is based purely on faith, “on trust as to the identity of the father: we have fathers (as symbolic functions, as the Name-of-the-Father, the paternal metaphor), because we do not directly *know* who our father is, we have to take him *at his word* and *trust* him.” Žižek argues that, “the moment I know with scientific certainty who my

father is, fatherhood ceases to be a function which grounds social-symbolic Trust.”²⁹ With DNA testing, the symbolic Trust in the paternal metaphor becomes unnecessary. For Žižek, then, the hegemony of scientific discourse “suspends the entire network of symbolic tradition that sustains the subject’s identifications.” In political terms, this signals the shift “from power grounded in the traditional symbolic authority to biopolitics.”³⁰ Here, I want to emphasize that the point is definitely not to mourn the loss of the performative in the Symbolic authority of the father, but rather to indicate a certain shift in the way authority functions.

For Žižek, this transition also indicates the postmodern end of ‘Grand Narratives’, or ‘big explanations’; there are now a multitude of local discourses with a means of defining knowledge in relative terms. This is where we begin to see the flourishing of various different discourses on this or that object of knowledge, the so-called ‘disciplinarity’ of knowledge. Against this background, we have witnessed over the last three decades something of an intellectual struggle for hegemony, particularly between proponents of Theory and Theory’s critics, the ‘post-Theorists’.

Contemporary post-Theorists are those ‘public intellectuals’ who seek to bring scientific knowledge back into the popular realm. Topics such as evolutionary theory, quantum physics and cosmology, and cognitivism, for example, are represented popularly by figures such as Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, and Daniel Dennett. In film studies David Bordwell has taken up the task of bringing scientific, empirical research to bear upon films and spectatorship. However, as Žižek points out, the typical response of contemporary cultural studies against the post-Theory figures of the public intellectual is the suggestion that its loss is the result of the transition from the predominance of the

(usually white, male) modernist intellectual, which in postmodernity “has been replaced by a proliferation of theoreticians who operate in a different mode... and do in fact address issues which concern the wider public.”³¹

Žižek claims that this (typical) cultural studies response against post-Theory is too easily produced; however, there is a degree of truth in it. The themes addressed by cultural studies are central to contemporary ideologico-political debates around issues of Power and domination, while proponents of post-Theory busy themselves with clarifying scientific ‘enigmas’, passing over silently “the burning questions which actually occupy centre stage in current politico-ideological debates.”³² Although Žižek finds it necessary to address science as “knowledge in the Real” (i.e., Marxism), and therefore criticizes some of the reigning practices in cultural studies, particularly a certain variety of historical relativism, he considers this silent passing over of the tough ideological questions by post-Theorists to be somewhat of a spontaneous ideological attachment to the reigning political power. As he puts it, “Much more worrying than the ‘excesses’ of Cultural Studies [i.e., historical relativism] are [what he refers to as] the New Age obscurantist appropriations of today’s ‘hard’ sciences which, in order to legitimize their position, invoke the authority of science itself.”³³

What Žižek refers to as the ‘historical relativism’ of cultural studies is a certain kind of practice, found predominantly in American (as opposed to British) cultural studies, informed by a “proto-Nietzschean notion that knowledge is not only embedded in but also generated by a complex set of discursive strategies of power (re)production,” such as the Foucauldian relationship of power-knowledge.³⁴ *Historicism* evades the encounter with the Real, as the ‘absent cause’ (to use an Althusserian-Spinozan term) of

the Symbolic, whether objective *or* subjective, whereas *historicity* proper understands the Symbolic writing of history as so many failed attempts to grasp the meaning of the Real (in political terms, I am referring to the relations of domination and exploitation, the ‘class struggle’ as the subject of history). This is where Lacan differs from the post-Structuralist notion of power-knowledge since, for him, *there is truth in the Real* – modern science, for him, “*touches on the Real* in a way that is totally absent from premodern discourses.” For Žižek, one must not play the relativist ‘game’ of validating every and all forms of knowledge as just so many different particular, local *truths* (plural).³⁵ In this sense, post-Theory does propose a relevant critique against cultural studies, returning to big ontological questions; however, by imagining science as *absolute* Truth – without taking into account the position of enunciation of the speaker (the value of which *is* found in cultural studies) post-Theory loses the philosophico-transcendental, *hermeneutic* dimension of reflection. While modern science brings us closer to understanding ‘reality’ as it actually is, the job of a hermeneutic philosopher, according to Žižek, is

to insist that, with the passage from the premodern mythical universe to the universe of modern science, *the very notion of what ‘reality’ (or ‘actually to exist’) means, of what ‘counts’ as reality, has also changed*, so that we cannot simply presuppose a neutral external measure which allows us to judge that, with modern science, we come closer to the ‘same’ reality as that which premodern mythology was dealing – as Hegel would have put it, with the passage from the premodern mythical universe to the modern scientific universe, the measure, the standard which we implicitly

use or apply in order to measure how ‘real’ what we are dealing with is,
has itself undergone a fundamental change.³⁶

The question, for a hermeneutic philosopher is not ‘is this real?’, or ‘does this exist’? It is rather, ‘*with which conception of “reality” do I perceive this as real?*’ This is the ideological question regarding science: how does one react to it – to the knowledge that is produced through scientific research?

How does science transform our *understanding* of ‘reality’? How, in other words, does a transformation in the object result in an equal transformation in the subject? Put differently, a particular understanding of the object (whether we are talking about nature or culture) will have a particular subjective reaction depending upon the subject’s own presupposed position with regards to the judgement of ‘what really exists’. This, I claim, is where Theory (*and* cultural studies) helps us to speak to the truth of the scientific discourse. Post-Theorists, according to Žižek, emphasize that “politically, they are not against the Left – their aim is to liberate the Left from the irrationalist-elitist, etc., postmodern fake; nevertheless, they accept the distinction between neutral theoretical (scientific) insight and the possible ideologico-political bias of its author.” Theory, in contrast, involves “the properly dialectical paradox of a Truth that relies on an engaged subjective position.” Žižek argues that, the ideological dimension of the standard ‘professionalism’ of the academic institution – the post-Theory penchant for solid, positivist, empirical research – is only visible from the position of Theory.³⁷ Truth, Žižek points out, “is, by definition, one-sided.”³⁸ Truth involves the gesture of choosing sides. In other words, in the division between Theory and post-Theory, we do not have two sciences; rather, we have one science “split from within – that is to say, caught in the

battle for hegemony.”³⁹ In this way, the debate between Theory and post-Theory displaces, in terms of academic and intellectual criticism, the terms of the ‘class struggle’. While post-Theory presents itself as ‘neutral’, impartial knowledge, Theory reminds us that *there is no neutrality*; every Truth is a one-sided, subjective interpretation. Every shift in our understanding of the object has an equal transformation in our own subjective conception of Self.

The question to ask, regarding the divide between Theory/post-Theory in terms of the ‘class struggle’ is not, Žižek suggests, “how do they explicitly *relate to* power, but how are they themselves *situated within* the predominant power relations?”⁴⁰ The very resistance to Theory, today, suggests that it remains as an excess in existing academia; post-Theory, on the other hand, attempts to standardize the function of academic knowledge through the practice of ‘professionalism’, rationalism, empiricism, ‘problem-solving’, etc..., in order to “get rid of this intruder,” Theory.

The two most exemplary cases of the kind of ‘non-academic knowledge’ found in Theory, detested by post-Theorists, according to Žižek, are Marxism and psychoanalysis. Both, of course, are active in a particular, engaged notion of Truth: not some objective truth, but “the truth about the position from which one speaks.”⁴¹ In a sense, Žižek argues, both Marxism and psychoanalysis are theories about the resistance to themselves – just as Marxism “interprets resistance against its insights as the ‘result of the class struggle in theory’”, psychoanalysis “interprets resistance against itself as the result of the very unconscious processes that are its topic.”⁴² In opposition to both, post-Theory presents itself as the epitome of the University discourse, as *the very model* of ‘neutral’, intellectual ‘freedom’. *The ideological gesture par excellence!*

In the preceding, I have argued that the debate between Theory and post-Theory in film studies must be seen as an example of class struggle at the level of ideology within intellectual discourse. In solidarity with Žižek's critique of Bordwell, Carroll, and the entire post-Theory project, I argue that the latter is the highest form of ideological displacement of the ruling ideology. By presenting itself as 'counter-ideology', post-Theory is presented as occupying a minority position. With reference to Žižek's interpretation of the Lacanian University discourse, I argue, on the contrary, that post-Theory is representative of the reigning ideology.

Also, insofar as the postmodern cultural studies Left continues its cynical resignation towards 'Grand Narratives' it poses no threat to the reigning ideology. Instead, it poses itself as the key target of post-Theory criticism. While, politically, postmodern cultural studies may stand in solidarity with the Marxian critique of capitalism, its rejection of the class struggle, and the dialectical conception of history, I claim, leaves it susceptible to ideological diffusion. Post-Theory and postmodern cultural studies are thus two sides of the same coin, as Žižek might put it. They are the front and back of the same ideological resignation towards a politics centred on class struggle. For both, there is no class struggle in the Marxian sense.

While Žižek's critique of post-Theory is useful for fleshing out the core of the class struggle in contemporary intellectual discourse, his work is of greater interest for revitalizing the field of film theory in two main areas. Žižek's psychoanalytic interpretations of film add to a theory of ideological form. I explore these interpretations and their importance for film theory and the theory of ideology in the following chapter.

I will then come back to Žižek's theory of subjectivity in chapter four in order to add to a theory of spectatorship that builds upon the Marxian theory of ideology.

NOTES:

¹ Noël Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment." In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), p. 62.

² See David Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything." *David Bordwell's website on cinema*. Available at <http://www.davidbordwell.com/essays/Žižek.php>.

³ Bordwell and Carroll, "Introduction." In *Post-Theory, op cit.*, p. xiii

⁴ Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory*. (London: BFI, 2001), p. 2. Subsequent references to this book will be marked as *FRT* within the text.

⁵ See Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

⁶ Bordwell and Carroll, "Introduction," p. xiv

⁷ Jameson, "Class and Allegory." In *Signatures of the Visible*. (New York and London: 1992), pp. 64-65.

⁸ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2000); *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); and, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). While I find the category of 'immaterial labour' useful for a new theory of the revolutionary subject, I am at odds with Hardt and Negri's notion of 'biopolitical production'. They claim that biopolitics concerns the production of a commodified *subject*. However, it is more appropriate to conceive biopolitics as the production of a

commodified *object*. Life is becoming increasingly objectified by way of commodification. In this sense, I see no difference between ‘biopolitics’ in the sense that they use this concept and Lukács theory of reification. A revolutionary subject, as opposed to a ‘biopolitical subject’, must recognize the objectification of life through commodification and reaffirm her position as a subject of history in order to effect any kind of social change.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*. Penguin Classics Edition. Ben Fowkes, trans. (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 930 n. 2; see also, Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto.” In *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Lawrence H. Simon, ed. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), p. 167.

¹⁰ Žižek, “Lenin’s Choice.” In *Revolution at the Gates*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 210.

¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 149 n. 22.

¹² Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. 2nd Ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 21-22.

¹³ Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT, 2006), p. 397; see also Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 131-157.

¹⁴ See Jameson, “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” *New Left Review* I 146: 53-92, 1984; and, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

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- ¹⁵ See Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” In *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).
- ¹⁶ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 30.
- ¹⁷ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 25.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p. 26
- ¹⁹ Carroll, “Prospects for Film Theory,” p. 57
- ²⁰ Here, it should be pointed out that Theory takes sides overtly, while post-Theory does so covertly.
- ²¹ All references to Bordwell in this section come from his article, “Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything,” *op cit*.
- ²² Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p. 6.
- ²³ Ibid, p. 7
- ²⁴ David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 260. Subsequent references to this book will be cited as *FTL* within the text.
- ²⁵ See also Žižek’s discussion on the displacement of class struggle in *Titanic*, in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, pp. 57-58. Žižek’s interpretation of *Titanic* is also discussed in chapter three. See also Matthew Flisfeder, “Class Struggle and Displacement: Slavoj Žižek and Film Theory.” *Cultural Politics* 5(3): 299-324, 2009.
- ²⁶ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, p. 8.
- ²⁷ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 127.
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, pp. 32-33

³⁰ Ibid, p. 33

³¹ Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), p. 215.

³² Ibid, p. 216

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid, p. 219

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 221-222

³⁷ Ibid, p. 223

³⁸ Žižek, “Lenin’s Choice,” p. 177

³⁹ Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, p. 225

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 226

⁴¹ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, p. 3

⁴² Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, p. 228

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARDS A ‘FILM THEORY OF IDEOLOGY’

In the previous chapter, I developed a schema for thinking through Žižek’s relationship to film theory and film studies by way of his debate with David Bordwell. In highlighting the central place of class struggle in intellectual discourse, I distinguished the Marxian approach to theory, and Žižek’s place within this approach, from both the myriad of ‘post-’ perspectives, i.e., cultural studies, and the post-Theory approach. The latter, I argued, are to be distinguished from the Marxian perspective in terms of their resignation towards a politics centred on class struggle and big emancipatory projects, or ‘Grand Narratives’.

In this chapter, I investigate Žižek’s psychoanalytic interpretations of films as a way of adding to a ‘film theory of ideology’. While Žižek presents his interpretations in the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, my thesis in this chapter is that this language serves to elaborate upon a dialectical materialist interpretation of cinema. I claim that Žižek uses psychoanalysis as a means of re-thinking dialectical materialism for the era of postmodernity. This is the premise on which I examine Žižek’s interpretations of films. As an extension of dialectical materialism, psychoanalysis provides a language with which it is possible to elaborate upon ideological deadlocks between the Law, Power or Authority, and desire, of which it is the objective of both psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism to dissolve.

With reference to various psychopathologies – perversion, neurosis, psychosis – psychoanalysis provides a wider terminology for variations in what I refer to as

‘ideological misrecognition’, by which I mean a misrecognition of form. It is the form that is misrecognized, as opposed to content, in ideology. But psychoanalysis does more than add to an analysis of misrecognized form. In locating the problem of ideology at the level of fantasy, psychoanalysis adds a supplementary condition to ‘ideological misrecognition’. What is misrecognized in ideology is both the form (S_1 , the signifier fixing the form) of ideological content (S_2 , the floating chain of signifiers, whose meanings are defined in their relationship to S_1) and the unconscious fantasy (a , the object cause of desire) that structures the subject’s (\$) perspective of the ideological content. The latter, however, is a topic to be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four. The point I want to make here is that the subject is caught in ideology between the Symbolic level of the text ($S_1 - S_2$), and the sublime level of the fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$). A film theory of ideology requires an analysis of both levels.

Psychoanalysis is therefore useful for two levels of ideology critique. On the one hand, it provides a language for critiquing ideology at the level of content. At this level, content is analyzed in order to flesh out the unconscious of the ideological form (the short circuit between S_1 and a). That is, by analyzing elements of film content, a psychoanalytic interpretation seeks to bring to consciousness the unconscious level of misrecognized form. On the other hand, psychoanalysis is useful for building an understanding of the relationship between ideology and subjectivity. This chapter focuses on the first of these two components of the psychoanalytic critique of ideology. With this purpose in mind, I will now turn to Žižek’s psychoanalytic interpretations of cinema, beginning with his own appearance in the film, *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* (2006).

PSYCHOANALYSIS, BETWEEN CINEMA AND IDEOLOGY

In *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, Žižek does not interpret cinema directly. Instead he performs a psychoanalytic interpretation of ideology through the cinema. While it appears as though he is using film examples to explain concepts in psychoanalysis, I argue that *The Pervert's Guide* is a perfect example of how Žižek refers to the cinema in order to interpret ideology. In this film, Žižek performs what I call a 'film theory of ideology'. Although he speaks in the language of psychoanalysis, his true motivation is the critique of ideology, and not simply an exegetic interpretation of his method of analysis.

For Žižek, films in general are worth analysing because of their proximity to Symbolic reality. Film, as such, is a fake – a fiction. However, in its very form as fiction, in appearance, it becomes more real than (Symbolic) 'reality' itself. While it is generally the case that films are approached as fictions, as mere appearances, they manage to approach the Real in their honesty, *as* fictions, while Symbolic reality – *the* fiction that structures our everyday, effective reality – is misrecognized as the real thing. In this way, there is more Truth in the appearance, in the form of cinematic fiction – we admit it as such, as a fiction, whereas we tend to avoid recognizing Symbolic reality itself as mere fiction. This is what we can learn from cinema, how to understand the appearances that structure our everyday – fake – Symbolic reality. This, I claim, is precisely what Žižek argues in *The Pervert's Guide*.

If there is a central theme to the film, it is with regards to, in psychoanalytic terms, the relationship between desire and drive, and the 'screen' of fantasy. The film

opens with Žižek posing the question: ‘how do we know what we desire?’ He argues, in terms of psychoanalysis, that we have to be *taught* to desire, and that cinema ‘teaches’ us how to desire. In order to make this point, he refers to the choice in the Wachowski brothers’ *The Matrix* (1999) between illusion and reality.¹ In *The Matrix*, Morpheus presents Neo with the option of remaining in the Matrix ‘reality’ (the virtual world of illusions-fictions), or to ‘emancipate’ himself into the real reality. The choice between illusion and reality in *The Matrix* is equal to the choice between illusion and reality in the cinema – this choice is also inherent to the relationship between ideology (Symbolic ‘reality’) and the Real. But, as Žižek indicates, the choice is not as simple as that between illusion and reality. The question is, rather, how is reality constituted by way of illusion? Herein lies the interest in cinema.

Films, like the Symbolic order, are fictions that effectively structure ‘reality’ – the Symbolic order, that is, structures the subject’s relationship to reality. Or, more precisely, the Symbolic order (S_2) announces the subject’s ‘place’ in reality. The subject represents the Void, or gap ($\$$), in the Symbolic. The subject’s place is given form by the signifier (the Master-Signifier, S_1) that *represents* the subject’s place in the Symbolic. This signifier is a fiction – the choice of illusion – that gives structure to the entire field of signification. This is what defines the form of the Symbolic for the subject. The film fiction, similarly, structures ‘reality’ by way of its form – by way of the cynical reaction towards it; it is not meant to be taken seriously – it structures reality by way of the spectator’s cynical ‘distanciation’ towards it; whereas the Symbolic order is a fiction that *is* meant to be taken seriously.

In the first part of the *Pervert's Guide*, Žižek deals with the form of horror films. In dealing with horror films, Žižek asks, what does the 'horror element' *add* to the story? In other words, what is accomplished by telling the story through the form of the horror genre – that is, by adding the horror obstacle? In Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), for example, the birds enter and thus disturb the Symbolic 'reality', therefore disintegrating 'reality'. For Žižek, this intrusion has the structure of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, as drive, invading the space of the Symbolic. And the entire thrust of the story deals with finding a way to domesticate the problem, to domesticate the drive, in other words, to get rid of the birds, so that Symbolic reality can be reconstituted.

The first part of the 'guide' examines films that deal, in some way, with the intrusion of the Real in the Symbolic, by way of drive. Apart from *The Birds*, Žižek refers to 'voice' in *The Exorcist* (1973) (the possession of the young girl is expressed through the strange voice that emits from her body), the 'voice' in Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) (the secret, invisible voice, 'floating' in inner space, that controls things behind the scenes), and the 'voice' in Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) (which marks the distinction between Hinkle/Hitler and the Jewish barber). Žižek also refers to the music in *The Great Dictator* – the same music is played in two instances, when Hinkle is playing with the balloon globe, and when the barber addresses the crowd in the guise of Hinkle. Music, for Žižek, can be expressive of drive since, with music, one can never be sure of its ethical implications, it is potentially always a threat. He compares this use of music to the 'free floating' singing in one particular scene in Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), where it appears that Opera is emanating from a singer on stage; however, after the singer falls ill, to the ground, the

singing continues. The singing, here, is for Žižek an example of drive as a ‘partial object’, or an organ without body (reversing the Deleuzian ‘body without organs’).

There is, according to Žižek, another sense in which desire and drive are dealt with in cinema, as the conflict between ‘myself’ and ‘my’ double. Here, *objet petit a* and the Master-Signifier are rendered as two opposed versions of the subject, where ideal ego and Ego-ideal come into conflict. This is portrayed, for example, in David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999) where the central character is confronted with himself in two guises: as the Symbolic, ‘castrated’, ordinary Edward Norton (the way the character experiences himself in the guise of his Ego-ideal), and as the Imaginary, pulsating, obscene double, Brad Pitt (the way in which he experiences himself in the guise of the ideal ego). In one particular scene in the film, the two modes become identical. This occurs during the scene when Norton beats himself up in his boss’ office. This scene, according to Žižek, exemplifies ‘a politics of drive’, or a fidelity to the Real. In order to get rid of that which is in ‘myself’ – the pathological supplement that attaches ‘me’ to the Symbolic, the ideal ego, or the unconscious fantasy – the subject must assume the agency of drive (as opposed to desire). This agency is that of the subject stripped of her support in either the obscene supplemental fantasy or the Symbolic. Norton’s fist in this scene functions as a ‘partial object’ of drive, similar to the fist in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). The only (ethical) way to get rid of the partial object is to *become* this partial object – that is, for the subject to assume the agency of this partial object of drive as her own. The ideological approach, in contrast, I would argue, is to re-integrate the irrationality of the drive back into the ‘rational’ terms of the Symbolic. In politics, for example, this would mean something along the lines of

labelling revolutionaries as ‘terrorists’, or ‘radicals’. Here, we have an example of something that appears irrational within the terms of the existing form of Symbolic rationality – that is, from the perspective of the reigning order. Drive represents this irrational element invading the space of the Symbolic, and the only way to domesticate it is by re-constituting the fantasy that shields the subject from the irrationality of the drive.

Fantasy is, in the psychoanalytic sense, the screen between desire and drive, or that which separates the subject from these partial objects of blind drives, positioning her within the perspective frame of desire. It transforms the ‘disgusting’, irrational object of drive into an intruding (or protruding) object of desire. Desire, as Žižek puts it, is the ‘wound of reality’. It inscribes itself into reality by distorting it. Desire, as I argue in chapter four, is an essential component of ideology (the ‘pure form’ of ideology), and cinema further functions as ideology by arousing desire. “The art of cinema,” as Žižek puts it at the end of the first part of *Pervert’s Guide*, “consists in arousing desire to play with desire. But at the same time, keeping it at a safe distance, domesticating it, rendering it palpable.” This, according to Žižek, is how the cinema ‘teaches’ us how to desire. It does so by constructing a fantasy screen between our Symbolic ‘selves’ and our unconscious ‘Self’. But it is important to keep in mind that there is still a level of irrationality at the level of desire, which is why it must be kept at a ‘safe distance’ from the subject. The fantasy is still at the level of the unconscious.

While the first part of the ‘guide’ deals particularly with the relationship between desire and drive, the second part concerns the relationship between fantasy and ‘reality’. Žižek begins part two with what he calls ‘the Freudian question’, which is *not*, he claims, ‘why is every meaning inscribed with some obscene sexual content’? The Freudian

question is *not* ‘why, whenever we are doing something, are we always thinking about sex’? The question is: what are we thinking about when we *are* having sex? In other words, what is the obscene supplemental fantasy that frames our perspective of the act in which we are engaged? This question should not imply that, in order to cope with reality, we have to *invent* fictions to keep us distracted; rather, in order to sustain our agency *in* the act, effectively, some supplemental content, one that frames our perception of the act, must be disavowed. Or, to put things differently, in order to make sense of our actions, some irrational, non-sensical element must remain outside the conscious framework of our actions. Awareness of this errant element would hinder the subject’s ability to act. There is therefore a minimal level of distancing between the subject’s conscious ‘Self’ and the Real. This distancing is made possible by the framework of fantasy. Fantasy is that which ‘protects’ the subject from the traumatic Real. When the fantasy breaks down, ‘reality’ becomes too Real for the subject to bear.

In this respect, and again referring to *The Matrix*, Žižek asks the question, not why does the Matrix need our energy (the energy of human desires); rather, why does the energy (libido, drive) need the Matrix? The machines, he argues, could have easily found another, more reliable form of energy, but it is the energy of humans that is still needed – What is this energy? According to Žižek, the only consistent answer is that, “the matrix feeds on the human’s *jouissance*,” the surplus-enjoyment of human desire.² Yet, at the same time, the humans, Žižek argues, rely on the Matrix as a way of disposing of excess surplus-enjoyment. His point is that Symbolic fictions (such as those in the Matrix) are needed in order to feed our drives, while still keeping them at bay. Libido needs illusion

in order to sustain itself, nevertheless, we transubstantiate drive into desire in order to prevent our own access to the horrible, meaninglessness of the Real.

Žižek then refers to Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), in which the fantasy of the return of the protagonist's dead wife is actualized within the co-ordinates of Symbolic reality. He compares this with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), where the dead Madeleine returns in Judy. In both cases, the fantasy object returns through a certain breakdown in the Symbolic order. The fantasy that protects the subject from unbearable reality breaks down, thus causing anxiety in the subject. Interestingly enough, in both *Solaris* and in *Vertigo* the unconscious fantasy that frames the co-ordinates of Symbolic reality for the protagonists is the unconscious desire for the death of the female characters, the wife in *Solaris*, Madeleine in *Vertigo* (or, rather, the desire for them to remain dead). The conclusion of *Solaris* is telling of this when, according to Žižek, at the end, the hero is reunited with his father, the Symbolic figure of Law. Law, at the end is reconstituted, prohibiting the entry of the fantasmatic object of desire. In contrast, the Symbolic 'reality' of *Vertigo* is reconstituted at the end when Judy, in the guise of Madeleine, dies by falling off of the bell tower, just like the original Madeleine. This ending has the structure of nightmare, where, according to Žižek, the desired fantasy becomes a reality, thus reconstituting the connection between fantasy and the paternal metaphor, the signifier of the Law.

The paternal metaphor, according to Žižek, is also central to Lynch's films. In both *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Lost Highway* (1997), the line between fantasy and reality is either dissolved or reconstituted by a foreclosure or intervention of a paternal figure. In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey is thrust into the nightmarish underworld the instant his father suffers

from a stroke. In *Lost Highway*, reality is reconstituted through the intervention of the crazy figure of Mr. Eddie/Dick Laurent. Mr. Eddie and Frank (from *Blue Velvet*) are examples of phallic father figures. Their power is a complete fake. This fake is constitutive of the Symbolic order. The Symbolic is ‘masculine’, phallic, in the sense that it is a complete fabrication. Phallus, in psychoanalysis, represents the fiction of meaning. The Law is a fake, and it is the entry of the (impossible) fantasy object into the framework of the Symbolic that dissolves ‘reality’. However, when fantasy disintegrates, or enters the frame of the Symbolic, we do not get real reality, rather, what we get is the Real – the horror of the formless matter, the ‘night of the world’, in Hegelian terms.

Part two of the ‘guide’, thus deals with films that realize the spectral, obscene fantasmatic underside of ‘reality’ within the space of the Symbolic. These examples all have the structure of psychosis, whereby the repressed fantasy object returns in the space of the Symbolic. It is important to note, of course, that for Žižek, the cinema itself is phallic in this sense, it is a fake that operates towards the domestication of the subject/spectator’s desire/drive.

In part three, Žižek, finally, argues that as *the* art of appearances, cinema tells us something about reality itself. That is, it teaches us about how ‘belief’ functions in the constitution of ‘reality’. Reality, according to Žižek is incomplete, unfinished. Similarly, he argues, cinema became a truly modern art as the depiction of an ‘unfinished reality’. For him, modern films are about the possibility/impossibility to make a film. And the question of analysis becomes one of asking how is it that, even when we know that the fiction we are presented with is a fake, we are still fascinated by it? This question, for Žižek, seeks to investigate that which is Real in the illusion.

The logic of demystification is not enough. Even in post-ideological society, there remains, according to Žižek, a kernel of belief – a ‘sublime object’ of ideology that still attaches us to the effective Symbolic reality. This is the paradox of belief in fetishism disavowal: “*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*” The fundamental delusion, today, according to Žižek, is in not taking illusions seriously enough – this is a cynical attitude that is developed in reactions towards both cinema *and* reality. This is why, in concluding the ‘guide’, Žižek states that, “In order to understand today’s world, we need cinema, literally. It’s only in cinema that we get that crucial dimension which we are not ready to confront in our reality. If you are looking for what is in reality more real than reality itself, look into the cinematic fiction.”

The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema serves as a perfect introduction to Žižek’s psychoanalytic interpretation of film. What he accomplishes is, more properly speaking, a psychoanalytic interpretation of ideology, with film serving as his object of analysis. The study of cinema, for Žižek, allows us to reflect upon many of the questions that need to be addressed in the problematic of ideology, primarily at the level of belief. Why, particularly when one is aware of the gaps in the existing ideology, does one still participate in the activities organized by the existing ideology? Žižek’s answer is that there is a level of unconscious belief, determined by the fantasy frame that is ontologically prior to one’s attachment to both the belief in the cinematic reality and the Symbolic, ideological reality. It is this unconscious ‘belief before belief’ that is disavowed in one’s participation in everyday ‘reality’. But before returning to this problematic of the ‘belief before belief’ in chapter four, I want to look at some of the ways in which Žižek interprets the texts of films in order to better answer the question,

what makes the text itself believable? My thesis is that the believability of cinematic texts relies upon, on the one hand, the introduction of some kind of paradox between power/authority and desire presented in the film, and on the other hand, the ideological resolution of this paradox. These elements within the text, I claim, are universal, and it is the resolution between them that indicates something about the form of ideology. However, before taking up this element of analysis, one question still remains regarding the ‘guide’. Why, I want to ask, is this the *pervert’s* guide to cinema? In order to understand this, I will, again, refer to the Lacanian discourses.

WHAT IS SO PERVERSE ABOUT ŽIŽEK’S ‘GUIDE’ TO CINEMA?

Following Jacques-Alain Miller, Žižek links the Analyst’s discourse to the ‘discourse of the pervert’.³ In the Analyst’s discourse, the *objet petit a* occupies the position of agency, the subject (\$) occupies the position of work, which produces a new Master-Signifier, with Knowledge in the position of Truth.

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

In the ‘guide’, Žižek occupies the position of the *objet petit a* in the Analyst’s discourse. However, this is not the position of ‘subjective destitution’, indicative of the ‘end of analysis’. Instead, he occupies *this* position of interpretation, which has not yet become revolutionary. In other words, his position is itself caught between a Kantian and Hegelian perspective, which is not yet Marxian.

Despite his keen interpretations of cinema and ideology in *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*, it is evident that Žižek is, himself, still caught in ideology. This problem can be explained further with reference to a passage in *The Fright of Real Tears*. In the

introduction to *Fright*, Žižek recounts an incident when he was asked to comment on a painting in an art round table. As Žižek puts it, he engaged in a ‘bluff’:

the frame of the painting in front of us is not its true frame; there is another, invisible, frame, implied by the structure of the painting, which frames our perception of the painting, and these two frames do not overlap – there is an invisible gap separating the two. The pivotal content of the painting is not rendered in its visible part, but is located in this dislocation of the two frames, in the gap that separates them. Are we, today, in our post-modern madness, still able to discern the traces of this gap? Perhaps more than the reading of a painting hinges on it; perhaps the decisive dimension of humanity will be lost when we lose the capacity to discern this gap... To my surprise, this brief intervention was a huge success, and many following participants referred to the dimension in-between-the-two-frames, elevating it into a term. This very success made me sad, really sad. What I encountered here was not only the efficiency of a bluff, but a much more radical apathy at the very heart of today’s cultural studies.⁴

Then, near the end of the book, he repeats this analytic conception, but without the cynical distance towards it:

One of the minimal definitions of a modernist painting concerns the function of its frame. The frame of the painting in front of us is not its true frame; there is another, invisible, frame, the frame implied by the structure of the painting, which frames our perception of the painting, and

these two frames by definition never overlap – there is an invisible gap separating them. The pivotal content of the painting is not rendered in its visible part, but is located in this dislocation of the two frames, in the gap that separates them.⁵

Here, the reading that *must* be taken seriously is the second one, without the ironic distance towards the mode of analysis. It is worth pointing out that the two frames, the visible and the invisible, represent the relation between the Symbolic and the Imaginary in Lacanian psychoanalysis – that is, between the apparent content and the obscene supplemental underside, and the gap between them is the Real, or the place of the subject. The point I want to make apropos of Žižek is that his ironic distance towards his own method of interpretation is symptomatic of his own ‘passionate attachment’ to ideology. As Žižek, himself, puts it apropos of this curious repetition, one must consider that, “even if the subject mocks a certain belief, this in no way undermines this belief’s symbolic efficiency – the belief continues to determine the subject’s activity. When we make fun of an attitude, the truth is often in this attitude, not in our distance towards it: I make fun of it to conceal from myself the fact that this attitude effectively determines my activity.”⁶ It is in his inability to take *himself* seriously that I believe we can find a hint of ideological belief in Žižek.

Here, however, I want to provide a psychoanalytic explanation for the persistence of Theory. Žižek explains the shift from the oral to the anal phase as “a certain dialectical shift in the intersubjective symbolic economy.”⁷ In the oral phase, the subject’s demands are satisfied by the (M)other; however, in the anal phase, the subject subordinates her own desire to the demand of the Other. Here, the “the object-cause of

the subject's desire (*a*) coincides with the Other's demand."⁸ The subject's needs can be satisfied only on the condition that she complies with the Other's demand. In the anal phase, in other words, the subject earns a place in the social order by satisfying her needs in compliance with the Other's demands.

Žižek argues that there exists a certain kind of anal attitude when it comes to Theory: particularly, the postmodern obsession with Hitchcock. That is, "the endless flow of books and conferences which endeavour to discern theoretical finesses even in his minor films." Žižek suggests that it is possible to account for this obsession "by way of a compulsive 'bad conscience' on the part of intellectuals who, prevented from simply yielding to the pleasures of Hitchcock's films, feel obliged to prove that they actually watch Hitchcock in order to demonstrate some theoretical point..."⁹ In other words, the Theorist is only "allowed to enjoy something insofar as it serves Theory qua my big Other."⁹ But is it not obvious that Žižek is, here, referring ultimately to himself? Is he not the epitome of an anal intellectual, unable to enjoy unless it is under the pretence of Theory?

Although Žižek's interpretation of cinema is perverse, his method, I claim, does provide insight into the function of ideology. So, while the interpretation of cinema does pose a dilemma for the analyst, this should in no way discourage a psychoanalytic interpretation of film. But, before I continue, I want to elaborate further upon Žižek's method of interpretation, which is based in Lacanian psychoanalysis. This quick digression will provide a framework for further understanding the significance for what I call Žižek's 'film theory of ideology'.

IDEOLOGY, BETWEEN THE MASTER-SIGNIFIER AND THE *OBJET PETIT A*

Žižek's most significant contribution to Lacanian theory is his elaboration upon the notion of the Real, perhaps the most elusive concept in the Lacanian oeuvre. While earlier Lacanian theorists, particularly in film theory, focused on the Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic, Žižek has helped to bring interest back to Lacan due to his emphasis on the Real. However, even within Žižek's own writings on the Lacanian Real, the concept still seems to slip into various different modalities. This has to do with the fact that there are, according to Žižek, three different conceptions of the Real in Lacanian theory: the imaginary Real, the symbolic Real, and the real Real.¹⁰ The Real, thus, emerges at three different points in Žižek's philosophical rethinking of Lacan, first and foremost as the 'sublime object', the *objet petit a*, or the object-cause of desire (imaginary Real). This is the 'hard kernel' of the Real found in the interpretation of dreams, as the unconscious desire that gets displaced and condensed within the content of the dream. This Real is the overdetermining principle of distortion of the unconscious desire in the dream. But the *objet petit a*, the 'little piece of the Real', is the 'sublime object' in another sense. It is the fantasy object, the 'obscene' supplemental underside to the effective Symbolic reality. It is, in other words, the *pathological* supplement to the everyday, *practical* order of things – that is, the disavowed X on account of which various different attempts at its interpretation ultimately end up in failure, the result of which constitutes a 'hook' of sorts onto the Symbolic. Here, then, it is possible to see the connection between the imaginary Real and the symbolic Real, in the subject's attachment to a (Master-)Signifier.

The Master-Signifier is the 'quilting point', often referred to in screen theory's version of 'suture'. The Master-Signifier adds no new content to the series of ordinary

signifiers; rather, it gives the series of ordinary signifiers a new harmony.¹¹ The Master-Signifier defines the relation between the series of signifiers, which turn back towards the Master-Signifier as their primary point of differentiation. It is a completely *contingent*, particular content, retroactively posited as *necessary* by the existing state of things – by the series of ordinary signifiers, which derive their own meaning by way of their differentiation from the Master-Signifier. The Master-Signifier is, thus, the signifier of the form itself. In order for all of the other signifiers to have some kind of static, or ultimately fixed meaning (to posit their own meaning as necessary), they must all refer back to the necessity of the Master-Signifier. It is in this way that content is hooked onto form, and vice versa.

The Master-Signifier, in a sense, functions as a *fetish*. It is important, here, to understand the difference between the Marxian conception of fetish (as in ‘commodity fetishism’) and the psychoanalytic conception of fetish. In Marxism, a fetish “conceals the positive network of social relations;” however, in psychoanalysis, a fetish “conceals the lack (‘castration’) around which the symbolic network is articulated.”¹² Marxism, in other words, conceives a fetish as a veil hiding some positive reality. A fetish hides the value of the commodity derived through the amount of abstract labour time put into it. This is what the Marxian tradition refers to as the labour theory of value. Psychoanalysis, in contrast, conceives of fetish as that which masks the Void of subjectivity (\$, the Lacanian ‘matheme’ for the subject of the unconscious), or the meaningless of unformed matter. A fetish gives meaning where it did not exist prior. The subject attaches herself to the Master-Signifier in order to avoid the traumatic abyss of the Real, the

‘nothingness’ of being. The Master-Signifier, in other words, provides meaning in the place of meaninglessness.

The Master-Signifier is also correlative with the subject’s Ego-ideal, or the point of symbolic identification “with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love.”¹³ This position from where we are being observed is that of the Lacanian ‘big Other’, the Symbolic order – the point at which all the other signifiers are ‘looking’ upon the subject. This is in contrast to the subject’s point of imaginary identification, or ideal ego, “identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing ‘what we would like to be’.”¹⁴ There is, then, a certain relationship between ideal ego and the *objet petit a*, and the subject’s place within this relationship can be graphed, either along the lines of Lacan’s ‘graph of desire’, as that between imaginary other and symbolic (big) Other ($i(o) - I(O)$), or within the later Lacanian mathemes, between the *objet petit a* and the Master-Signifier ($a - \$ - S_1$). The *objet petit a*, as the fantasmatic, pathological, supplemental underside, is the obverse of the Master-Signifier, that which identifies the subject in the terms of her everyday, practical Self. The Master-Signifier holds the place of the subject in the Symbolic. This place is, then, sustained by the obscene, supplemental underside of the ‘sublime object’ of fantasy. The place of the subject is in between the Symbolic Master-Signifier and the ‘sublime object’.

The relationship between the Master-Signifier, the *objet petit a* and the subject is important at two different levels. On the one hand, analytically, they represent the three main characters in Oedipal analysis, the Authority, desire, and the Subject. As I argue below, with reference to some of Žižek’s earlier interpretations of the works of Alfred

Hitchcock, ideology takes a particular form, depending upon the resolution of the relationship between Authority and desire. For the critique of ideology it is necessary to demonstrate how the ideological resolution of this relationship is pathological, and can be interpreted as either a perverse, psychotic, or neurotic text. On the other hand, the relationship between the Master-Signifier and the *objet petit a* is important for locating the subject in between the Symbolic texture of the cinema (or ‘reality’) and the supplemental fantasy that structures the subject’s relationship to text. I will come back to the latter in the following chapter.

The real Real, finally, is best understood as the Thing (*das Ding*) of (impossible) *jouissance*, or enjoyment, or the Kantian Thing-in-itself. The Thing is that which is originally ‘lost’, the Void of subjectivity, which is filled out by the noumenal fantasy object, the *objet petit a* (which is why the Lacanian formula for fantasy is: $\$ \diamond a$ – the ‘barred subject’ – the Void of subjectivity – in its encounter with the fantasy object). The subject is, therefore, capable of participating in Symbolic reality only insofar as she is inaccessible to herself as Thing.¹⁵ The Real is, thus, represented in the Symbolic by a certain Void or gap, the position of which is the place of the subject in the Symbolic, the ‘I’ of subjectivity (not the *ideal-I*, or the ideal ego, but the subject’s Master-Signifier in the Symbolic, the signifier which identifies the subject for all the other signifiers), which merely serves to mask this Void. Here, then, we encounter the difference between ‘the subject of enunciation’ and ‘the subject of the enunciated’. The former refers to the speaking subject (\$) who does not recognize her own position of enunciation, whereas the latter is the ‘I’ of the spoken word, the Symbolic ‘I’. What the subject, therefore, *misrecognizes* in Symbolic ‘reality’ is her own position of enunciation (\$) as opposed to

S₁), and this misrecognition is made all the more believable to the subject because of her pathological attachment to the fantasy object (*objet petit a*) sustaining her belief in a particular Symbolic representation of herself, and the social-Symbolic field that defines the context for the emergence of this Symbolic 'I'. Once again, the subject is caught between *a* and S₁, between the *objet petit a* and Master-Signifier.

This is why Žižek refers to the *objet petit a* as the 'sublime object of ideology'. The 'sublime object' helps us to explain certain attachments to the reigning ideology within the postmodern context of the 'post-ideological era'. It represents the pathological supplement – a kind of 'belief before belief' – that operates even beyond the limits of 'false-consciousness', or naïve consciousness. This is what helps Žižek explain, following Peter Sloterdijk, how the dominant ideology that prevails, at the end of ideology, is cynicism. Cynicism, for Žižek, is best captured by the psychoanalytic formula for 'fetishism disavowal', developed by Octave Manoni: "*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*" ('I know very well, but nevertheless...'). Cynicism, as Sloterdijk puts it, is "enlightened false consciousness."¹⁶ It is the state of consciousness "that follows after naïve ideologies and their enlightenment."¹⁷ Cynicism, for Žižek, is the ideology that emerges at a point when (as he puts it in the introduction to, *In Defense of Lost Causes*), 'big explanations' no longer suffice; when big political projects towards emancipation no longer resonate; when 'common sense' tells us:

the furthest we can go is enlightened conservative liberalism... there are no viable alternatives to capitalism... [but] left to itself, the capitalist dynamic threatens to undermine its own foundations. This concerns not only the economic dynamic... but, even more, the ideologico-political

dynamics.... Within this horizon, the answer is neither radical liberalism *à la* Hayek, nor crude conservatism, still less clinging to old welfare-state ideals, but a blend of economic liberalism with a minimally ‘authoritarian’ spirit of community... that counteracts the system’s excesses...¹⁸

This is the context in which Žižek organizes his rejection of the reactive and protective stance of ‘post-Theory’, and its ‘counter-revolution’ against Theory. The attitude of ‘post-Theorists’ is representative of the kind of cynical reason that predominates, today – the attitude that posits the end of ‘Grand Narratives’. However, it is an attitude that is sustained, according to Žižek, by some pathological, underlying supplemental fantasy. It is this supplement which Žižek refers to as the ‘sublime object of ideology’: “it serves as the fantasmatic support of ideological propositions.”¹⁹

With this understanding of Žižek’s interpretation of the Lacanian Real, and a further elaboration upon the Master-Signifier and the *objet petit a* – the elements of the Symbolic and the sublime – I can now conclude this quick digression and return to more serious matters regarding film theory and the interpretation of cinema.

FANASY, IDEOLOGY, AND THE FETISHISM OF THE CINEMA

If I have made one thing clear in the preceding sections it is that fantasy, first and foremost, is definitely *not* Symbolic, and in the context of a psychoanalytic theory of cinema, it cannot be argued that film *texts* fall within the realm of fantasy (even films within ‘fantasy’ genre). Films, all films, are Symbolic texts. This, I claim, is what, most evidently, invalidates Christian Metz’s assertion that films are ‘imaginary signifiers’. No

signifier, by definition, can be imaginary. Metz uses the concept of the ‘imaginary signifier’ to make a claim regarding the form of the ‘reality’ presented in a cinematic text.

According to Metz, the cinematic signifier is more perceptual than that of other forms of aesthetic expression.²⁰ This claim is based on Metz’s presumption that the cinematic signifier is ‘imaginary’, alluding to the Lacanian Imaginary. He argues that the cinematic signifier is a projection of ‘reality’, one that has been pre-recorded. In this, he compares the film signifier to that of the musical recording. Both the film signifier and the musical signifier, according to Metz, are present, but only as the recording of them allows. The recording signifies the presence of an absence. Thus, for Metz, the cinema is characterized by “the imaginary that it *is* from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier.”²¹

Metz’s claims about the ‘imaginary signifier’ appear to be simple re-interpretations of earlier philosophical investigations of cinematic reality, the most well-known of which are found in the writings of André Bazin and Stanley Cavell,²² using semiotic and psychoanalytic, particularly Lacanian, terms. What he ends up doing, however, is conflating the Imaginary fantasy object (*objet petit a*) with the Symbolic Master-Signifier. The Imaginary fantasy object is nowhere rendered on the screen. It is the signifier, rather, which presents itself to the spectator in the film text. However, the relationship between the two is still relevant for film theory. It is the signifier, I argue, that is responsible for a certain ‘prohibition’ of the fantasy object in the film text. With an understanding of this relationship, between the signifier – that is, the Master-Signifier, as the signifier of the form – the signifier that fixes the meaning of the Symbolic, and the sublime fantasy object, I am now in a position to develop the relationship between film

content and film form. This relationship is equally applicable to that between ideological content and ideological form.

Žižek provides an example of this kind of prohibition, indicative of form, found in *Casablanca*. Ironically, Žižek pulls this example from one of the chapters in the *Post-Theory* anthology: “‘A Brief Romantic Interlude’: Dick and Jane Go to 3 ½ Seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema,” by Richard Maltby. Here, Maltby highlights the relevance of a particular shot of the airport tower at night, in between a shot of Rick and Ilsa sharing in an embrace and then a shot from outside the window of Rick’s room, “where he is standing, looking out, and smoking a cigarette. He turns into the room, and says, ‘And then?’ [Ilsa] resumes her story...”²³ Maltby suggests that viewers may interpret this scene in at least two mutually conflicting ways: it either suggests that Rick and Ilsa had slept together during the interlude where the scene dissolves into the shot of the airport, or it indicates that they have not, and is simply added to denote the passage of a short amount of time, during which Ilsa continued to recount her story to Rick. Maltby focuses on this scene “as an example of the way in which Hollywood movies presuppose multiple viewpoints, at multiple textual levels, for their consuming audience,”²⁴ and indicates something of Hollywood’s “contradictory refusal to enforce interpretive closure at the same time that it provides plot resolution. [According to Maltby] The movie neither confirms nor denies either interpretation.”²⁵ However, for Žižek, the question is not simply “did they ‘do it’ or didn’t they?” It is not simply a question of interpretive closure and plot resolution. Instead, for him, the more important question is: *which content must be added* in order to disavow the potential, obscene supplemental interpretation, that they *did*, in fact, sleep together?

As Žižek puts it, in Lacanian terms, the question to ask is, which content *is allowed* to enter the “public domain of the symbolic Law, or the big Other”? Or, put differently, *which content is added in order to disavow the (supposedly) prohibited content?* According to Žižek, this shot indicates the essential character of appearances – that is, the need for appearances that are added in order to activate and disavow obscene surplus-enjoyment. This added content speaks to *the form* of the appearance itself.²⁶

In the three-and-a-half second shot in *Casablanca*, Rick and Ilsa did *not* ‘do it’, they did not sleep together for the Symbolic big Other – for the ‘order of appearance’, as Žižek would put it; but they *did* ‘do it’ “for our dirty fantasmatic imagination.”²⁷ This fantasmatic, obscene supplement, has the structure of what Žižek calls the ‘inherent transgression’,²⁸ and, according to him, Hollywood needs both levels – the explicit order of appearance, *and* the obscene supplemental fantasy – in order to function. There are, of course, other examples of this kind of supplement in cinema, such as the close-up shots of the match in David Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* (1990), but one example that I find particularly interesting, one that is often discussed in film studies, is the added shot of the unicorn in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner: The Director’s Cut* (1992).

The latter is often discussed as adding to the dimension of Deckard’s own status as a human being. The film, as is well known, challenges Deckard’s own humanity: is he truly human or is he a replicant? Since Rachael’s memories were implanted, the audience comes to question whether this image is truly Deckard’s own, or whether it was implanted in his mind. This added shot of the unicorn also speaks to the psychoanalytic thesis that fantasy structures reality. Here, Deckard’s own sense of Self is produced in tandem with this fantasy image. However, what does it add for the spectator? Is it, like

the three-and-a-half second shot from *Casablanca*, added as a kind of censorship, as a signifier of prohibition, activating desire? Like the question ‘did they do it or didn’t they?’ apropos of *Casablanca*, the unicorn shot subjectivizes the spectator through the question: is Deckard a human or a replicant? It is, I argue, this added element that produces a degree of (surplus-)enjoyment for the spectator in the film.

This relationship between prohibition and desire is, for Žižek, how we must understand the function of ideology. It is neither a naïve false-consciousness, nor simply the ideas that seem to dominate; it has to do, rather, with *the fetishistic attachment to a particular kind of avowed supplement* (the Master-Signifier) *and its disavowal, sustained by one’s attachment to some supplemental underside* (the fantasy object, *objet petit a*). The critique of ideology has to ask, what is it that is added to the order of appearances in order to generate a subjectivized element of desire, one that supplements the subject’s actual, practical attachment to the order of appearances?

This underside, the fantasy object, conceals the fact that the Symbolic order is structured around some traumatic impossibility that cannot be symbolized, the Real of enjoyment. Fantasy is what ‘domesticates’ this impossibility, transforms it into desire (or what Lacan refers to as ‘surplus-*jouissance*’, or ‘surplus-enjoyment’ in Žižek’s texts).²⁹ Beyond fantasy there is only drive (the Freudian ‘death drive’), ‘pulsating’ around the *sinthome* – a signifying formation, penetrated with enjoyment. The *sinthome* is the only, final remaining substance of the subject’s ontological attachment to impossible enjoyment.³⁰ In a sense, *sinthome* is the original, constituting, symptom of the subject – a symptom that forms as a ‘fundamental fantasy’, giving consistency to the subject in place of (Self-)doubt. Fantasy is that which closes the gap of the pre-ontological Real, the

Void of nothingness.³¹ This, finally, points to the psychoanalytic theory that, “what should remain inaccessible to us is not the noumenal Real, but our *fundamental fantasy* itself – the moment the subject comes too close to this phantasmatic core, he loses the consistency of his existence.”³² In cinema, fantasy is definitely *not* that which appears on the screen. It is, rather, that which allows the subject to take pleasure from the screen as surplus-enjoyment. Fantasy is the, Imaginary, ‘invisible frame’ that co-ordinates our *perception* of the visible, Symbolic, frame.

I want to extend this point further by considering two films from the late 1990s, both of which deal with the American television mythology of the idyllic small-town lifestyle, perhaps best recognized by references to *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963). The two films I have in mind here are Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* (1998) and Gary Ross’ *Pleasantville* (1998). *The Truman Show* contrasts the idyllic *Leave it to Beaver* representation of small-town life with the so-called ‘real world’ of freedom, agency and choice. Indeed, the resolution of the film comes when Truman (Jim Carrey) freely chooses to leave the idyllic world of the TV show and enters the ‘unknown’ world of ‘reality’. *Pleasantville* also contrasts the idyllic TV world with the miserable reality of everyday life. As the story progresses, the idyllic world continuously is rejected (by way of analogy, shifting from a 1950s conservative mentality towards the liberal mentality of the 1960s and 1970s American culture – allusions to the civil rights movement and the feminist movement by way of the transition from black and white to colour film, as well as the attitude which instigates this transformation: sexual liberation), suggesting that it is preferable to live in a world that is not necessarily cheery, but one that may, perhaps, be filled with misery, so long as freedom and agency are still the dominant ideology. In

both cases, we get a clear sense of what Žižek means when he contrasts the ruling ideology with the ideas that seem to dominate.³³

Both films present the image of 1950s conservatism as a dominant ideology, while at the same time, both films are also framed as criticisms of *this* ‘dominant ideology’; however, they both also conceal the ideology present in the *form* of this *apparent* – *in what appears to be* – criticism of ideology. Here, it is the form, itself, and not the content, that is ideological. It is the form that criticizes what appears to be the dominant ideology (1950s conservatism), but which presents the ‘common sense’ notions of freedom and agency as strictly self-evident. The form, in other words, conceals the supplemental, pathological underside of the belief inherent to the film’s central message: ‘we believe in free choice; we believe that we are all endowed with free agency; our society promotes freedom and equality, etc...’ It is the pathological belief in this fantasy object that supports the ideological claims of these films, found, not in their explicit content, but in their form; and the criticism of ideology, I argue, has to focus on the pathological supplement – the surplus-enjoyment – attached to the ideological form itself. This is a surplus-enjoyment that supports the subject’s own sense of (Self-)consistency. The point I want to emphasize is not that one should reject choice, agency, and equality (of course these are things worth fighting for), but that the background of global capitalist inequality persists as the unspoken point of their contemporary prohibition. They are definitely *not* prohibited by the apparent, official Symbolic order – which is why the contemporary reigning order *appears* post-ideological; they are, however, prohibited by the background of capitalist inequality.

This relationship between the explicit level of avowed content and the sublime level of disavowed content, a content that accounts for the unconscious level of form, is one that requires consideration for a full psychoanalytic critique of ideology. It is this relationship, I claim, that accounts for pleasure, both in cinema and in ideology. However, it is harder to claim, today, that any kind of censorship exists, either in cinema or in ideology. How, at this level, is it possible to claim that there exists a level of repression in ideology? An ‘obscene’ example might help to answer this question.

‘RAPE IN FANTASY’

One of the examples that continues to return in Žižek’s work is that of the ‘Say fuck me!’ scene in David Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* (1990). This is a particularly traumatic scene in the film that incorporates elements of irony and violence in depicting – if not physical rape, then at least – what Žižek refers to as ‘rape in fantasy’. Žižek describes the scene in the following terms:

In a lonely motel room, Willem Dafoe [Bobby Peru] exerts a rude pressure on Laura Dern: he touches and squeezes her, invading the space of her intimacy and repeating in a threatening way ‘Say fuck me!’, that is, extorting from her a word that would signal her consent to a sexual act. The ugly, unpleasant scene drags itself on, and when, finally, the exhausted Laura Dern utters a barely audible ‘Fuck me!’, Dafoe abruptly steps away, assumes a nice, friendly smile and cheerfully retorts: ‘No thanks, I don’t have time today’ but on another occasion I would do it gladly...’³⁴

Žižek claims that, in this scene, Bobby Peru has actually attained what he was *really* after. Not the sexual act itself, but rather Dern's consent – that is, her 'symbolic humiliation'. Žižek argues, in other words, that what Bobby Peru wanted was for Dern to 'register' her consent to the Symbolic order, to the big Other, to publicly avow some obscene, supplemental fantasy. Žižek claims that,

the shock of Dafoe's final rejection of Dern's forcibly extorted offer gives the final pitch to him: his very unexpected rejection is his ultimate triumph and, in a way, humiliates her more than her direct rape. He has attained what he really wanted: not the act itself, just her consent to it, her symbolic humiliation. What we have here is rape in fantasy which refuses its realization in reality, and thus further humiliates its victim – the fantasy is forced out, aroused, and then abandoned, thrown upon the victim.

Žižek adds that there is evidence of Dern's wilful submission to Dafoe:

it is clear that Laura Dern is not simply disgusted by Dafoe's (Bobby Peru's) brutal intrusion into her intimacy: just prior to her 'Fuck me!', the camera focuses on her right hand, which she slowly spreads out – the sign of her acquiescence, the proof that he has stirred up her fantasy.

Here, Žižek suggests that the scene should be read as an inversion of the 'standard scene of seduction', "in which the gentle approach is followed by the brutal sexual act, after the woman, the target of the seducer's efforts, finally says 'Yes!'":

Bobby Peru's friendly negative answer to Dern's extorted 'Yes!' owes its traumatic impact to the fact that it makes public the paradoxical structure of the empty gesture as constitutive of the symbolic order: after brutally

wrenching out of her the consent to the sexual act, Peru treats this ‘Yes!’ as an empty gesture to be politely rejected, and thus brutally confronts her own underlying phantasmatic investment in it.³⁵

In other words, by treating Dern’s ‘Yes!’ as an empty gesture, rejecting it politely, Bobby Peru manages to humiliate Dern by exposing her own supplemental, obscene fantasy to the order of the big Other.

This scene from *Wild at Heart*, I argue, should be read as the exact obverse of the three-and-a-half second shot of the guard tower from *Casablanca*. The scene from *Casablanca* functions as a fetish that stands-in to supplement the Real of desire – the fantasy that supports the ideological framework of the film; while the scene from *Wild at Heart* is presented as a ‘return of the Real’, an obscene fantasy brought to the surface. This is what makes it so traumatic for the spectator; it forces an encounter with the ugliness of the Real. It is this ugliness that needs to be domesticated, brought back within the realm of the Symbolic order. It presents, in a way, the fantasy-object that sticks out, that has no place in the Symbolic order. Here, as well, I claim, we have a possible definition of the difference between modern and postmodern cinema: in modern cinema, the Master-Signifier still functions as the content *added* to the order of the big Other, as the avowed supplement, expressing the form of the prohibition; whereas, in postmodern cinema, there is a certain foreclosure of the Master-Signifier. Everything can be expressed, we can see ‘it’ all – obscenities, violence, etc. What is foreclosed, however, is the agency of the Master-Signifier in the form itself.

This is, perhaps, why Žižek refers to Lynch’s films as ‘the art of the ridiculous sublime’. By ‘showing it all’, Lynch’s films bring to the surface the obscene

supplemental underside of fantasy – the ‘sublime object’; however, the question I want to ask is, are these instances of the sublime resurfacing meant to be taken seriously? It is, I argue, in the ‘ridiculous’ presentation of the ‘sublime object’ in Lynch’s films that we find the agency of the Master-Signifier. It is the form itself, not the content that is not meant to be taken seriously. In this way, Lynch’s films are close to pornography. Pornography is, perhaps, *the* example of uncensored content. In pornography, we can ‘see it all’. Žižek argues, however, that there is still an element of censorship in the very form of pornography. Although it shows real sex, “the narrative which provided the frame for repeated sexual encounters [is] as a rule ridiculously non-realistic, stereotypical, stupidly comical.”³⁶ Thus, he argues that, “this strange compulsion to make the narrative ridiculous [is] a kind of negative gesture of respect: [in pornography] yes, we do show everything, but precisely for that reason we want to make it clear that it’s all a joke.”³⁷ And the same goes for Lynch’s films. As Žižek puts it, “Lynch’s universe is effectively the universe of the ‘ridiculous sublime’: the most ridiculously pathetic scenes... are to be taken seriously,” – that is, as instances worthy of interpretation; it is the form, however, which is not to be taken seriously.³⁸ But this is precisely the point of Žižek’s critique of ideology. In order to truly critique the force of ideology it is necessary to examine its disavowed form – at the level of content, there is no censorship; however, the trick is to locate a particular element in the content that signals the ‘hook’ onto the form.

UNIVERSALITY AND ITS EXCEPTION(S)

In the preceding sections, I have focused on the relationship between ideology at the level of form. However, in what proceeds, I want to further develop elements of Žižek's interpretation of film content. Two methods are employed in Žižek's textual interpretations of cinema. On the one hand, Žižek refers to the Oedipal 'master code' in order to interpret the relationship between power and desire in film texts. More specifically, he refers to the link between the Master-Signifier and the *objet petit a*, passing through the subject. His 'master code', in other words, is his continued reference to the Lacanian Real. On the other hand, he employs a dialectical method that seeks to locate exceptions within series of films that speak to a universal quality of film form – that is, the way in which the form structures the content.

According to Žižek the only way to understand the universality of form is through its constitutive exception. The exception speaks to the universality of the form. Žižek's procedure is thus to locate exceptions – formal exceptions, the work of exceptional *auteurs*, even exemplary exceptions (films, scenes) within the entire oeuvres of particular *auteurs* – in order to understand some universal quality in the ('normal') form of films, as well as the form of ideology.

If there is a single truth to Žižek's constant references to examples, film examples in particular, it is that they cannot be read on their own. Everything has to be read relationally – that is, dialectically. This is similar to the way in which Marx reads the relation between 'use value', 'exchange value' and 'value', in *Das Kapital*. In order to understand the 'labour theory of value', Marx has to demonstrate that the value in a commodity embodies the labour of the producer – how does he do this? First by

distinguishing the two values embodied in the commodity: use value and exchange value. How, though, should we understand the values of use and exchange? Use value is simple: it embodies the usefulness of a commodity. Exchange value is more difficult: Marx shows that it embodies both a use value and value – that is, the value of the labour embodied in it. But how can we measure the value of labour? Marx's answer is that we have to understand the value of labour through exchange – concrete labour is measured in units of abstract labour time, which are given an exchange value (i.e., wages). So we end up with a conception of use value in a commodity, measured in terms of exchange value and value; we then understand exchange value measured in terms of use value and value; and, finally, we understand value (the labour embodied in the commodity) measured in terms of use value and exchange value. In other words, the only way to understand the value of a commodity is to measure the labour embodied in it in terms of use and exchange. We therefore get the 'labour theory of value' only when we interpret it in relation to the other forms of value. The meaning of the one is measured in its *relation* to the others. And this is precisely how Žižek examines the ideology embodied in the form of cinema, which is best demonstrated in his study of Kieslowski in *The Fright of Real Tears*.

The lucidity with which Žižek shifts from example to example, and from film to film, is often criticized as a mere 'free association' of examples. As Bordwell puts it, *The Fright of Real Tears* is nothing more than "a fairly conventional book of free-associative film interpretation."³⁹ One reviewer comments that, while the explicit focus of the book is the work of Kieslowski, "Žižek continually cycles back to American films and narratives as anchor points for his argument... The deeper into *The Fright of Real Tears*

one delves, the more frantic, free-associative, and collage-like Žižek's style of argumentation becomes."⁴⁰ It is clear from these remarks that neither commentator has fully understood the methodology that Žižek employs in this work of Theory.

Žižek practices a very precise dialectical method that examines films in relation to each other. The 'art' of dialectical analysis consists in locating the 'exceptional example', the singular case that speaks to the (false) universality of the form itself. For example, Žižek argues that Hitchcock is in a position of exception when it comes to the standard Hollywood narrative. His style poses an exception to the standard Hollywood cinema, which is why his work is engaged with such enthusiasm by critics. As well, the exception in Hitchcock's own oeuvre, according to Žižek, is *The Trouble with Harry* (1955). It is an exception that "coincides with the founding gesture of a universality" (*FRT*: 27).

In terms of Kieslowski's films, the particular topic of *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek points to one of his earliest films, *Blind Chance*, as the singular exception which sustains Kieslowski's entire oeuvre. However, it is only by comparing the form of *Blind Chance* to other (non-Kieslowski) films, particularly Tom Tykwer's *Run, Lola, Run* (1998) and Peter Howitt's *Sliding Doors* (1998), that its own relative position, as the 'key' to Kieslowski, is developed.

For Žižek, Kieslowski's films are defined by a certain kind of 'open-endedness'. In Lacanian terms, they are set by an inability to 'quilt' a final version – a final narrative. All of Kieslowski's films, according to Žižek, are different versions of the same basic form: the inability to define closure. Kieslowski's films, according to Žižek, deal with the theme of 'alternative histories'; however, none more so than *Blind Chance* (1987).

As a film that deals specifically with the theme of ‘alternative histories’, *Blind Chance* sets the stage for Kieslowski’s entire oeuvre.

ETHICAL CHOICES AND THEIR ALTERNATIVES

The ‘key’ to Kieslowski’s films, according to Žižek, is the theme of open-ended repetitions of the same basic narrative (of alternative histories), which repeat without any determinate closure. All of his films are therefore various different Symbolic articulations of the same basic Real. Every deadlock in the preceding version results in its re-articulation in the next. All of Kieslowski’s films, in other words, are remakes of the same basic story, but from a new vantage point.

For Žižek, a common theme in Kieslowski’s films is that of ‘alternative histories’, or alternative narrative lines, represented by *Blind Chance* as Žižek’s ‘master code’ for interpreting Kieslowski’s work. According to him, this theme is another case of an artistic content pushing the boundaries of form, as if the content, the narrative itself, has to be invented in order to practice the form. Kieslowski’s films, according to Žižek, present a ‘new life experience’, one that “explodes the form of linear, centred narrative and renders life as a multiform flow” (*FRT*: 78). His films present various parallel, overlapping, alternative narrative lines, disrupting the linear flow of narrative cinema. Žižek argues that the way to understand this procedure in Kieslowski’s films is by interpreting them through the theme of ‘ethical choice’, particularly the choice between ‘calm life’ and ‘mission’. This choice is presented in the relation between each new version and its previous incarnation: each new version is prompted by a deadlock in the previous one, regarding the failure to make a proper ethical choice.

Žižek distinguishes three versions of alternative histories in Kieslowski's films: "direct presentation of three possible outcomes in *Blind Chance*, the presentation of two outcomes through the theme of double in [*The Double Life of Veronique* [(1991)], and the presentation of two outcomes through the 'flashback in the present' in *Red* [(1994)]" (*FRT*: 79). But these variations take on different forms in Kieslowski's many films. *Veronique* is another key (or 'master code'); it is *the* film which stages the choice between vocation (leading to death) and quiet satisfied life (the result of compromising one's vocation) (*FRT*: 137). The key distinction is played out by the two 'Veroniques'. Veronique, herself, is melancholic and reflective, while Weronika is directly enthusiastic for the cause. This theme of 'ethical choice' is also played out in the TV series, *Decalogue* (1989). Each of the ten segments of *Decalogue* stages one of the ten commandments, but in a disjointed way, so that, according to Žižek, each episode in the series stages a commandment in the order that precedes it, i.e., *Decalogue 1* stages the second commandment, etc., whereas *Decalogue 10* stages the first commandment. Each instalment, however, is about the transgression of a commandment, leading to a deadlock which thrusts the narrative into the next film and the next commandment, each failing in making an 'ethical choice'.

Rather than giving some indication of liberation, alternative histories, Žižek argues, are in fact quite enveloping: "the fact that there is only one reality leaves the space open for other possibilities, i.e., for a choice... If, however, these different possibilities are realised, we get a claustrophobic universe in which there is no freedom of choice precisely because *all* choices have already been realised" (*FRT*: 79). Having all possibilities realised eliminates the openness of choice; everything is given

determinate closure. This closure is, perhaps, what is expressed by Witek's cry – his desperate shout – at the beginning of *Blind Chance*.

This cry signals at the beginning the determinate suture, closing upon the deadlocks experienced in the two other alternatives presented in the film. Žižek argues that the entire film presents 'flashbacks' of alternative histories of a person who, aware of his imminent death, reflects upon alternatives that could have been. He reflects upon his three possible lives (*FRT*: 80). Žižek interprets these three different versions as intertwined to the extent that each passes into the next as the result of a deadlock in the previous scenario: "the deadlock of the socialist apparatchik's career pushes him into dissidence, and non-satisfaction with dissidence into a private profession" (*FRT*: 80). It is only the final version which is 'real': the one which ultimately ends back at the beginning, with Witek's cry as he realizes that he is about to die in the plane explosion. The deadlock of the other two realities, the two realities where he does not die in the end, still throw him into the 'real' reality: the one where he must die. The final version, the 'real' one, gives finitude to the deadlock of 'choice', and in this way, transforms the various contingent possible realities into a single necessary reality (the final version retroactively authorizes the *necessity* of the Master-Signifier as the only possible solution).

The psychoanalytic point that Žižek makes apropos this relationship between the possible, contingent alternatives and the necessary determinate *one* reality, is the relationship between the sublime, spectral, fantasy object and the Master-Signifier. The possible alternatives resonate below the surface – the fantasy of that which could have been, haunting us in the present – and the necessity of the choice made which gives

closure to the ‘real’, effective, Symbolic reality. It is the elevation of *one* of the contingent possibilities (one element of content, S_2) into the only – necessary – existing choice, retroactively suturing (S_1) the entire field of the form of ‘reality’. However, these possible alternatives still haunt us below the surface (*a*) and are disavowed by the effective ‘real’ reality. These overlapping fantasies of possible alternatives are, in other words, the *fantasmatic* support for the effective Symbolic reality. The ‘truth’ of this effective reality, the truth of the appearance of reality, is found in the exception of these possible alternatives.

Žižek, finally, contrasts *Blind Chance* with *Blue* (1993). *Blue* is, according to Žižek, “the obverse of the psychoanalytic treatment: not as the traversing of fantasy, but as the gradual reconstitution of the fantasy that allows us access to reality” (*FRT*: 176). After the accident, Julie is deprived of fantasy, she is deprived of the ‘protective shield’ of fantasy and is, thus, confronted with the Real in all its traumatic disgusting pulsating nothingness – its non-purpose; its non-meaning. The film concludes once Julie is able to reconstitute the fantasy that protects her from the Void of the Real. *Blue* is, thus, “not a film about the slow process of regaining reality, to immerse oneself in social life, but rather a film about building a protective screen between the subject and the raw Real” (*FRT*: 176). The difference between *Blind Chance* and *Blue* is, thus, one of ethical choice between ‘calm life’ in *Blue* and ‘mission’ in *Blind Chance*... And, as Žižek might put it, is this ethical choice between ‘calm life’ and ‘mission’ not also the choice between the ‘calm life’ of post-Theory and the (political) ‘mission’ of Theory – in Alain Badiou’s terms, between Being and Event; or in Freudian terms, between the ‘pleasure principle’

and the (death) drive, ‘beyond the pleasure principle’: either fidelity to the Symbolic fiction, or fidelity to the Real (*FRT*: 148-149)?

The theme of alternative histories – alternative narrative lines – thus exposes another aspect of the supplemental underside of fantasy. All of the various unrealized possibilities frame the perspective of the fully realized, retroactively necessary, Symbolic ‘reality’ – the outcome. So long as they remain unrealized, these possible alternatives inform our perspectives upon the realized Symbolic reality. Kieslowski’s films are, thus, I claim, ‘obscene’ in a way that is similar, yet distinct, from Lynch’s films. His films allow the obscene supplemental underside of fantasy to surface; however, again, it is the form of this resurfacing, and their final submergence – particularly in the case of *Blue* – that they remain domesticated. Lynch and Kieslowski, I argue, thus represent a particularly postmodern method of dealing with content that pushes the boundaries of ideological form.

GAZE, VOICE, AND THE FORECLOSURE OF THE MASTER-SIGNIFIER – EXAMPLES OF A ‘PSYCHOTIC’ CINEMA

Another way of practicing dialectical analysis is by locating examples of formal failure. Žižek locates three such examples by interpreting them through the framework of the Oedipal ‘master code’. The Master-Signifier and the *objet petit a*, as well as being correlative to the subject’s Ego-ideal and ideal ego, respectively, also represent particular orders in the psychoanalytic paradox of desire and authority, the most famous elaboration of which is the Oedipus myth. The basic problem that occupies the various psychoanalytic interpretations is the question: *why is it necessary to prohibit that which*

*is impossible? If something is ontologically impossible (enjoyment, in the psychoanalytic sense), why is the prohibition necessary? Or, in Žižek's terms, how can we account for the fact that the absence of Law universalizes prohibition?*⁴¹ It is the relationship between Law/prohibition and desire that, according to Žižek, orders and imposes a certain relationship to *jouissance*, or enjoyment. This takes on various modalities, the most common of which are described in terms of psychosis, perversion and neurosis. Each represents a particular form of the relationship between the subject/desire and authority.

Desire, in itself, is impossible – or, to put things differently, (structural) impossibility (the gap in the Symbolic) is the very condition of desire.⁴² In Lacanian theory, desire is self-reflexive; it is the desire of the Other. According to Žižek, drive is the original fact, not desire. Drive represents that which, for Hegel, is constituted by 'abstract negativity', or the 'night of the world', the pure 'nothingness' of being; or, in other words, the 'pre-ontological' status of the subject.⁴³ Drive is the obverse of desire,⁴⁴ it is formless matter, which is transubstantiated into desire by way of fantasy. An encounter with this pure 'nothingness' of formless (meaningless) matter, according to Žižek, is what constitutes 'trauma' – trauma represents the subject's encounter with her own non-being, or the impossibility of 'Self'. As Žižek puts it, "the entire psychoanalytic experience focuses on traces of the traumatic passage from this 'night of the world' into our 'daily' universe of *logos*."⁴⁵ Desire is, thus, the transmutation of drive by way of the 'screen' of fantasy. It is the transformation of the impossibility into possibility by telling "the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire."⁴⁶ However, in order to disavow

the impossibility of desire, the subject must find some kind of explanation for this loss. This is how the subject gets attached to authority (Law/prohibition). *If desire is prohibited then it is inaccessible, not because of its impossibility, but because of the Law.* Attachment to the Law, thus, allows desire to be perceivably possible. The subject thus engages in a kind of (primordial) masochistic submission to authority in order to evade the impossibility of desire, while still trying to transcend prohibition – what Žižek refers to as the ‘inherent transgression’. This is why Žižek claims that perversion is a “socially constructive attitude.”⁴⁷ The ‘normal’ relationship to authority (in a post-authoritarian/post-ideological world) is perverse.

Psychosis and hysteria represent two other manifestations of the relationship between desire and authority. The psychotic perceives it possible to attain the object of desire by eliminating (‘foreclosing’ upon) the prohibitory Law, not realizing that the Law is the condition of possibility for desire. Psychosis is thus the result of trying to maintain the possibility of desire without attaching oneself to authority. In a sense, this is how, following Fredric Jameson, we can characterize the contemporary, postmodern, relationship to authority. Jameson⁴⁸ refers to the Lacanian conception of psychosis as an aesthetic model for understanding postmodernism. Psychosis for Lacan (in terms used by Deleuze and Guattari),⁴⁹ is constituted as a ‘breakdown of the signifying chain’. Psychosis, in other words, is the form of consciousness that forecloses upon the Master-Signifier, so that the field of ordinary signifiers are no longer ‘sutured’ within a field of meaningful *totality* (something of which cultural studies and post-Theory approaches both hold with disdain); thus, we are (seemingly) left with free-floating content without form – with signifiers that have no point of reference with which to differentiate

themselves (this is also another reason why class struggle remains invisible in non-dialectical analysis). As Žižek puts it, “The basic feature of our ‘postmodern’ world is that it tries to dispense with the agency of the Master-Signifier,” and, as Žižek has been arguing for the past twenty years, “The suspension of the Master-Signifier leaves as the only agency of ideological interpellation the ‘unnameable’ abyss of *jouissance*: the ultimate injunction that regulates our lives in ‘postmodernity’ is ‘Enjoy!’”⁵⁰ In other words, with the ‘end of authority’, ‘end of history’, ‘end of ideology’, the subject of postmodern liberal-capitalism is supposedly free to enjoy; however, since desire is impossible, the foreclosure of prohibition actually brings about feelings of *anxiety* – the result of an encounter with the (impossible) Real. The objective of a postmodern critique of ideology is, thus, to indicate where the Master-Signifier *does* actually operate to suture the field of meaning.

Without the quilting of the Master-Signifier, desire is interpellated, not by the Symbolic order, but by what Lacan refers to as the ‘gaze’ and ‘voice’. As Žižek puts it, “in psychosis, we effectively hear the voice of the primordial Other addressing us, we effectively know that we are being observed all the time.” In psychosis, what is missing is the Master-Signifier, which “returns in the real in the guise of psychotic apparitions.”⁵¹ Under ‘normal’ circumstances, and in order to maintain some kind of consistency of Symbolic ‘reality’, the *objet petit a* must remain *excluded* from ‘reality’. In psychosis, *objet petit a*, the piece of the Real, invades the Symbolic space of ‘reality’. This is where film theorists have tended to misconstrue the Lacanian notion of the ‘gaze’.

In one of his earliest essays on Lacan and film theory, “The Undergrowth of Enjoyment,”⁵² Žižek notes that the renewal of Lacanian film theory first developed in the

1980s as a re-interpretation of the notions of ‘gaze’ and ‘voice’, particularly in the works of Pascal Bonitzer and Michel Chion.⁵³ I would argue that Lacan has two theories of the ‘gaze’, the first developed in the ‘mirror stage’ essay, and the second developed in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. In “Undergrowth”, Žižek advances the relevance of the latter over the former. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan posits the ‘gaze’ as the *objet petit a* in the scopic drive, and as the ‘voice’ in the invocatory drive. As Žižek explains, ‘gaze’ “marks the point in the object (the picture) from which the viewing subject is *already gazed at*: it is the object which is gazing at me.” The ‘gaze’, in other words, is of the object, not the subject. It “functions as a spot or stain in/on the picture, disturbing its transparent visibility and introducing an irreducible split in my relation to it.” ‘Voice’, in contrast, is attached to no object. It addresses the subject “without being attached to any particular bearer, floating freely in some horrifying interspace.”⁵⁴ Unlike the ‘gaze’, which is presented as a ‘blind spot’ in the visible – a stain which marks the Void of subjectivity – the ultimate surfacing of ‘voice’ is silence;⁵⁵ not in the sense of no sound, but rather as a ‘spectral voice’, beyond comprehension, which is impossible to locate in a body.

In his “Undergrowth” article, Žižek highlights three examples of films in which the agency of the Master-Signifier is foreclosed, thus rendering the *objet petit a* in the texture of each respective film. These are Robert Montgomery’s *Lady in the Lake* (1947), Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948), and Russell Rouse’s *The Thief* (1952). *Lady in the Lake* is well known for being shot (almost) entirely from the point of view of the protagonist, the detective, Marlowe. Here we have a case of a foreclosure of an ‘objective shot’. *Rope* presents a foreclosure of a different kind: a foreclosure of

montage. The film appears to be shot as one single long take. There are a few instances where the film is cut, however, through some formal trickery (for example, by closing in on the backs of characters who pass in front of the camera) the film appears seamless, without montage. *The Thief* is a sound film, however, it avoids the use of spoken dialogue to convey the main character's sense of isolation and deprivation. In all three cases, a certain kind of foreclosure of the signifier (either as an objective shot, a cut, or dialogue) renders the Real, the *objet petit a*, in the texture of the film. The result is rendering of the psychotic breakdown of the signifying chain. This is not to say that these kinds of prohibition of the signifier interpellate the spectator as a psychotic; rather, it helps to explain the uneasiness with which these films are received by the spectator – they construct a representation that is difficult to watch because they prohibit the quilting element of the signifier. In other words, they all subvert, in some way, traditional montage and sound film, constructing a somewhat unpleasant experience for the spectator. While it is not explicit in Žižek's text, I would argue that the reference to these films, examples of formal failure, all speak to the universality of film form. They are failures, in other words, or exceptions, because they subvert the standard, or universal style of montage.

These formal examples of film also help to demonstrate the way in which Žižek refers to films, not only to articulate a clear reading of Lacan through examples, but to exemplify the way in which Žižek compares *the form of cinema* to *the form of ideology* through a psychoanalytic interpretation, as well. That is, by using psychoanalytic terminology, Žižek tells us something about the analogous forms of film and ideology. In his psychoanalytic interpretation of cinema, Žižek presents a unique conceptualization of

the form of ideology, which is best understood in its likeness to film form. However, Žižek also develops textual interpretations of films, particularly the films of Alfred Hitchcock, based upon the paradox of desire and authority, and its manifestations in the forms of hysteria, perversion and psychosis. Again, through these different interpretations of hysteria, perversion and psychosis in cinema, Žižek, I claim, is trying to tell us something, not simply about film form, but about *the form of ideology and the subject's relation to authority*.

HYSTERIA, PERVERSION AND PSYCHOSIS IN THE CINEMA⁵⁶

The examples of 'psychotic' cinema are ones of formal failure. They are failures in the sense that – by opting to foreclose upon certain formal features of traditional narrative cinema, they render certain elements in the texture of the film that diminishes the pleasure of the text. However, there are particular ways in which the 'drama' of desire and authority can be rendered in the text of the film, which manifest as versions of hysteria, perversion and psychosis. Here, my interest is in the way in which the plot is *resolved* by either a hysterical, perverse, or psychotic relationship between the elements of desire and authority in the narrative. Such resolutions indicate something of the way particular impasses, or deadlocks, in the relationship between desire and authority are reified into ideological texts.

Žižek claims that if we try to examine Hitchcock's entire oeuvre together, we end up with a random assortment; however, if we separate them into series of threes, they begin to formulate around certain themes. Žižek takes the following five films as constitutive of the 'Hitchcockian Universe': *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958),

North By Northwest (1959), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). He then separates them into triads. The first triad concerns ‘false identity’: *The Wrong Man*, *Vertigo*, and *North By Northwest*. The second triad concerns filling in the gap of the ‘empty place’: *Vertigo*, *North By Northwest*, and *Psycho*. The final triad concerns the motif of the ‘maternal superego’: *North By Northwest*, *Psycho*, and *The Birds*. All three triads deal, in one way or another, with the relationship between desire and authority, manifested either as an hysterical relationship, as a perverse relationship, or as a psychotic relationship.

The theme of mistaken/false identity approaches the relationship of hysteria. Hysteria is best understood as ‘failed interpellation’.⁵⁷ In hysteria, the subject refuses the symbolic mandate conferred upon her in the ‘Symbolic universe’. She begins to question the symbolic authority of the Master-Signifier. In a sense, hysteria is the reverse of psychosis: in psychosis, the subject is too attached to desire, whereas in hysteria, the subject begins to lose the attachment to desire, the underside of surplus-enjoyment, which sustains her attachment to the Master-Signifier. The hysteric thus bombards authority with the question: ‘*Che vuoi?*’ – ‘Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying that I am?’⁵⁸ This is how Žižek approaches the first triad. In *The Wrong Man*, the protagonist, a poor musician, is accused of two robberies he did not commit; in *Vertigo*, Judy protests the way in which Scottie tries to ‘dress her up’ as Madeleine; and, in *North By Northwest*, Thornhill is mistaken for the (non-existent) Kaplan. In each case, one of the characters in the film is conferred with a particular symbolic mandate, which s/he refuses.

The second triad, tied together by the theme of filling in the gap of the ‘empty place’ concerns a perverse relationship between desire and authority – that is, of

assuming the symbolic mandate conferred upon the subject by the big Other. The pervert, works fully towards satisfying the desire of the Other – that is, in working towards the Other’s enjoyment.⁵⁹ In *Vertigo*, Judy does assume the symbolic mandate conferred upon her, assuming the role of Madeleine, both initially, when Scottie first encounters the woman he believes to be Madeleine (but who was, in fact, Judy, playing the role of Madeleine), and at the film’s conclusion, when she suffers the same fate as the (real) Madeleine. In *North By Northwest*, Thornhill assumes the mandate – fills in the gap – of the empty signifier, ‘Kaplan’. He becomes Kaplan, and a CIA operative. He becomes, in the end, what he protests at the film’s outset. In *Psycho*, finally, Norman Bates assumes the role of his mother, wearing her clothes, speaking in her voice. Significantly, it is the signifier of the wig which confers upon Norman this mandate, which he assumes. In each case, assuming the symbolic mandate masks the gap in the Symbolic itself, and brings the narrative to a rational (reifying) conclusion.

The final triad revolves around the motif of the ‘maternal superego’. This has the structure of psychosis – the subject being interpellated, not by the Master-Signifier, but directly by desire (again, this is how we can understand Žižek’s argument, following Jameson, that the postmodern era is characterized by a foreclosure of the Master-Signifier and the direct interpellation of the superego: Enjoy!). Žižek notes that in each of the films in this triad, the heroes are fatherless, and each has an overbearing mother who is ‘strong’ and ‘possessive’. We meet Thornhill’s mother at the beginning of *North By Northwest*. She is presented as scornful and mocking of Thornhill, chastising him for his inability to enjoy (or, rather, for what she perceives as his ‘foolishness’, which, if only he would give it up he could ‘enjoy’). In *Psycho*, Norman appears to be acting in direct

accord with the interpellation of his (dead) mother. And, in *The Birds*, Mitch's mother is particularly involved in his romantic 'relationship' with Melanie.

In each of these triads, we encounter, in some way, the paradoxical relationship between desire and authority, manifested in various different forms of hysterical, perverse, and psychotic relationships. The point, here, however, is not to suggest that the films themselves play out instances of theoretical doctrine, something that Carroll suggests is practiced by practitioners of 'the Theory';⁶⁰ nor is it to suggest that films are useful towards an exegetic reading of psychoanalysis. Here, Žižek's primary concern is ideology, and in developing a mode of interpretation that addresses the dynamic between the subject and authority, and the different ways in which this relationship is manifested, rationalized (i.e., reified) into a believable text. In other words, the question for the criticism of ideology is, which ideas – ideas that resolve contradictions between relationships of desire and authority – are believable enough to produce a degree of enjoyment – or pleasure – for the spectator? My argument is that, what Žižek develops in his interpretations of the films is not simply a psychoanalytic reading of films; it is, rather, a psychoanalytic interpretation of ideology that focuses on film form – narrative films that resolve contradictions in particular ways – as material examples of ideology. In the following section, I consider a few recent examples of Žižek's film interpretation that speak to this kind of psychoanalytic reading of ideology through cinema. In the following examples, Žižek reads the elements of the Oedipal narrative in the texts of films. For him, the added Oedipal element that structures the form of the text works towards a displacement of the Real of the political content. These examples are worth examining, I claim, because they also reveal something about the form of ideology.

THE 'FAMILY MYTH' IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

The second chapter of *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008) focuses specifically on the Oedipalization of the content of films *as* ideology. As Žižek puts it, “in a typical Hollywood product, everything, from the fate of the knights of the Round Table through the October Revolution up to asteroids hitting the Earth, is transposed into an Oedipal narrative.”⁶¹ According to Žižek, the films of Steven Spielberg, for example, all incorporate the motif of the impasse of paternal authority and its restoration. One should remember, he notes, that “the small boy to whom E.T. appears was abandoned by his father... so that E.T. is ultimately a kind of ‘vanishing mediator’ who provides a new father (the good scientist who, in the film’s last shot, is already seen embracing the mother) – when the new father arrives, E.T. can leave and ‘go home’” (IDLC: 56)

Jurassic Park (1993), according to Žižek, similarly, incorporates the motif of paternal authority. As Žižek describes it,

In the very first scene of *Jurassic Park*, we see the paternal figure (played by Sam Neill) jokingly threatening the two kids with a dinosaur bone – this bone is clearly the tiny object-stain [*objet petit a*] which, later, explodes into gigantic dinosaurs, so that one can risk the hypothesis that, within the film’s fantasmatic universe, the dinosaurs’ destructive fury merely materializes the rage of the paternal superego. A barely perceptible detail that occurs later, in the middle of the film, confirms this reading. Neill and the two children, pursued by the monsters, take refuge from the murderous carnivorous dinosaurs in a gigantic tree, where, dead

tired, they fall asleep; on the tree, Neill loses the dinosaur bone that was stuck in his belt, and it is as if this accidental loss has a magical effect – before they fall asleep, Neill is reconciled with the children, displaying warm affection and tenderness toward them. Significantly, the dinosaurs which approach the tree the next morning and awaken the sleeping party, turn out to be of the benevolent herbivorous kind... (IDLC: 56)

For Žižek, the entire plot of the film involves the resolution of the impasse of paternal authority, which is reconstituted through the relationship between the two children and Sam Neill. However, at a more controversial level, Žižek claims that *Schindler's List* (1994) is a remake of the same basic plot. He suggests that *Schindler's List* is a remake of *Jurassic Park*, with the Nazis representing the dinosaurs, the Jews as the threatened children, and Schindler as the paternal figure, whose authority is reconstituted once he passes from being “a cynical, profiteering and opportunistic paternal figure” to “his transformation into a caring and responsible father” (IDLC: 56-57). Despite the similarities, I would argue, in contrast to Žižek, that the latter is not really a remake of *Jurassic Park*, but simply another ‘remake’ of the Oedipal narrative.

War of the Worlds (2005), again reaffirms this reading of the Oedipal narrative in Spielberg's films. In the same way that Žižek notes the importance of the horror element in *The Pervert's Guide*, he suggests that *War of the Worlds* can be imagined without the added element of the alien invaders, “so that what remains is in a way ‘what it is really about’, the story of a divorced working-class father who strives to regain the respect of his two children” (IDLC: 57). More interestingly, though, for my purposes, is the way in

which Žižek interprets James Cameron's films, *Titanic* (1997) and the recent blockbuster, *Avatar* (2009).

According to Žižek, the Oedipal element in *Titanic*, the love story between the two protagonists, is added in order to evade the traumatic element of the class struggle in the film. It is important, he claims, to take notice of the precise moment when the disaster occurs in *Titanic*. It occurs immediately following the lovers' consummation. As well, Kate Winslet, as Žižek puts it, "passionately tells her lover [Leonardo Di Caprio] that, when the ship reaches New York the next morning, she will leave with him, preferring a life of poverty with her true love to a false and corrupted existence among the rich" (IDLC: 57). It is at this moment, Žižek notes, that the disaster occurs. According to Žižek, the disaster is essential for preventing the true disaster of the class struggle between the two lovers.

"One can safely guess," Žižek argues, "that the misery of everyday life would soon have destroyed their love" (IDLC: 58). For him, the accident occurs in order to save their love and the illusion-fantasy that if not for the disaster, they would have had a happy life together. Žižek claims that the same kind of operation functions in *Avatar*.

In a recent critique of *Avatar*,⁶² Žižek comments that a full understanding of the film requires thinking through the way it conceptualizes the distinction between 'reality' and fantasy. Here, he argues, that *Avatar* should be compared to a film like *The Matrix*. In both films, the hero is caught between two 'worlds': the 'real' world and the 'fantasy' world. Each film, in a way, forces the hero to choose between reality and fantasy. The problem with *Avatar* is that it treats both the real world and the fantasy world as two different versions of the 'real world', so that the choice is not between reality and fantasy,

but between two (compromised) versions of reality. In choosing the second alternative, the fantasy-reality of the alien world, the hero, effectively, does not traverse the fantasy; he merely reconstitutes the symbolic co-ordinates of his already existing supplemental, spectral fantasy, in the psychoanalytic sense. The problem, here, according to Žižek, is that nothing really changes for the hero, who simply maintains a perverse relationship to his spectral fantasy, thus positioning himself within the symbolic coordinates that will allow him to maintain this particular subjective position, and the ‘pleasure’ (as opposed to enjoyment) derived from it. Here, I claim, we see something in the range of what Fredric Jameson refers to as the ‘utopian dimension’ of the film: the “celebration of the renewal of the social order and its salvation, not merely from divine wrath, but also from unworthy leadership.”⁶³

The film, according to Žižek, should also be read as an Oedipal narrative. Like the other typical Hollywood films referred to above, the entire plot works towards resolving the difficulty for the two love interests to form a romantic couple. This is ideology at its purest: the Oedipalization of commentary on social-historical-political problems, which Žižek compares to films like *Titanic* and Warren Beatty’s *Reds* (1981), both of which Oedipalize the class struggle.

What would we get, Žižek asks, in the story without the Oedipal narrative between the two protagonists? For one thing, the blue aliens in the film would not be ‘humanized’ in the same way, and the sympathies of the audience would not lie with them. The Na’vi, I claim, would be treated much in the same way as the alien monster from one of Cameron’s other blockbusters, *Aliens* (1986), or perhaps, even, the cyborg monster from *The Terminator* (1984). The monsters in these films are the obverse of the

Na'vi from *Avatar*, they are the front and back of the same X, as Žižek might put it, and it is, I would argue, the fantasy frame that supports the way in which we (the audience) relate to them in symbolic reality. For Žižek, then, the 'true avatar' of the film is the film itself, "substituting for reality".⁶⁴

Žižek's interpretations of Cameron's films, as well as those of Spielberg, I argue, are exemplary of the way in which his references to films speak to the form of ideology. Like Fredric Jameson, who reads narrative allegorically – with history as his 'master code' – Žižek interprets narrative against the analytical framework of psychoanalysis. His purpose, however, is not simply to understand something specific about cinema; it is, rather, to understand something about ideology. As I have been arguing in this chapter, Žižek's method of psychoanalytic critique – particularly his references to Lacanian concepts, such as the Master-Signifier and the *objet petit a* – adds to a film theory of ideology. Film interpretation teaches us about the way in which ideology is constituted at both the level of Symbolic 'reality' and the supplement level of fantasy. The subject, in ideology, exists in between these two levels.

In this chapter, I have argued that Žižek refers to elements of content *in* films in order to speak to the general form of films themselves, in their form as Symbolic fiction, thus also presenting us with an analysis of the form of ideology. It is only by taking this form seriously, I claim, that we can begin to understand the way in which ideology functions, today, in our post-ideological era. There is an ontological difference, though, between film texts and the texture of Symbolic 'reality'. The former is more often regarded as mere fiction, while the latter is taken seriously. However, I claim that it is in our distancing towards the fiction that we find the kernel of belief in our own,

everyday, Symbolic ‘reality’. This, then, is the place where I will begin to consider the formal relationship between ideology and subjectivity – or, in film, between cinema and spectatorship – in the following chapter.

NOTES:

¹ It will become evident in most of what follows that *The Matrix* serves as an essential reference point for Žižek’s discussions on films, particularly in the relationship between the cinema and the spectator.

² Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. Routledge Classics Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p. 262; for Žižek’s political interpretation of *The Matrix*, see *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT, 2006), pp. 312-317.

³ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 303.

⁴ Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 2001), pp. 5-6.

⁵ Ibid, p. 130

⁶ Žižek, “Afterword: With Defenders Like These, Who Needs Attackers?” In *The Truth of Žižek*, Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, eds. (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 199.

⁷ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke, 1993), p. 72.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, p. 73

¹⁰ Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* 2nd Ed.

(London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. xii; see also, Žižek, *On Belief* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 81-82.

¹¹ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 37.

¹² Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 49.

¹³ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ See Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, pp. 12-18

¹⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Michael Eldred, trans. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁸ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 2.

¹⁹ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 41

²⁰ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 43.

²¹ Ibid, p. 44

²² See André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and “The Myth of Total Cinema.” In *What is Cinema Volume 1*. Hugh Gray, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Bazin, “An Aesthetic of Realism: Neorealism (Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation).” In *What is Cinema Volume 2*. Hugh Gray, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and, Stanley Cavell, *The*

World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), especially chapters two through five.

²³ Richard Maltby, “‘A Brief Romantic Interlude’: Dick and Jane go to 3 ½ Seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema.” In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), p. 434.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 436

²⁵ Ibid, p. 438

²⁶ Žižek. *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), p 6.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 5

²⁸ See Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 18-27.

²⁹ See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 123

³⁰ Ibid, p. 75

³¹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 57.

³² Ibid, p. 60

³³ Žižek, “Afterword: Lenin’s Choice.” In *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings of Lenin From 1917*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 169.

³⁴ Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 101.

³⁵ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 185

³⁶ Žižek, *Fright*, 76.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime*, 22

³⁹ Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything." *David Bordwell's website on cinema*.

Available at <http://www.davidbordwell.com/essays/Žižek.php>.

⁴⁰ Greg Oguss, review of *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory*. *Film Quarterly* 56(4): 52-53, 2003. P. 52

⁴¹ Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 9

⁴² Žižek, *On Belief*, p. 83

⁴³ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, pp. 28-34

⁴⁴ As Žižek puts it, the "Freudian drive designates precisely the paradox of 'wanting unhappiness,' of finding excessive pleasure in suffering itself." *On Belief*, p. 63

⁴⁵ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 35

⁴⁶ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 32

⁴⁷ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 247

⁴⁸ See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* I 146: 53-92, 1984.

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

⁵⁰ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, p. 30

⁵¹ Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes'; or, The Invisible Master." In *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl, eds. (Durham and London: Duke, 1996), pp. 90-91.

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- ⁵² Žižek, “The Undergrowth of Enjoyment: How Popular Culture Can Serve as an Introduction to Lacan.” *New Formations* 9: 7-29, 1989.
- ⁵³ See Pascal Bonitzer, *Le regard et la voix: essays sur le cinéma* (Paris: Union général d’éditions, 1976); and, Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de l’étoile, 1982).
- ⁵⁴ Žižek, “Undergrowth of Enjoyment,” p. 8
- ⁵⁵ Žižek, “‘I Hear You With My Eyes’,” p. 92
- ⁵⁶ Žižek develops the following analyses of Hitchcock’s films in “Hitchcock.” *October* 38: 99-111, 1986.
- ⁵⁷ See Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 101
- ⁵⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 113
- ⁵⁹ See Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 271
- ⁶⁰ Noël Carroll, “Prospects for Film Theory.” In *Post-Theory*, p. 43
- ⁶¹ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, p. 52. Subsequent references to this book will be marked as IDLC within the text.
- ⁶² Slavoj Žižek, “Return of the Natives.” *NewStatesman*. March 4th, 2010. Online Edition. Available at <http://www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality-love-couple-sex>. Viewed March 5th, 2010.
- ⁶³ Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture.” In *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 35-36.
- ⁶⁴ Žižek, “Return of the Natives.”

CHAPTER FOUR

ENJOYMENT IN THE CINEMA

At this point, I want to reiterate what is at stake in the psychoanalytic reading of cinema. The ontological thesis of psychoanalysis is that, it is impossible to show the whole of reality. In order to represent ‘reality’, something must be foreclosed from it, a certain gap, or Void, in reality that accounts for the subject’s (\$) own position *within* reality. What is present at the level of the Symbolic is made possible by the absence of the subject and the fantasy object (\$ \diamond *a*) that sustains her attachment to the Symbolic. In the previous chapter, I argued that psychoanalysis helps to discern this absent level of fantasy in the texture of the film on account of the substitution of the Symbolic. What, then, does film theory add to the theory of ideology? This question may be answered by referring to Žižek’s interpretation of Krzysztof Kieslowski’s transition from documentary cinema to fictional cinema.

For Žižek, it is Kieslowski’s transition from documentary to fiction in cinema that signals his shift towards Symbolic ‘reality’ as opposed to the Real. According to Žižek, the foreclosure of the Real is what accounts for Kieslowski’s transition to fiction. Documentary was too Real, thus making it difficult for Kieslowski to develop some kind of emotional response in the viewer. He seemed to feel it necessary to express something in the subjects of his documentaries that remained impossible in the form of documentary ‘reality’. Documentary for Kieslowski was too intrusive of the Real. As he puts it himself: “I’m frightened of real tears.”¹

For Žižek, then, this is “the ultimate lesson of the dialectical tension between documentary reality and fiction: if our social reality itself is sustained by a symbolic fiction or fantasy, then the ultimate achievement of film art is not to recreate reality within the narrative fiction, to seduce us into (mis)taking a fiction for reality, but on the contrary, to make us discern the fictional aspect of reality itself, to experience reality itself as a fiction.”² This, I claim is what is at stake in a film theory of ideology. Film theory, I argue, helps us to discern the fictional aspect of Symbolic ‘reality’ itself. All of the variations of Symbolic ‘reality’ are just so many failed attempts to grasp the kernel of the Real. Film theory, I argue, mediates between the Symbolic texture of the cinema and the critique of ideology by locating the place of the subject within the co-ordinates of the Symbolic text, whether this is the text of the cinema or that of everyday ‘reality’.

In this chapter, I want to consider Žižek’s theory of subjectivity for a theory of cinematic spectatorship. My aim is to examine the analogous ontological forms of subjectivity and spectatorship. This aim grows out of attempts by early film theorists to develop a theory of cinematic spectatorship based upon the Althusserian notion of interpellation. Lacanian psychoanalysis entered film theory through these initial attempts to develop a theory of ideology in cinema. Early film theorists argued, along the lines of Althusser’s theory of interpellation, that films, within the ideological apparatus of the cinema, interpellate *spectators* as *subjects*. As Colin MacCabe puts it, “the subject is an ideological notion... which is tied very closely to the rise of the bourgeoisie.” The starting place for a theory of film ideology, according to MacCabe, is the bourgeois notion of a “unified subject of experience.”³ Early film theorists, in other words, argued that films – particularly mainstream/Hollywood, narrative films – interpellate spectators

as subjects of unified experience, thus ridding all contradictions, all elements of irrationality, from the field of subjectivity. For them, the goal of a political cinema is, on the contrary, “to change the position of the subject within ideology.”⁴

As I noted in the introduction, film theorists believed it possible to ‘produce’ a political subjectivity in the spectator through an alternative form of cinema. This, I claim, is a misguided theory that relies heavily upon Althusser’s claim that ideology has no history. Against Hegelian Marxists, such as Lukács, Althusser argued, as MacCabe puts it, against “the promise that the victorious conclusion to the class struggle will result in the arrival of the new and true ideology which will correspond to the real.”⁵ This perspective, according to MacCabe, “merely incarnates the Hegelian version that being and consciousness will finally coincide within a simple view of the end of class struggle.”⁶ In contrast to MacCabe and other early film theorists, including Laura Mulvey who, as I pointed out in the introduction, believes that it is only possible to develop an alternative cinema capable of ‘changing the position of the subject within ideology’, and not necessarily of breaking through ideology itself, I believe that it is important to perceive the Hegelian theory of ‘Absolute Knowing’ as one that allows us to perceive a particular notion of ‘freedom’, one that allows the subject to *act* politically, *outside* of ideology. ‘Absolute Knowing’, I claim, is *not* a theory of utopia. I am not suggesting, in other words, that it is possible to perceive an historical ‘end’ to ideology in some future utopia. Rather, what I suggest is that, in order to effect any kind of social change, transformation, or revolution, the subject must act outside of ideology. In other words, the revolutionary subject, I claim, is *not* interpellated by a Cause. Rather, the subject, which I associate with free agency, emerges where interpellation fails; and, as I

noted in the previous chapter, when interpellation fails, the subject is presented with a choice between the re-constitution of the fantasy that structures her relationship to ideology and the possibility of an (ethical) act that would transform the existing coordinates of Symbolic ‘reality’, either for the subject herself (the aim of psychoanalysis) or for ‘society’ in general, through the subject of the class struggle (the aim of dialectical materialism, i.e., Marxism). From this perspective, and for purposes of interpretation, I feel it necessary to make a distinction between ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’.

Identity is what one assumes in the Symbolic order, or in discourse. It is the Symbolic Master-Signifier that represents the subject for the series of other signifiers, or the big Other. Identity as the Master-Signifier for the subject in the Symbolic is the ‘I’ of subjectivity, the ‘mask’ that the subject assumes in Symbolic representation. The subject, in contrast, is the agency of the unconscious and, again, emerges at points where interpellation fails. Identity, then, is that which the subject assumes in ideology. Ideology, I claim, does not interpellate individuals as subjects; rather, *subjects are interpellated as individuals*. Likewise, I argue, films do not interpellate spectators as subjects; rather, they interpellate spectators/subjects as individuals (the Kantian-bourgeois individual, to be more precise). Or, more precisely, films, I claim, interpellate subjects as individuals by *reproducing something essential to their identity*. Here I do not disagree with the initial point articulated by early film theorists, that the film interpellates the spectator through a unified subjective experience, ridding contradiction from the field of perception; however, I am at odds with their version of ‘subjectivity’ and ideology. Two consequences follow from the distinctions I am making between early film theory’s version of subjectivity and the one I develop here.

First, the version of subjectivity and ideology that I develop suggests that there are, indeed, variations in the reception of cinema. The latter has been the single most important critique from the post-Theorists against ‘the Theory’. This is where they claim that empirical studies of audiences are important for understanding film reception. However, my claims go deeper than that of the post-Theorists. I claim that empirical research on film reception is not enough to understand the ideological operation. The critique of ideology, I argue, is not just a matter of knowledge – i.e., gaining knowledge that will ‘prove’ the ‘true state of things’. Ideology is not just a matter of epistemology. It is, rather, deeply ontological. I argue that theory is still needed in order to make sense of ideology at the level of ontology. But the theory that I advocate is not the ‘screen theory’ version of Theory. I give ‘screen theory’ credit for their initial efforts to develop a Marxian and psychoanalytic theory of ideology in cinema; however, both Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Marxian theory of ideology require new readings that are capable of amending the errors of early film theory.

Unlike Mulvey, for example, who claims, through her notion of the ‘male gaze’, that film spectators directly assume the subjective position offered by the cinema, I argue that film spectators *do not* always occupy the same subjective position. In other words, not all spectators are interpellated in the same way. Not all spectators will assume the subjective position of the ‘male gaze’. Nor will all spectators assume the position of a unified subject of experience. There is, in other words, no *one* subjective position in the cinema. It is important to account for social-cultural-historical, etc., differences in spectatorship. It is to the merit of cultural studies, as well, to have asserted the latter. Mulvey, however, also claimed that an alternative cinema, one that does not interpellate

the bourgeois (individual) subject, but an alternative subjectivity, is also possible.

Against this claim, I argue that alternative cinema interpellates spectators in exactly the same way as mainstream/Hollywood cinema. My second point, then, is that a political cinema is not possible in the sense in which it has been envisioned by theorists of alternative cinema or the avant-garde. While I find the arguments of post-Theorists important for asserting difference in film reception, as well as the cultural studies perspectives for asserting variations in social-cultural-historical subjectivity, I believe that neither has yet to fully grasp the full theoretical importance of ideological interpellation. My thesis in the following is that subjects are interpellated by ideology *through the (re-)production of surplus-enjoyment, or desire*. My claim is that enjoyment in cinema is premised upon the production of desire in the spectator. This is why I claim that a political cinema is not possible in the way in which it has been theorized by early film theorists. Political subjectivities still enjoy the cinema in the same way as non-political subjectivities who enjoy Hollywood/mainstream cinema, and the assertion that mainstream cinema cannot be political, or politicized, is, I argue, rather elitist.

Furthermore, alternative cinema, I claim, does not speak to a popular audience, and therefore limits its own revolutionary potential – that is, in terms of class politics. As I have been arguing throughout, what makes the cinema – or any other work of art or culture – truly political is its interpretation, and, as I argued in chapter two, there is a class struggle at the level of interpretation. Žižek makes a similar point regarding the differences between modernist and postmodernist theories of interpretation.

In the introduction to his anthology on Hitchcock – *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan... (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992), Žižek claims that,

A modernist work of art is by definition ‘incomprehensible’; it functions as a shock, as the irruption of a trauma which undermines the complacency of our daily routine and resists being integrated into the symbolic universe of the prevailing ideology; thereupon after this first encounter, interpretation enters the stage and enables us to integrate this shock... In this sense, interpretation is the conclusive moment of the very act of reception... What postmodernism does, however, is the very opposite: its objects *par excellence* are products with a distinctive mass appeal (films like *Blade Runner*, *Terminator* or *Blue Velvet*) – it is for the interpreter to detect in them an exemplification of the most esoteric theoretical finesses of Lacan, Derrida or Foucault. If, then, the pleasure of the modernist interpretation consists in the effect of recognition which ‘gentrifies’ the disquieting uncanniness of its object (‘Aha, now I see the point of this apparent mess!’), the aim of the postmodernist treatment is to estrange its very initial homeliness: ‘You think what you see is a simple melodrama even your senile granny would have no difficulties following? Yet without taking into account... /the difference between symptom and *sinthom*; the structure of the Borromean knot; the fact that Woman is one of the Names-of-the-Father; etc., etc./ you’ve totally missed the point!’⁷

While Žižek refers to the differences as modern/postmodern, I feel that the difference is better understood as one between alternative/avant-garde cinema and mass culture. Both, I claim, have the potential to become political through a particular kind of interpretation. In the case of alternative/avant-garde cinema, politicization occurs where the interpretation integrates the meaning of the text back into the Symbolic order. However, this level of interpretation does nothing to transcend the ideological level of the text. It speaks too closely to the film-object itself. The interpretation of mass culture, in the way that Žižek advocates, permits, not just an interpretation of the text, but also an interpretation of the Symbolic level of ideology. The goal is to render films *unpalpable* in order to accomplish the work of theory. Films are material examples of ideology, and it is by rendering them unpalpable, by demystifying their simplicity, that they can add to a theory of ideology. Žižek demonstrates how this may be accomplished in a language that speaks to the wider population, and not just an elite, intellectual audience. He speaks in the language of cinema.

The stakes that I explore in this chapter are, thus, the psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity advanced by Žižek, the theory of ideological interpellation, and a new theory of film spectatorship that, as I argue, focuses on the production of desire in the spectator. Films, like all art and cultural objects, do not produce subject positions; they produce pleasure. Ideology, similarly, functions because it reproduces pleasure. Before proceeding towards the theory of the subject, though, I want to elaborate further upon the stakes of a psychoanalytic theory of spectatorship.

‘JOLTS OF ENJOYMENT’

If it is now possible to induce pleasure through direct stimulus, through drugs, or electro-chemical inducements upon the pleasure centres of the brain, why then is there still anything like culture or art? Why, in other words, do we have art and culture for our aesthetic pleasure rather than simple and direct stimuli? Why do we still need Symbolic fictions for our pleasure? This is the problem that Žižek invokes regarding *The Matrix* (1999). The question Žižek asks apropos of the Matrix, the virtual universe of Symbolic reality in the film, is not ‘why does the Matrix need our energy’, the human libido as the energy used to power the machines; rather, the question to ask is the opposite one: ‘why does the energy need the Matrix?’

The Matrix, I believe, seems to offer a valuable frame of reference for Žižek’s analysis of cinema and subjectivity simply because of its own self-referentiality. The film speaks to the very process within which its spectators are engaged. Are we not all ‘in the Matrix’ when we are watching films? This question, I think, begs another: how can we be certain that our own effective, everyday Symbolic reality is not just some computer-generated simulation? I suggest that the topic of human sexuality can be of assistance here.

Humans can, in a way, be distinguished from animals in the sense that humans do not just have sex for the purpose of procreation. What we call ‘sexuality’ is the Symbolic universe within sex itself that is constantly displaced. Here, then, I am referring to the Lacanian thesis that ‘there is no sexual relationship’ (*ils n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*). On this topic, Žižek evokes a cognitive psychologist explanation for the evolution of human intelligence.⁸ Geoffrey Miller argues that the impetus for intellectual evolution was not

survival but, rather, competition in sexual choice. The evolution of human intelligence, according to Miller, developed through efforts to convince a potential mate to choose 'me' as a partner. This developed into 'fitness indicators', which demonstrate one's advantage over others in sexual competition. For Miller, human mental abilities are examples of psychological fitness indicators. However, what Miller misses, according to Žižek, is the fact that, only in humans are these indicators (if the argument is in fact correct) elevated into ends in themselves. In other words, it is not the act of having sex that is the desired end in human sexuality. Rather, it is the act of *arousal*. If the desired end were only the act itself, we would most likely witness an end to seduction. Even with the advent of Viagra, and other direct stimulants, culture continues to be sexualized (not just in Western society).

Žižek's point is that we have sexuality *because* of its inherent failure. Sexuality spills over into all other contents because of its own inherent impossibility – that is, the inherent impossibility of its 'end' in the attainment of the object of desire. The sexual act is never enough. Do we not, I ask, always end the sexual act wanting more? The uniqueness of humanity, according to Žižek, is that we seem to take more pleasure in things such as 'fitness indicators', in the process of seduction, than in the act itself. Here, he reverses the formula, it is not that sexuality develops as a means to enact procreation; rather, we procreate (or, we engage in the act of sex) in order to take further pleasure in seduction. Sexuality, in other words, is a 'game' of Symbolic fictions that serve to displace the traumatic energy of drive. The Symbolic is thus that in which we immerse ourselves in order to discharge our libidinal energy. It is in the Symbolic real of sexuality that humans evade the traumatic abyss of the Real, of blind drives. It is the Symbolic

which assigns meaning to these blind drives. The passage from the Real to the Symbolic is the one from meaninglessness to meaning. It is non-meaning which is utterly traumatic.

Cinema is of interest precisely because of its very form *as* a Symbolic fiction that activates desire. In this sense, cinema reproduces perfectly the elementary matrix of identity (as opposed to subjectivity) within the Symbolic co-ordinates of ideology. It does so, I argue, by generating an unconscious fantasy that sustains the pleasure that it derives, that fully integrates the spectator in the act of spectatorship. In this way, the cinema, I claim, is ‘sexualized’. It operates by arousing desire. It serves as a very precise example of the relation between the Symbolic level of ideology and the sublime level, the obscene underside of ideological ‘passionate attachments’. Cinema stages the full relationship between culture and ideology.

Here, I want to suggest that ‘culture’ represents all of those activities in which ‘I’ participate without fully believing in them – towards which I maintain a distance. However, in participating there is still a sublime level of belief in the fantasy-object that sustains attachment to the Symbolic. In cinema, it is not that ‘I’ do not take seriously the form of the Symbolic fiction. What ‘I’ do not take seriously is my own active, subjective engagement with the form. What I do not take seriously is the disavowed fantasy-object that sustains my enjoyment in the cinema. Not simply a suspension of disbelief, but *a suspension of my belief in disbelief*. What I suspend is not my actual disbelief, but the belief before belief – the supplemental fantasy – that sustains my disbelief. What the spectator is not ready to accept – what she is not ready to fully assume – I claim, is that there is more reality in the Symbolic fiction of the cinema. Not in its content, but in its

form. It is the form of the cinema that is perfectly homologous to the Symbolic form of everyday, functional reality.

Both cinema *and* everyday reality are sustained through fetishism. I am allowed to disbelieve only to the extent that I invest my belief in some contingent element (the Master-Signifier), retroactively posited as necessary. The goal of ideological analysis, I argue, is to locate this contingent element, raised to the level of necessity – the element on account of which I am allowed not to believe, since my belief in the necessity of this contingent element fills in the gap in the Symbolic, as an evasion of the traumatic Real.

What, then, is the belief that sustains my disbelief in the Symbolic efficiency of the cinema? How is it that I can approach the Symbolic fiction of the cinema through ‘distanciation’, while at the same time I take seriously the Symbolic fiction of reality? Why do I approach the first with irony and the second with cynicism? It may be that, since the reality of the cinema is technologically reproduced we can produce a greater distance between it and ourselves. But is not ‘reality’ more and more technologically mediated and reproduced today? Is this not the point of Jean Baudrillard’s conception of simulacrum and simulation, or of Guy Debord’s notion of ‘spectacle’? Why are these technological mediations of reality perceived as ‘more real’ than cinema?

Here, I claim, we are back at Kieslowski’s fright of real tears. What is really ‘real’ in the cinema – as in actually functioning Symbolic reality – is the level of emotion it is capable of elucidating. But emotions lie – emotions are capable of masking the Real. The only emotion that does not lie, from the psychoanalytic perspective, is anxiety. All other emotions have an object (the *objet petit a*). Anxiety, according to Lacan, is the only emotion without an object and, therefore, touches the Real.⁹ With anxiety we come

closer to recognizing the phallic form of the Symbolic because it is a sensation that arises when there is a loss of the protective shield of fantasy. Anxiety is the one emotion that cannot be produced by the cinema, whereas it can be felt in ‘reality’. The cinema does a better job, I claim, of producing pleasure than everyday ‘reality itself’. This is why it is not taken seriously. It is more ‘real’ than Symbolic ‘reality’ itself.

Although the cinema is distinguished from ‘reality’ in its ability to avoid anxiety, it is still of interest for the study of ideology precisely because of the way it activates the same kind of misrecognition that is implicit in the everyday functioning of ideology. Cinema, like ideology, is in the business of organizing *jouissance*, or enjoyment. In the next few sections, I further develop the psychoanalytic notion of *jouissance*. I do so by elaborating upon the Lacanian theory of subjectivity advanced by Žižek. If, as Žižek claims, politics, today, is the politics of *jouissance*, it is important to better understand its operation at the level of ideology. For my purposes, it is the relationship between subjectivity and *jouissance* that truly speaks to the relationship between film theory and the critique of ideology.

FETISH/SYMPTOM

For Marxism, like psychoanalysis, the way to understand the ‘normal’ constitution of the Symbolic and subjectivity is by locating the pathological at the heart of the practical – that is, by interpreting the symptom. The Symptom, however, according to Žižek, is a kind of *envers* of the fetish. Here we have two elements which form the front and back of the same X, and thus speak to two different kinds of universality – what is, in Hegelian terms, the ‘concrete universality’. A fetish is

correlative with the Master-Signifier; it is a particular element that colours the entire totality. Each element within the totality ultimately refers back to the defining feature of the fetish. The symptom, however, is that element that sticks out. The symptom is the exception that speaks to the false particular universality of the Symbolic under normal conditions. The symptom is a 'singularity' elevated to the status of universality. It says more about the truth of the universal, in other words, than the very terms of the universal itself. More precisely, the symptom is an irrationality that disrupts the functional rationality. In the relation between fetish and symptom we do not have two different versions of universality, rather we have two different universalities in competition with each other – or, more precisely, we have the same universality, the same totality, split internally.

The traditional mode of ideology critique is said to be symptomal. That is, it seeks out the symptom in order to demonstrate the false universality of the ordinary conditions of existence. In a symptomal analysis, one must locate the errant element that sticks out in order to speak to the false totality. How, then, I ask, can we accomplish the same ideology critique in a world that is supposedly 'post-ideological'? This is the problem that occupies Žižek's critique of the postmodern ideology of the 'end of history', or the 'end of ideology', etc., characterized by cynicism and political apathy, where the problems with late-capitalist society are fully visible. For Žižek, the problem, here, is not one of locating and interpreting the symptom, but rather of locating the fetish.

Fetishists, Žižek tells us, are not dreamers lost in another (imaginary) world; they are realists, ready to assume all of the traumatic elements of the world and the Self. However, their (passionate) attachment to some particular element through which the

traumatic is disavowed allows them to subjectively assume the trauma and go on with their practical everyday existence. A fetish, as Žižek puts it, embodies “my disavowal of knowledge, my refusal to subjectively assume what I know [the Master-Signifier],” while a symptom “embodies a repressed knowledge, the truth about the subject that the subject is not ready to accept [*objet petit a*].”¹⁰ In order to better explain this relationship, I want to return to the examples from the previous chapter, the obverse examples of *Casablanca* and *Wild at Heart*.

The three-and-a-half second shot of the light tower in *Casablanca* demonstrates perfectly how fetishism functions in the cinema. Here we have an example of a particular content added to the series – a shot added to the series of other shots – which has the function of disavowal, a disavowal of whatever dirty fantasies sustain the enjoyment of the spectator. One is free to fantasize on the condition that the fantasy is disavowed by some content that is fully presented to the Symbolic order – this content is added in order to sustain the gap in the Symbolic, which is precisely the ‘objectively subjective’ place of the subject. *Objet petit a* is the element within the subject that allows her to, first, displace the Void of subjectivity – which sustains her as X in the Symbolic order – and then to assume a particular content that allows her to disavow this sublime, underside, of subjectivity. It is the traumatic aspect of fantasy that, needing to be disavowed, attaches the subject to some perfectly permitted content in the form of a fetish.

The ‘say “fuck me”’ scene from *Wild at Heart*, however, appears to perform the exact opposite of the fetish function. Here, it would seem that disavowed content is, in fact, being brought to the surface of the Symbolic order, presented to the big Other. In this scene, the obscene underside of subjectivity is fully assumed at the level of the

Symbolic, something of which is akin to the process of psychoanalytic treatment whereby the subject must fully assume the subjective aspect of the disavowed fantasy. But, what I want to ask is whether this works the same way in cinema? Does the Symbolic construction of this obscene example allow the subject-spectator to fully assume the underside of fantasy that sustains the subjective attachment to the fetish?

The answer to this question, I claim indicates what is truly important about cinema at the level of ideology. The cinema, *as such*, is a fetish. What is significant about the cinema is that it is capable of presenting us with the Symbolic texture of our everyday practical reality, but in a form that allows us to disavow this Symbolic texture itself. In the *admission* of appearance, the cinema is, in a way, more real than reality itself – we fully assume the level of appearance in cinematic reality. However, it is more difficult to do so at the level of practical reality. We admit with cinema that which is true of our everyday reality, while disavowing the constitutive level of appearance in the everyday. Cinema functions, in this sense, as a fetish for the everyday level of practical, Symbolic, reality. We affirm in cinema what is true of the everyday.

While the scene from *Wild at Heart* presents us with the obscene underside of Symbolic reality, its very Symbolic form gives us cause towards its disavowal. It is the same with political cinema. Consider, for example, James McTeague's recent film, *V for Vendetta* (2006). This is a film with a very apparent political message, making obvious comparisons between the present political constellation of reigning neoconservative ideology and a possible future dystopia that could emerge should the present conditions continue into the future. The hero of the film, V, is even labelled a 'terrorist', however, he is presented as a character with whom the sympathies of the spectator should lie.

Why, then, does the film not interpellate the spectators towards a more contemporary political cause? Why are the spectators not hailed into action as political activists? Perhaps, I claim, because the form of the cinema does not, in fact, give us cause to take it seriously. There is an implied cynicism in the form of political cinema, in all cinema, for that matter; and, it is one that provides for a certain degree of ‘distanciation’ between the spectator/subject and the implied meaning – I am tempted to refer to this effect as ‘cynima’: the cynicism inherent in the fetish form of the cinema, we do not take it seriously, it is only appearance, not reality. While the content itself may be taken quite seriously, it is the form that is not; not unlike the form of pornography which is, inherently, designed to mock sexuality. The form itself is its own censorship.

The point I want to emphasize in the above is the necessity of a *fetishistic* critique of ideology. A fetishistic critique requires locating the fetish that sustains the subject’s relationship to the ideological text. It is the fetish that is responsible for the disavowal of the fantasy object, or desire, which I claim, following Žižek, is what ‘subjectivizes’, i.e., interpellates the subject in ideology.

In what follows, I will elaborate upon Žižek’s psychoanalytic conception of the subject with two purposes in mind. On the one hand, this notion of the subject allows me to distinguish between the notion of subjectivity that I advance in my present theorization of spectatorship from that of early film theorists. On the other hand, Žižek’s notion of subjectivity allows me to refute some of the basic claims of early film theory. Early film theory relied upon a notion of subjectivity based in Althusserian theory. However, the Althusserian theory of ideology and subjectivity is important at another level of cultural theory. It is, significantly, the Althusserian version of subjectivity and ideology, I claim,

that are refuted by the Foucauldian tradition. This tradition is important, as well, since, as Joan Copjec has noted, early film theory often conflated Lacanian and Foucauldian perspectives. While Foucault rejected (Althusserian) notions of ideology and the subject, it is his criticisms of the latter that allow me to more thoroughly advance the notion of subjectivity that I defend. Therefore, in order to advance the theory of subjectivity operative in my own work, I will begin by highlighting the differences between the latter and the Foucauldian perspective. This, I believe, will also allow me to locate some of the errors in the theory of subjectivity found in early film theory.

WHICH NOTION OF THE SUBJECT?

Early film Theory drew primarily upon three related notions of the subject. Each, in a way, was tied to the Althusserian notion of the subject, which, arguably, passes as the suturing thread of film theory's notion of subjectivity. Here, I find a notion of the subject elaborated by Althusser, as well as one developed through the Lacanian notion of the subject, and, finally, the Foucauldian notion of the subject which was elaborated, primarily in reaction to the Althusserian-psychoanalytic conception of subjectivity. All three, I claim, were conflated by film theorists into a single notion of subjectivity.

Althusser, as I have mentioned, claims that ideology interpellates individuals as *subjects*. He argues that, "there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects."¹¹ From this perspective, the subject is what emerges in the process of ideological interpellation. Ideology, in other words, appears to be that which gives the subject agency within the Symbolic order, with the ability to act upon the world. Mladen Dolar notes, however, that, "[f]or Althusser, the subject is what makes ideology work"; but

psychoanalysis holds to a different thesis. For psychoanalysis, “the subject emerges where ideology fails.”¹² This is why hysteria is one of the ways in which we can get access to the unconscious. Hysteria is failed interpellation. Hysteria emerges when the subject is without an answer to the question ‘*che vuoi?*’ – ‘what do you want from me?’; or, ‘why am I what you, the big Other, the Symbolic order, are saying that I am?’ Without an answer to this question, the subject becomes incapable of assuming a symbolic mandate within the Symbolic order. Hysteria is one answer as to why psychoanalysis remains ‘non-historical’: its focus is the non-historical kernel of the Real that always returns as the same in the Symbolic.

The Foucauldian notion of the subject is similar to that developed by Althusser. Like Althusser, who claims that the subject appears in ideology, for Foucault, the subject is an effect of discourse. However, the notion of ideology is still problematic for Foucault. Foucault rejects the notion of ideology because,

like it or not, [the notion of ideology] always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.¹³

Here, Foucault draws a line of demarcation between himself and Althusser, who argued for the distinction between ideology and science. Science (and for Althusser, this refers specifically to Marxian ‘science’) speaks to the Truth about the state of things, whereas

ideology is involved in the mystification of the world, the world viewed from the perspective of the reigning (i.e., capitalist) order. I argue that this line of demarcation that Foucault draws between his own view and the Marxian view of ideology is a particularly Althusserian interpretation of the latter. However, both Foucault and Althusser, in this sense, are working from a different conception of the notion of ‘truth’ than the one that I argue for here.

As I have suggested above, truth is always one-sided, and based upon a particular subject-position from which one engages with the objective conditions of existence. Thus, I claim that it is possible to conceive a distinction between ideology and truth, or science. Ideology has to do with a misrecognition (if not necessarily a ‘false consciousness’) of one’s own subjective conditions of existence, and the form in which she exists, whereas truth, or science, speaks to the form of subjectivity within the actual, objective conditions of existence. Here, I am not referring to some kind of relativistic conception of truth, nor am I referring to a notion of truth that is absolute, or neutral and entirely objective. In opposition to Foucault, I want to stick to a notion of truth that speaks to the objective conditions of existence for the subject; however, in opposition to post-Theory, I maintain that this truth is always subject-oriented. In other words, while it is important to assert the truth-value of scientific knowledge, as knowledge in the Real, we must be careful to maintain that this is not some neutral knowledge, but necessarily perceived from within one’s own subject-position, or position of enunciation, which is ultimately tied to her objective conditions of existence. This is where Theory differs from post-Theory. Theory works towards some kind of Self-knowledge with regards to the objective conditions of existence, whereas post-Theory mystifies the latter.

Foucault then claims that the notion of ideology refers to “something of the order of the subject.”¹⁴ This, again, draws upon the Althusserian thesis that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. This is the notion of the subject that Foucault rejects. However, I argue that the Foucauldian perspective on subjectivity and agency comes across more clearly in claims made by Judith Butler. Therefore I rely on arguments made by her at the beginning of her book, *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), in order to more clearly elaborate upon the Foucauldian notion of subjectivity. Butler, claims that,

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form power takes. To find, however, that what ‘one’ is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are. The customary model for understanding this process goes as follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that the ‘we’ who accept

such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for ‘our’ existence... Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency... ‘Subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject. Whether by interpellation, in Althusser’s sense, or by discursive productivity, in Foucault’s, the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power.¹⁵

Here, Butler comes very close to the psychoanalytic thesis regarding ideological interpellation. The key distinction, however, has to do with whether or not it is possible to conceive a notion of subjective agency outside of Power, or discourse. The Foucauldian perspective, I claim, follows that of Althusser in claiming that the subject only exists within discourse (again, recall that for Althusser, individuals are interpellated as subjects through language, the Symbolic, i.e., discourse). My argument, in contrast, is that the subject exists *outside* of ideology/discourse, i.e., the Symbolic.

Both the Marxian and psychoanalytic notions of subject conceive the agency of the subject as existing outside of ideology – that is, outside of discourse. Ideology activates *a certain kind* of agency, within the confines of the relations of domination and exploitation, what Butler, following Foucault, refers to as Power. As Butler puts it, power is “what we depend on for our existence.” Power also, she claims, “initiates and sustains our agency.” However, the point of both Marxism and psychoanalysis is that the free agency of the subject *can* exist beyond the confines of ideology or discourse. This is what emerges in the process of the psychoanalytic cure. As unities-of-theory-and-

practice, the point of both Marxism and psychoanalysis is to act upon the functioning conditions of existence, the conditions of domination/authority, in order to transform the material circumstances of the subject's relation to the object. This, I claim, means breaking the confines of the discursive determination of the subject, or the reliance of the subject upon the discursive formulation of her existence. It is only when the subject (\$) assumes herself as object (*objet petit a*), and traverses the fantasy that attaches her to the ideological, Symbolic, order, and then acts upon the world in order to change the object in herself, to produce a new (historical) Master-Signifier – the position from which she can perceive the former conditions of existence in another, new way; changing the co-ordinates from which she perceives the former conditions of her existence; what Fredric Jameson refers to as 'cognitive mapping' – only then does she truly demonstrate her agency as a (free) subject (of history). This is the conception of freedom, the conception of subjectivity (the subject of history) advanced by Marxism and psychoanalysis.

As Žižek puts it, in Lacanian terms, it is the Analyst's discourse that stands for "the emergence of revolutionary-emancipatory subjectivity... in it, the revolutionary agent (*a*) addresses the subject from the position of knowledge which occupies the place of truth [S_2 , below the bar]... and the goal is to isolate, get rid of the Master-Signifier which structured the subject's (ideologico-political) unconscious."¹⁶ The objective, in other words, is to locate and destroy the fetish that structured the subject's ideological position within the Symbolic. The goal of 'cognitive mapping' involves proposing a new Master-Signifier that would transform the existing conditions, co-ordinates, of the possible. Possibility is *retroactively* posited. The impossible becomes possible from this new perspective because in the act it is demonstrated that it could not be otherwise. The

emergence of the New is proof of its own possibility, which the former reigning ideology claimed could not be.

I want to argue at this point that film theory drew primarily from the Althusserian-Foucauldian notions of the subject and ideology/discourse. My point is that it is the Althusserian-Foucauldian notions of subjectivity and ideology that are rejected by the post-Theorists *in the place of* Marxism and psychoanalysis. Furthermore, I claim that the post-Theory rejection of ideology critique and psychoanalysis is actually a rejection of the Althusserian-Foucauldian model, standing in for the Marxian theory of ideology and the psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity. What I mean to suggest by this is that there is an error in conflating the Althusserian-Foucauldian model with that of Marxism and psychoanalysis, or Theory as such. I doubt, though, that taking note of this error is enough to get post-Theorists to rethink their critiques of Theory. However, for my purposes, highlighting the reliance of film theory on the Althusserian-Foucauldian model provides an avenue for critiquing film theory, while not succumbing to its outright rejection. This is what distinguishes my objectives from that of the post-Theorists. While I am in solidarity with the objectives of early film theory, I challenge their reliance on the Althusserian-Foucauldian model. It is early film theory's reliance on the latter, I claim, that enabled the positing of a theory of spectatorship in which the spectator is interpellated as a subject ("individuals are interpellated as subjects"; "following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence"). It is my claim, however, that Žižek's re-interpretation of Lacan corrects errors made by Althusser, and is therefore useful for rethinking the project of film theory.

In the following section, I begin to draw out more thoroughly the contours of the Žižekian-Lacanian theory of subjectivity.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE SELF

Žižek's notion of subjectivity is best addressed by beginning with the question, 'what is the Self?' This question, for Žižek, as I read him, is also often entangled with the question, 'is there freedom?' Both questions, in a sense, have to do with the problematic of determinism, or determination. It is here that the antagonism between cognitivism and psychoanalysis meets head-on. As Bordwell explains, cognitive theory is interested, first and foremost, in understanding something about human mental activities, such as recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgement, memory, and imagination. He adds that cognitive researchers work by proposing theories of how these processes of human mental activity function, and proceed by analyzing and testing their theories "according to canons of scientific and philosophical inquiry."¹⁷ It is interesting that Bordwell acknowledges the meshing of scientific *and* philosophical inquiry, highlighting this element as one of the core aspects of cognitivism, which, it would seem, is not just a scientific mode of analysis, but also has a penchant for trying to close the gap between nature and culture. More precisely, it appears as though cognitivism endeavours to bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities. For Žižek, however, this problem of closing the gap is a false problem. The problem, for him, is not how to close the gap, but rather, *how to rethink this gap* (between science and philosophy) *with each new scientific discovery*. In other words, the question

for him is, how do our conceptions of ‘reality’ and our conceptions of consciousness change with discoveries of the New? How, in other words, *does* the New come to be?

Science, as a knowledge in the Real, seems to push more and more towards a formal determinism as opposed to freedom. If thought is merely a pattern of measurable brain activity, and if action is nothing more than sensory impulse, from where does the agency of the subject come? How do I know that my thoughts and actions are not directly stimulated by access to the brain processes? Is all that ‘I’ am simply determined by these purely biological and chemical factors? In terms of the cinema, how can I be sure that the pleasure I take from it is not the result of some direct stimulus to the brain and the senses? Here, consciousness, the ‘Self’ and subjectivity are to be radically differentiated from the *substance* of the brain. For consciousness, or the ‘Self’, is that gap between nature and culture – it is the result of a constitutive imbalance. It is this gap of reflexivity, a gap of ‘awareness’, or misrecognition, by which the Self is registered *to itself*. Here, we encounter the difference between phenomenology and dialectics.

Phenomenology is concerned with the *emergence* of the ‘Self’ – the phenomenon of ‘Self’ – whereas dialectics is concerned with those gaps of negativity – of contradiction – within the form of consciousness. Phenomenology asks, ‘how is it that consciousness comes about?’ in experience, while dialectics seeks points of negativity that contradict this emergence of the Self in conscious experience.

Consciousness is a phenomenon that emerges out of a deadlock of impossibility. But it is important to distinguish the notion of consciousness I am developing here from the traditional conception of consciousness found in Descartes – that is, the bourgeois subject of certainty and unified experience, which early film theorists claimed is

interpellated in the cinema. Against some structuralist/post-structuralist thinkers who have turned away from this notion of the subject, one of Žižek's philosophical aims has been to bring back to prominence the relevance of the Cartesian *cogito*. In his return to the *cogito*, Žižek outlines the difference between the modern, bourgeois subject of unified experience (the 'conscious subject'), and the psychoanalytic subject of the unconscious.

COGITO AND THE FORCED CHOICE OF BEING

According to Žižek, *cogito* is important for understanding the unconscious in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan set out to elaborate upon the Freudian method, which begins by assuming the position of the subject of certainty – that is, from the position of the fully self-aware, centred bourgeois subject of modernity; or, in other words, the Cartesian reduction of *cogito* to *res cogitans*, or the reduction of existence to consciousness – *cogito ergo sum*. As Lacan puts it,

Freud's method is Cartesian – in the sense that he sets out from the basis of the subject of certainty. With this aim, the first thing to be done is to overcome that which connotes anything to do with the content of the unconscious – especially when it is a question of extracting it from the experience of the dream – to overcome that which floats everywhere, that which marks, sustains, spots, the text of any dream communication – *I am not sure, I doubt*.¹⁸

However, against the background of the Cartesian *cogito*, psychoanalysis follows the Kantian 'transcendental turn' in pointing out the disjointedness of the subject within the totality of the universe. The subject (of the unconscious) in psychoanalysis parallels the

Kantian subject in the sense of lacking a definitive place. This lack (\$) is constitutive of the subject. The point of psychoanalysis, however, is that the subject is radically de-centred. Consciousness is the result of a *misrecognition* of its place – its ‘position of enunciation’ – within the Symbolic. What psychoanalysis, following Kant, brings back to the table is the elementary aspect of Self-doubt. This is what Lacan sets out to argue by referring to the Cartesian *cogito*.

Cogito, according to Lacan, results from a forced choice of being. Lacan contends that the subject is forced to choose between thought and being (existence). In order to exist, within the confines of the Symbolic that is, the subject is *condemned* to the choice of being, and thought is relegated to the unconscious. A person becomes a subject by way of this forced choice of being, which relegates thought (*objet petit a*) to the place of the unconscious. As Žižek puts it, the unconscious is precisely the “thing which thinks”, and is in this way inaccessible to the subject. Lacan’s paraphrase of Descartes is, thus, “I am, therefore *it* thinks.”¹⁹ Žižek explains, following Lacan, that Descartes’ error was the assumption that the choice of thought secured for the subject a piece of being, thus attaining the certainty of “I” as a “thinking substance” (*res cogitans*).

Žižek’s point, however, à propos the Lacanian forced choice of being, is that the being chosen by the subject has its support in fantasy. This solution of the ‘thing which thinks’ is also, I claim, how we can distinguish between Kant and Hegel. Kant could not solve the problem of the Thing-in-itself. Hegel’s solution is to locate this problem at the level of form, and the limits of the form of thought. It is not the conscious subject (\$ - S₁) that thinks (not, ‘I think therefore I am’); it is, rather, the unconscious fantasy object (*a*) that thinks (‘I am, therefore ‘it’ thinks’). It is in the choice of being that the subject’s

ideal ego is then formed in the Imaginary – the fundamental fantasy – the point from which I see myself as ‘this’. It is the image of myself – my ideal point of identification with myself – which is the Imaginary, pathological, support for my everyday, practical engagement with Symbolic reality. This fantasy-frame, through which I see myself seeing myself, is the original, constitutive, symptom of subjectivization, the *sinthome*. The ontological thesis of psychoanalysis is that, in order to gain access to Symbolic reality, something must remain foreclosed from it, the errant fantasy-object that sticks out, the remainder of the Real; the object without a place in the Symbolic, which is, conversely, the very object that *is* the subject. It is the piece of the subject that she herself cannot even identify. It is this that remains misrecognized in the form of ideology. The truth of the subject is neither her Symbolic identity, nor simply her place (\$), the gap or Void, in the Symbolic. It is the thought of the unconscious, the *objet petit a*, which directly *is* the subject. It is that in the subject that she is not ready to assume. Doing so would challenge her own Symbolic existence.

Fantasy and *sinthome* are thus ‘two sides of the same coin’. Fantasy is foundational as the constituting substance of the subject. It is this that is truly traumatic for the subject. The fantasy/*sinthome* is obscene in the sense that it says something about the subject that she is, herself, not ready to accept, or to assume in the first person. The subject, in other words, is not ready to take responsibility for her own pathological supplemental fantasy, which structures her very own subjectivization within the Symbolic. Fantasy and *sinthome* are, thus, condensed into the form of the Lacanian object, the *objet petit a*.

My reference to the *objet petit a* in this sense has to do precisely with the Imaginary, pathological fantasy-object which remains inaccessible to the subject. *Objet petit a* is the very kernel of the subject's being – thought relegated to the unconscious. It is the *frame*, or the 'pure form' of our experience which is constantly misrecognized. It is in this context that Žižek argues that fantasy structures reality – not fantasy as the Symbolic texture of reality, or some kind of daydreaming naïve consciousness by which we experience the world; but as the very support of the Symbolic, beneath the surface.

The above, I claim, is useful for resolving the Foucauldian critique of the 'repressive hypothesis' in psychoanalysis.²⁰ Logically, I argue, there is no difference between the psychoanalytic perspective and the Foucauldian perspective. Prohibition in both perspectives is responsible for the *production* of desire. Power is, in this sense, both repressive *and* productive. It is the act of repression that *produces* desire. Here, on the one hand, the Foucauldian perspective assumes, on the part of psychoanalysis, the *pre-existence* of desire in the subject, which the prohibitive order then represses; and, on the other hand, we find a parallel in one of the central misunderstandings of psychoanalysis in the schizoanalysis developed by Deleuze and Guattari, again an assumption regarding the pre-existence of desire.²¹ The difference between the psychoanalytic perspective and that of post-structuralists, like Foucault and Deleuze, is purely ontological. However, for my purposes, this ontological claim is significant for the theory of interpellation.

The psychoanalytic perspective is more precise than the post-structuralist perspective. Desire is produced through the subject's entry into the Symbolic order, in the forced choice of being. Desire is retroactively posited as the (unconscious) presupposition of the subject's existence. Prior to the Symbolic dismemberment of

subjectivity there is only drive, libido, the raw Real. This is the Self as Thing (*das Ding*). It forms the inhuman core of humanity's material existence. The Thing is the material substance of the subject, forever inaccessible to Self-consciousness, and entry into the Symbolic is marked by the loss of (access to) the Thing. This loss, according to Lacanain theory, is replaced by the *objet petit a*.

There are two modes of *objet petit a*, then, in psychoanalysis: it represents desire – the object-cause of desire – on the one hand, and drive, on the other hand. *Objet petit a* stands for the two modes of desire and drive on opposing sides of the Symbolic order: as the pathological fantasy-object that remains below the surface, and as the protruding object of the Real – as gaze and voice – invading the space of the Symbolic. *Objet petit a*, in other words, is the object of desire, whereas drive is this object itself. Fantasy is, thus, the 'screen' that divides desire from drive. Fantasy is what keeps drive at bay, by translating it, domesticating it, into something that structures the subjective relation to the Symbolic. The Symbolic is what prohibits full *jouissance*, or enjoyment, but which also regulates the subject by producing little 'jolts' of enjoyment – or, more precisely, surplus-enjoyment (or surplus-*jouissance*) – through the constant (re)production of desire. It is this constant reproduction of desire that maintains the subject's existence within the Symbolic. It makes possible the conditions of being.

CONDITIONS OF (IM)POSSIBILITY

From the Lacanian perspective, being is grounded upon the conditions of possibility of *jouissance*. Ideology then, I claim, relies upon the masochistic submission of the subject to authority. According to this logic, the subject submits herself to the

prohibition of authority in order to *evade the impossibility of full enjoyment*. *Jouissance* becomes ontologically possible if I blame my inability to gain access to it on prohibition. What is truly traumatic in the subject's encounter with the Real is the realization that full enjoyment is ontologically impossible. However, the way to avoid this impossibility is to assume that its inaccessibility is due, not to its status as impossible-Real, but rather due to prohibition. This, I argue, is how power/authority is productive of desire, and this is how subjects are interpellated by ideology.

According to Žižek, our politics today are more and more directly the politics of *jouissance*. Politics, today, are concerned with the different ways of soliciting, regulating and controlling our enjoyment.²² This is, in one sense, what is indicated by the homology between the University discourse and contemporary biopolitics (see chapter two, above). Today, in our free, post-political, 'end of history', liberal democratic societies, not only are we supposedly free to enjoy, we are more and more enjoined to do so. For Žižek, postmodern societies are societies of the superego. If modern society was characterized by the hard work of production and the authority of the paternal law, postmodern society is characterized by the ideology of consumption, pleasure, and the maternal superego injunction: 'Enjoy!'

As Žižek points out, Law, in the psychoanalytic sense, is "the agency of prohibition that regulates the distribution of enjoyment on the basis of a common, shared renunciation (the 'symbolic castration'), whereas superego marks a point at which *permitted* enjoyment, freedom-to-enjoy, is reversed into *obligation* to enjoy."²³ The Law is what *regulates* pleasure in order to 'save' us from the imposition, by the agency of the superego, to enjoy. This is the hypothesis of the Master in psychoanalysis: in order to

save our desire from saturation, we “externalize the impediment, the inherent impasse of desire, transforming it into a ‘repressive’ force which opposes it from outside.”²⁴

Perversion, then, is the result of assuming the necessity of the Law in the production of desire, yet the pervert continues to ‘enjoy her symptom’, so to speak.

Through its regulation of enjoyment, of desire, the Law produces surplus-enjoyment, the transformation of the raw Real of drive into something domesticated, off of which the reigning order maintains itself. The reigning Symbolic order is self-reproductive to the degree that it is capable of generating surplus-enjoyment in the subject. The only problem with the contemporary reigning order is that it appears to have, as Žižek points out, dispensed with the agency of the Master-Signifier – the agency of the Law. This is what leaves as the only agency of ideological interpellation the superego injunction to ‘Enjoy!’²⁵ However, since enjoyment is impossible-Real, this superego injunction is met with *anxiety*, or a traumatic encounter with the impossible. Postmodernity is, I claim, in this sense, truly the ‘age of anxiety’.

Here, however, I want to add that there is another version of prohibition and repression that accompanies the psycho-ontological one developed with regards to enjoyment – that is, the materialist version. Power, I claim, is not only dependent upon the subject’s submission to authority as a guarantee of her own existence, and the production of surplus-enjoyment. To simply suggest that Power is (only) the result of one’s (ideological) submission to authority is somewhat tasteless and vulgar, and ultimately ignores ongoing forms of repressive *violence*. There is, of course, a *violence* that persists at the core of Power and authority, both in the form of the State and in the form of the ‘mode of production’.

Enjoyment, I claim, is not simply barred because of its constitutive impossibility; freedom, in the Marxian-psychoanalytic sense outlined above, is barred because of the material inaccessibility and exploitation engendered by the class antagonism. The psychoanalytic conception of enjoyment, however, provides an answer to the ideological problematic I outlined at the beginning of the introduction, why do exploited subjects of the class struggle still participate in the conditions that account for their own exploitation? In the following section, I want to posit a potential answer to this question.

THE SYMBOLIC MANDATE

Contrary to the Althusserian notion of interpellation, ideology, I claim, does not involve some kind of *internalization* of external contingent notions in the ISAs. According to Žižek, “ideology is the exact opposite of internalization of the external contingency: it resides in externalization of the result of an inner necessity” – the subject’s own inner necessity of existence, of sustaining the surplus-enjoyment, the desire, at the heart of Symbolic existence-agency – “and, the task of the critique of ideology here is precisely to discern the hidden necessity in what appears as a mere contingency.”²⁶ For Žižek, the problem with Althusser is that neither he, nor his successors, were ever able to elaborate upon the link between ISAs and ideological interpellation: “how does the Ideological State Apparatus... ‘internalize’ itself; how does it produce the effect of ideological belief in a Cause and the interconnecting effect of subjectivization, of recognition of one’s ideological position?”²⁷ The first thing to do, I argue, is to stop thinking of interpellation as an internalization of ideology *into* the unconscious.

Interpellation is not the actualization of an individual into a subject. We must begin to think of interpellation as the goal of the subject to have her identity recognized by the Symbolic big Other. It is not the subject who recognizes the call of the Other; it is, rather, the Other for whom the subject endeavours to have herself recognized in the guise of some symbolic mandate: “I am (this).” Identity, as such, is a fake, and is, in this sense, ‘phallic’. The ‘phallus’ in psychoanalysis is not a guarantee of (masculine) power, it is, rather, the fake of masculinity. The masculine position in psychoanalysis is a fake, a performance (in the Butlerian sense), which we play at in order to generate some kind of recognition of ourselves on the part of the big Other. This is the misrecognition central to the ideological sense of Self. A Lacanian logic game is helpful for an explanation of this process.

In his paper on ‘logical time’,²⁸ Lacan presents a problem: a prison warden brings together three inmates and explains that he must free one of them for reasons that are not mentioned. He tells them that he will conduct a test to decide which of the three he will release. The warden holds five disks: three of them are white, while two are black. A disk, either white or black, will be placed upon the head of each inmate. They will then be left together in a room, but banned from communication. The first to accurately figure out the colour of the disk placed upon his head will be set free. This conclusion, however, must be based upon a logical assessment to be presented to the warden after passing through the door; doing so is an indication that he has discovered the colour of the disk upon his head.

Three possible solutions are presented to this problem:

- 1) If one inmate sees a black disk upon the heads of the other two, he immediately knows that the disk upon his own head must be white, since there are only two black disks.
- 2) If one inmate sees upon the heads of the other two one white disk and one black he can then surmise that if his were black then the inmate with the white disk would get up and walk out the door. Since he does not, this inmate can infer that the disk upon his own head must not be black. His own solution to this problem comes from the inaction of the other two.
- 3) If one of the inmates sees two white disks upon the heads of the other two, he can reason that, based on the inaction of the other two, his own disk must be white: if it were black, then – following the logic in the previous solution – one of the other inmates would have already stood up and walked out the door. Since neither does so, it is logical to assume that all of the inmates have a white disk upon their heads.

Here, Lacan refers to logic in order to grasp the notion of self-reflection.

Consciousness of the Self comes to the subject through a temporal delay – in the case of the final solution, there is a double delay whereby the subject must first hypothesize the inaction of the others before assuming the solution. However, in ideology, this is definitely *not* how the subject assumes a symbolic mandate. Quite the reverse. In ideology, I claim, the anxiety of existing without a symbolic mandate forces the subject to assume a non-reflexive mandate: “I am this”. As Žižek puts it, “in the case of the symbolic mandate, we never simply ascertain what we are; we ‘become what we are’ by means of a precipitous subjective gesture.”²⁹ This precipitous gesture of *assuming* a

symbolic mandate implies a shift from object to signifier – symbolically, in the logic game, from the disk-object to the assumption of a signifier (white or black); the disk is the object ‘I am’, i.e., *objet petit a*, and, “its invisibility to me renders the fact that I can never get an insight into ‘what I am as object’.”³⁰ In the subject’s misrecognition of the Self as object, then, we find the relationship between the subject (\$) and the object (*objet petit a*) in the psychoanalytic sense. What is always inaccessible to me is the object that sustains my Symbolic-phenomenological existence as Self – that is, the supplemental fantasy object ($\$ \diamond a$). This, then, is what is necessary for understanding the psychoanalytic conception of desire. Desire is the surplus-enjoyment that sustains my own sense of existence, my own sense of Self, within the Symbolic. Ideology, I claim, interpellates the subject through the (re-)production of desire. It is this unconscious level of desire, I argue, that attaches the subject to her own exploitation in ideology, and it is Žižek’s notion of the ‘parallax gap’ that helps to account for the subject’s misrecognition of the desire that attaches her to authority.

PARALLAX VIEW

What Žižek refers to as a ‘parallax view’, or a ‘parallax gap’, is best described as a link between two, or more, different perspectives, of which no neutral common ground is possible. There are several different ways to approach this notion of ‘parallax’ in Žižek’s work. On the one hand, we might consider it in relation to what Žižek calls a ‘parallax Real’. While the standard, Lacanian, Real is that which always returns as the same – the non-Symbolizable Thing (*das Ding*) – the parallax Real is that which accounts for the various different *representations* of the same underlying Real.³¹ The parallax

Real, in other words, accounts for the multiple different Symbolic appearances that all try to grasp the gap/Void of the Real at their core. On the other hand, a parallax gap may be understood as the ‘minimal difference’, or the ‘pure difference’ between these various different representations. It is the minimal difference that cuts across and divides the same object amongst the various different perspectives. This minimal difference is represented by the *objet petit a*, which is, Žižek tells us, a ‘pure parallax object’.³² This object is, thus, (what Althusser, following Spinoza refers to as) the ‘absent cause’ of the Symbolic. Again, the various different Symbolic appropriations of the object are split internally, and derive from different attempts to get at the object itself.

Žižek envisions this notion of ‘parallax’ as a concept with the capacity to revitalize dialectical materialism. With the notion of ‘parallax’, the point is to identify the highest point of mystification with the lowest point of ‘excess’. In terms of ‘humanity’ as notion, the point is not to differentiate between the highest and the lowest, but to conceive both as two different perspectives on the same non-Symbolizeable object, and the closest we can get at the truth about this object is to conceive it through the speculative identity of both. The same can be said of the subject herself.

Žižek’s philosophical-psychoanalytic, ontological, claim is that the subject, herself, is internally split like a parallax gap. This is the parallax between the ‘lack’ (\$) and the surplus (*a*), between the empty place in the structure and the errant object without a place in the structure. Žižek asserts that these are not two elements, but the same element viewed from two different perspectives in a ‘parallax view’. They are one and the same entity viewed from two different subjective positions.³³ Žižek suggests, then, that the *objet petit a* is precisely “the paradoxical object which directly ‘is’ the subject”,³⁴

and, in order for the subject to move beyond some pathological constraint in her everyday practical state of existence, she must begin by assuming this object in the first person – to take responsibility for the pathological, herself – that is, by risking the objective, noumenal, kernel of her own phenomenal existence, the subject must ‘traverse the fantasy’ and enter a state of ‘subjective destitution’. The next step, in order to complete the psychoanalytic treatment, is to perform an act that directly transforms the objective conditions that define the terms of subjectivity. This, of course, is the exact formula of dialectical materialism. What constrains the subject is the objective conditions of existence, with which she must respond in her everyday existence. Therefore, in order to change one’s own subjective existence, one must transform the objective conditions of existence through which the subject experiences herself. For Žižek, the ontological thesis of ‘parallax’ thus explains the correlation between psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism shares with psychoanalysis the unity-of-theory-and-practice, and is, thus, both ideology critique and (political) action tied together in a single move.

This, I claim, is how we have to understand the relation between the pathological within the subject and her relation to the Symbolic at the level of appearances. Žižek contends that when we are dealing with ideology, it is not enough to resort to some debunking of the level of appearances as some form of naïve or false consciousness. Rather, it is important to understand that within the subject there is an inner necessity that ties her, ever more aggressively, to the level of appearances, beyond all attempts at demystification. The ontological thesis of psychoanalysis is that fantasy, as a scandalous, paradoxical element, directly subjectivizes the order of appearances. Here, I am not

simply referring to a clear-cut distinction between the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’.

What I am dealing with, here, is what might be thought of as the ‘objectively subjective’, the fantasy object that subjectivizes the subject towards the Symbolic order.³⁵ There is, in other words, no subjectivization, no identity within the Symbolic without some sublime fantasy object in the subject that subjectivizes the latter. The ‘objectively subjective’, in other words, is the way things objectively appear to the subject, even if she is not ready to assume this appearance in the first person.

This, finally, is how I believe we need to approach spectatorship in the cinema.

When speaking of ‘subject-positions’, it is important to avoid the conception of spectatorship developed by early psychoanalytic film theorists, as well as the poor image of it developed by Bordwell. What we have to keep in mind, I claim, is the parallax gap between the spectator as subject and the sublime underside of fantasy that subjectivizes the subject, producing her own subjective encounter with the Symbolic text of the cinema. Against the vulgar claims of early film theory, we do not have one spectator, assuming the same ‘gaze’ as that intended by the filmmaker. Rather, we have different subject-positions in a parallax Real, all of which are subjectivized by the particularity of the fantasy object as objectively subjective. And, with this, I now conclude this rather lengthy foray into the theory of the subject and return to a conceptualization of spectatorship, one that begins by taking up Žižek’s notion of ‘interface’.

INTERFACE

Žižek’s notion of ‘interface’ differs from early film theory’s notion of ‘suture’ by way of his inclusion of the *objet petit a* in its connection to the Master-Signifier.³⁶ In a

way, theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz were on the right track with their own conceptions of spectatorship;³⁷ however, they were overly deterministic, and too simplistic, in assigning too much power to the cinema towards the interpellation of the subject/spectator. Mulvey, on the one hand, gave too much significance to the formation of Ego ideals in the cinema through the power of the star and the male protagonist. For her, spectatorship resembles the ‘mirror stage’, and the spectator identifies with the image of the male protagonist who produces a ‘male gaze’ in his objectification of the female characters on the screen.³⁸ Metz, on the other hand, is more thorough in noting that the subject enters the cinema having already developed the ego in the Imaginary through the process of the ‘mirror stage’, and therefore, the cinema does not reproduce the ‘mirror stage’ effect. However, he forfeits too much knowledge to the spectator, who, according to him, identifies with the cinema by identifying with herself, through the self-knowledge of the fantasy invested in the cinema.³⁹ ‘Interface’, I claim, corrects these misconceptions about subjectivity and spectatorship.

I conceive interface as a relation between the *objet petit a* and the Master-Signifier passing through the subject. Interface, in other words, positions the subject between the Symbolic level of the text and the sublime level of fantasy. In interface, the three levels of Imaginary (fantasy), Symbolic (Master-Signifier) and Real (subject), come together to form the necessary link of subjectivization. Film theorists focused on either the relationship between the Imaginary and the Real (following Althusser), or between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, never taking into account the relation between all three. The point about interface is that it conceives the subjectivization of the subject/spectator by way of the link between the obscene supplemental underside of the fantasy object, and

the Symbolic appearance of the cinema as signifier (not an ‘imaginary signifier’ as Metz claims).

The standard ‘suture’ effect functions, according to Žižek, in the following manner:

First, the spectator is confronted with a shot, finds pleasure in it in an immediate, imaginary way, and is absorbed by it... Then, this full immersion is undermined by the awareness of the frame as such: what I see is only a part, and I do not master what I see. I am in a passive position, the show is run by the Absent One (or, rather, Other) who manipulates images behind my back... What then follows is a complementary shot which renders the place from which the Absent One is looking, allocating this place to its fictional owner, one of the protagonists. In short, one passes thereby from imaginary to symbolic, to a sign: the second shot does not simply follow the first one, it is *signified* by it.⁴⁰

In order to avoid the gap opened up in the second phase of the ‘suture’ effect, the previous shot must, according to Žižek, be reinscribed into the texture of the film as a point-of-view shot of one of the characters within diegetic space. That is, all subjective shots must be assigned to one of the characters through an objective shot conveying the point-of-view to that particular character.

Interface, according to Žižek, is what accounts for the functioning of cinema when we absent the standard reversal of subjective and objective shots. As in Metz’s problematic, whereby the cinema makes possible an entirely objective representation,

without the representation of the subjectivizing shot of the protagonist,⁴¹ interface accounts for the way the cinema still functions in the absence of some subjectivized perspective. Interface takes place when the standard suturing effect no longer functions.⁴² As Žižek puts it, when the gap of the Real can no longer be filled by an additional (Master-)Signifier, it is filled in by the spectral element of the fantasy object. Here, again, I want to emphasize the relevance of Žižek's notion of the 'sublime object' of ideology.

The 'sublime object of ideology' accounts for the subject's 'passionate attachment' to the Symbolic level of ideological appearances at a point that may be said to be 'post-ideological'. That is, the question that Žižek asks is, how can we account for the functioning of ideology when ideology no longer relies upon the operation of mystification, or false/naïve consciousness? His thesis (and the 'moral to our story') is that there is an objective element within the subject – an element that is 'objectively subjective' – that attaches the subject to the Symbolic order. It is the subject's attachment to the Symbolic that displaces, or allows her to disavow, some supplemental fantasy object that remains unknown to her. This underside, the 'sublime object', is that which is formed in the Imaginary as the subject's fundamental fantasy, which is itself constitutive of the subject. The fundamental fantasy is the original symptom of subjectivity, the *sinthome*.

Objet petit a, the 'sublime object', the fantasy object, is the object in the subject that is directly the subject herself. It is that part of the subject with which she cannot identify, which remains primordially repressed. This is where Metz errs with his conception of spectatorship. In order for subjectivization to occur the subject definitely

cannot identify with the fantasy that sustains her own existence. As well, this is where Althusser is mistaken since ideology does not represent the subject's imaginary relationship to her real conditions of existence (a link between the Imaginary and the Real); rather ideology constitutes a Symbolic relation of the subject to the Real, *which is sustained by the supplemental underside of fantasy*. The notion of interface describes the subject's attachment to the Symbolic supported by some disavowed supplemental underside. Subjectivization only works if this relation is concealed. The cinema does not induce this effect in the subject, and therefore I should be careful not to suggest that films somehow subjectivize the spectator. However, the cinema, I argue, does function in accordance with this notion of subjectivity, and in doing so develops a degree of enjoyment (or, *jouissance*) for the spectator.

ENJOYMENT IN THE CINEMA

The cinema, I argue, works upon the spectator in the production of *surplus-enjoyment* as opposed to enjoyment. *The Matrix* (1999), again, is useful for a better understanding of this function in the cinema. The virtual world of the Matrix in the film is, according to Žižek, designed to extract surplus-enjoyment, desire, the energy of humans in the form of libido, from the subjects trapped within it. This energy serves as fuel for the reproduction of the machines themselves.⁴³ *The Matrix* provides a perfect model of the relationship between spectators and cinema, for what the cinema produces in the spectator, I argue, is a degree of surplus-enjoyment, desire. Cinema, then, truly is the medium of our desires. It functions, as Žižek points out at the beginning of *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, not by giving us that which we desire, but by 'teaching' us

how to desire. Cinema functions by constantly postponing the satisfaction of desire in enjoyment (in the psychoanalytic sense).⁴⁴

The cinema activates desire, it produces a degree of surplus-enjoyment, by denying actual enjoyment. In this, it is no different than the Symbolic order itself. Though, the difference between the two, I argue, develops only to the extent that one is taken seriously – as ‘reality’ – while the other is not. Spectatorship differs from subjectivity in the degree to which we create a distance between ourselves and the cinematic text.

In psychoanalysis, there is a strict distinction between enjoyment and pleasure. Pleasure is what we get in Symbolic reality. Enjoyment, however, is closer to the Real. If the Thing (*das Ding*) – the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’ – is the hard, material substance of the Real – the Thing that is inaccessible in Symbolic reality, but which protrudes the Symbolic as that around which discourse is constantly articulated – then enjoyment is the other side of this Real. It is the psychical correlative of full access to the Thing – to knowledge about the Self. The Symbolic is just so many failed attempts to gain full access to knowledge in the Real. Scientific knowledge endeavours to do so, however, it is always barred by the subject’s own particular position of enunciation with regards to the Real. There is, in other words, always a gap between the Symbolic and the Real – a gap that is marked by the subject. It is this gap that indicates the impossibility of the subject ever gaining full access to knowledge about herself. This is what constitutes enjoyment/*jouissance* in the psychoanalytic sense: it is impossible-Real, and as such shares a distinction with the Hegelian notion of ‘Absolute Knowledge’, which indicates something regarding the acceptance of contradiction, or the condition of impossibility

that stages conditions of possibility. Desire, thus, emerges as the constant attempt to actually get full enjoyment. This is what produces the surplus of enjoyment, and cinema, I argue, interpellates the subject in this way: by activating desire, *not* as early film theorists claimed, by producing subject positions.

NOTES:

¹ Quoted in Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 2001), p. 72.

² Ibid, p. 77.

³ Colin MacCabe, “Realism and the Cinema.” In *Tracking the Signifier – Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 52.

⁴ Ibid, p. 53.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Žižek, “Alfred Hitchcock, or, The Form and its Historical Mediation.” In *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan... (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 1-2.

⁸ See Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT, 2006), pp. 246-250; see also, Geoffrey Miller, *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature* (London: Vintage, 2001).

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (1954-1955)*, Sylvana Tomaselli, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 164.

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- ¹⁰ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and New York: Verso, 2008) p. 282.
- ¹¹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." In *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Ben Brewster, trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), p. 115.
- ¹² Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation." *Qui parle* 6, 75-96, 1993. P. 78.
- ¹³ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 60.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁶ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 298.
- ¹⁷ David Bordwell, "A Case for Cognitivism." *Iris* 9: 11-40, 1989. P. 13
- ¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1963-1964), Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 34.
- ¹⁹ See Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd Ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 146-149; and, Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke, 1993), p. 59.
- ²⁰ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1990).
- ²¹ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

²² Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 309.

²³ Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 237

²⁴ Ibid, p. 264

²⁵ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, p. 30.

²⁶ Žižek, “The Spectre of Ideology.” In *Mapping Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 4.

²⁷ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 43.

²⁸ See Lacan, “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty.” In *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Bruce Fink, trans. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

²⁹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 76

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Žižek, *Parallax View*, p. 26

³² Ibid, p. 18

³³ Ibid, p. 122

³⁴ Ibid, p. 213

³⁵ See Žižek, *The Parallax View*, pp. 170-171.

³⁶ See, for example, Jacques-Alain Miller, “Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier),” Jean-Pierre Oudart, “Suture and Cinema,” and Stephen Heath, “Notes on Suture.” *Screen* 18.4 (1977/1978): 23-76.

³⁷ See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” In *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); and, Christian

Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

³⁸ Mulvey, 486-487.

³⁹ Metz, 42-44.

⁴⁰ Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, p. 32; this follows very closely to the way in which ‘suture’ is outlined by Jean-Pierre Oudart (see note 36, above).

⁴¹ As Metz puts it, the cinema “often presents us with long sequences that can (literally) be called ‘inhuman’... sequences in which only inanimate objects, landscapes, etc. appear and which for minutes at a time offer no human form for spectator identification” (Metz, 47).

⁴² Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, p. 52

⁴³ Žižek asks, “Why does the matrix need human energy?” While the machines, he argues, could have easily found another, more reliable form of energy, it is the energy of humans that is still needed. So what is this energy? The only consistent answer, according to Žižek, is that, “the matrix feeds on the human’s *jouissance*,” the surplus-enjoyment of human desire. Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. Routledge Classics Edition. (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 262. For Žižek’s political interpretation of *The Matrix*, see *The Parallax View*, 312-317.

⁴⁴ Desire, for Žižek, is best rendered through a joke about a conscript who pleads insanity in order to avoid his military service: “his ‘symptom’ was compulsively to examine every document within his reach, and exclaim: ‘That’s not it!’; when he was examined by the military psychiatrists, he did the same, so the psychiatrists finally gave him a document confirming that he was released from military service. The conscript reached

for it, examined it, and exclaimed: ‘That’s it!’” (*The Parallax View*, p. 213). The point, of course, is that the search itself generated its own object. This is precisely how desire functions, and the cinema adds to this production of desire by staging another Symbolic fiction within which the subject/spectator produces her own surplus-enjoyment in the process of searching for enjoyment itself.

CONCLUSION
FILM THEORY,
BETWEEN DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND
HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

In the introduction to the present work, I argued that the single most important problematic of Marxian thought is that of ideology and the development of a revolutionary class-consciousness. I have argued throughout that film theory can add to a theory of ideology, and that the work of Slavoj Žižek helps to bridge the gap between film theory and the Marxian critique of ideology. Although early film theorists were responsible for introducing Lacanian perspectives into film theory and critical studies of ideology in cinema, it is Žižek's philosophical re-thinking of Lacan that truly adds to a film theory of ideology.

In the preceding, I have argued that film theory and interpretation are important for the Marxian critique of ideology. While early film theorists referred primarily to Marxian and Lacanian theory in order to develop a theory of film, I argue that film theory must refer to films, to study films and spectatorship in order to understand something about ideology. I have therefore changed the trajectory of early film theory. Film theory, I claim, must aid in developing a theory of ideology, and not necessarily a theory of film. Žižek's work is useful in this sense because he refers to films – that is, he interprets films – in order to add to a theory of ideology. Contrary to many of his critics who claim that Žižek refers to examples in cinema in order to more clearly elaborate upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, I argue that Žižek interprets films using psychoanalysis in order to

add to a theory of ideology. Although Žižek does often refer to films to explain Lacan, there is also evidence that suggests that he interprets films in order to build an understanding of the form of ideology.

Žižek's place in films studies, I have argued, also comes by way of his debate with the post-Theorists, and David Bordwell in particular. I argue that the debate between Žižek and Bordwell is representative of the debate between Theory and post-Theory, which I claim is an example of class struggle at the level of intellectual discourse. Theory, I argue, is the discourse of the proletariat, whereas post-Theory represents a counter-revolutionary effort to rid film studies of this discourse. Class struggle, I claim, cannot be understood in the Marxian sense without a fully engaged dialectical analysis. The debate between Theory and post-Theory is historical in the sense that the antagonism itself appears at a particular historical stage in the capitalist mode of production. It is significant, then, that this antagonism emerged, initially, in the mid-1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, at a time when, according to Francis Fukuyama, we reached the 'end of history'. This is an historical period when 'big emancipatory projects' were beginning to lose political importance. This perspective was shared both by post-Theory and the postmodern, post-structuralist, cultural studies.

The difference between the Marxian theory of ideology and that of cultural studies, I argue, is based, primarily, on an antagonism over the importance of dialectics. The two, I claim, are in solidarity at the level of Leftist struggles against the reigning order. However, the Marxian perspective practices a dialectical materialist critique of ideology, while the cultural studies perspective practices non-dialectical analyses of discourse. The latter, I argue, operates at the level of epistemology, whereas the Marxian

critique of ideology must operate at the level of ontology. Both the cultural studies perspectives, and the post-Theory perspectives operate at an epistemological level and therefore miss the important ontological level of ideology. As well, because both the cultural studies perspectives and the post-Theory perspectives reject the dialectical materialist analysis of ideology they fail to perceive the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory as an *historical contradiction* at the level of class struggle.

A dialectical perspective is important because it accounts for the emergence and disintegration of particular, historical forms of thought. Historical forms of thought are ideological in the sense that, on the one hand, they organize the particular historical form of rationality, or ‘rationalism’, while ridding thought that is perceived to be ‘irrational’; and, on the other hand, the particular form of historical thought is representative of the rationalism of the ruling class. This, I claim, is how we should interpret Marx and Engels’ claim that the ruling ideas are in every epoch the ideas of the ruling class. Žižek points out, though, that quite often, the ruling ideas are not only the ideas of the ruling class. As he puts it, “the ruling ideology, in order to be operative, has to incorporate a series of features in which the exploited/dominated majority will be able to recognize its authentic longings. In short, every hegemonic universality has to incorporate *at least two* particular contents: the ‘authentic’ popular content and its ‘distortion’ by the relations of domination and exploitation.”¹ It is the second element, the ‘distortion’, which, I claim, represents the form of thought of the ruling class. It is the Master-Signifier of the ruling class that ‘distorts’ the meaning of all other signifiers. This is where cultural studies potentially lends itself to the ruling ideology.

By studying the ‘authentic’ popular practices and beliefs of the majority, as well as those of social/cultural/racial minorities, all of those free-floating signifiers, discourses and ‘cultures’, cultural studies provides the ruling order with material for incorporating ‘authentic’ practices and beliefs into the ruling form of ideological rationalism. This, I claim, is what is operative at the level of the ruling hegemony. The ruling class, in other words, can incorporate the irrationality of social antagonisms uncovered by cultural studies into its own form of rational thought. This form of incorporation is what British cultural theorists, such as Dick Hebdige, referred to as ideological ‘diffusion’.² In order to remain politically radical, cultural studies, I argue, must articulate other elements of social antagonism in the terms of the class struggle. This, again, is not to suggest that class struggle is more important than antagonisms on race, or gender, etc. What I am suggesting is that antagonisms on race, gender, etc., are the ideological *effects* of the class struggle, and, I claim, only a dialectical materialist conception of history is capable of understanding all other social antagonisms as historical effects of the class struggle.

The class struggle, in the sense that I refer to it, has to do with the historical struggle between the ruling form of thought and those forms of thought that the ruling order perceives as ‘irrational’. From the Marxian perspective, these forms of thought come and go with historical transitions in modes of production. The dominant form of thought, in other words, coincides with the relations of production. This, of course, does not mean that thought is directly determined by the mode of production, or the infrastructure. If it were, it would be impossible to account for critical forms of thought and interpretation. However, this does suggest that antagonisms between forms of thought are determined by antagonisms in the mode of production. This, for me, is how

we must understand the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory. This antagonism is representative of the class struggle at the level of intellectual discourse. I argue that the post-Theory rejection of film theory is indicative of the counter-revolutionary thought of the ruling class. This, however, does not mean that early film theory is free of error.

The problem with early film theory, I claim, is that it stayed too close to the Althusserian interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. At times, this also involved a conflation of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault. Two consequences, I claim, followed from the primarily Althusserian current in film theory. On the one hand, early film theory developed a theory of spectatorship by which spectators are interpellated as subjects. The cinema, in other words, from this perspective, interpellates subjectivity. On the other hand, early film theorists believed it possible to develop an alternative cinema that could interpellate political subjectivities by changing the subject position of the spectator *within* ideology. My primary contention with this perspective has to do with the version of subjectivity that it develops. In the preceding, I have demonstrated the way in which Žižek's philosophical rethinking of Lacan helps to amend errors in early film theory's version of subjectivity.

First, I claim, that ideology does not interpellate individuals as subjects. On the contrary, ideology interpellates subjects as individuals. From this perspective, I argue that the cinema does not interpellate spectators as subjects. Rather, the cinema interpellates spectators, not by producing subjectivity, but by reproducing an element of the surplus-enjoyment, or desire, that sustains the subject's attachment to her Symbolic identity. This, I claim, is how pleasure, as opposed to enjoyment, is derived from the cinema. The cinema reproduces a degree of surplus-enjoyment that reinforces the

subject's own sense of 'Self'. This is an unconscious process, since what must remain inaccessible to the subject is the unconscious fantasy that structures her desire.

Therefore, identification with the cinema, I argue, is not self-conscious; it is, rather, unconscious. This version of interpellation also accounts for displeasure in the cinema. Displeasure is the result of failed interpellation, which is precisely the way in which contemporary Lacanians, such as Žižek and Dolar, conceive hysteria. Hysteria is the result of a failed interpellation. This, I claim, is how displeasure is registered by the subject, particularly when pleasure is expected. Displeasure is felt as neurosis.

Second, I have argued that Žižek's theory of subjectivity is useful for critiquing early film theory's notion of a political, alternative cinema. Early film theorists argued that alternative cinema is capable of interpellating political subjectivities. The cinema, I claim, cannot interpellate a truly political, i.e., revolutionary subjectivity. Neither avant-garde/alternative political cinema, nor popular, i.e., mass culture cinema with political themes, are capable of interpellating a revolutionary subject. It is, rather, I claim, the mode of interpretation that politicizes the text *and* the subject. This is what Žižek accomplishes, I claim, in his psychoanalytic interpretations of film.

I have argued that Žižek uses the language of psychoanalysis in order to rethink dialectical materialist philosophy for the era of postmodern capitalism. This is an era that is thought to be post-ideological. Žižek's theoretical and political project involves developing a theory of ideology that seeks to understand the latter in a post-ideological era. Through the language of psychoanalysis, Žižek develops a theory of ideology that understands the latter as pathological. There is a pathological attachment to ideology. There is, thus, an unconscious level to ideology. Ideology, in other words, operates at

two levels. It operates at the Symbolic level, and at the sublime level of fantasy. It functions by way of a connection between the fetish that structures ideological content for the subject – the fetish, that is, gives form to ideological content – and the supplemental level of fantasy that attaches the subject to the form. In ideology, it is the form that is misrecognized by the subject. This is why any critique of ideology at the level of knowledge, at the level of epistemology, is sure to miss the point about ideological mystification.

Žižek's interpretations of film are political in the sense that they produce a level of understanding regarding the form of the ideological text. In demonstrating the way that film texts resolve narrative deadlocks – deadlocks that may be understood through the interpretation of 'psychopathologies' in the text – Žižek, I claim, develops an analysis of ideological form in cinema. This, I argue, is equally an analysis of the form of ideology, at the level of ideological content. By interpreting films at the level of content, in psychoanalytic terms, Žižek builds upon an analysis of ideological form. Žižek's method of interpretation, I claim, is also significant for speaking in a language that is perhaps more accessible to a popular audience.

Here, I am definitely not claiming that the psychoanalytic terminology in Žižek's work is accessible to a popular audience. Rather, I am claiming that the *objects* of Žižek's analysis are accessible to a popular audience. In taking popular cinema seriously, Žižek presents himself to a popular audience, and not just an intellectual, academic, elitist audience. The suggestion that *Avatar* and *Titanic* displace 'class struggle', or that *E.T.* tells the story of the loss of paternal authority, or that *The Matrix* tells the story of ideology critique, is not so far above the comprehension of a popular audience. In fact,

these suggestions – these interpretations – are perfect examples, I claim, of a ‘film theory of ideology’, which blends popular culture with theory. This is why, I claim, that Žižek, this most modern philosopher, is truly the most postmodern contemporary philosopher.

The project of theory, I argue, involves getting audiences to think and interpret films in another, new way. Theory and interpretation are political, I claim, because they allow the subject to interpret her everyday experiences from a perspective that is external to her ‘normal’ subjective experience. Dialectical materialist philosophy is the most radical form of political interpretation, I argue, because it is a method of *praxis* by which the subject comes to break out of her attachment to her Symbolic identity, and the ruling ideology, through the act of interpretation. Non-dialectical forms of interpretation, however, simply reinforce the subject’s Symbolic sense of ‘Self’ within the co-ordinates of the ruling ideology. This is why, I claim, that cultural studies, particularly the variant known as ‘identity politics’, misses the point. Identity politics is not radical enough. In all its efforts to politicize identities, it stays too ‘passionately attached’ to the reigning ideology because it reinforces senses of ‘Self’ so dear to identity politics. Class, I claim, is precisely the non-identity amongst the identities. Class struggle is waged, not to assert the identity of the proletariat, but to destroy the class distinction itself. In class struggle, one must risk identity. This, I claim, means also risking the impossibility of enjoyment.

The subject, I argue, stays passionately attached to her Symbolic identity because of the perceived possibility of enjoyment. However, if the psychoanalytic perspective teaches us anything, it is that enjoyment is impossible-Real. Subjects in ideology refuse the truths of the Marxian critique of capitalism, I claim, because they are too passionately attached to the perceived enjoyment in their identity. This, I argue, is what film theory

teaches us about ideology. Ideology, like the cinema, is premised upon enjoyment. The critique of ideology, I claim, is based upon the risk of enjoyment. When the ruling ideology is all about ways of permitting, even forcing the subject to enjoy, psychoanalysis, as Žižek puts it, is the only discourse where the subject is allowed to *not* enjoy.³

While I have been advocating a dialectical materialist theory and interpretation of ideology, one thing is still missing in Žižek's theory of ideology. That is, an historical account of the subject. I have tried to develop an historical materialist analysis of ideology in film studies, locating Žižek's place in film studies through the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory. This antagonism, as I have already indicated, is representative of a particular stage in capitalist society. However, this is only an historical analysis of modes of interpretation. What is needed, still is an historical materialist account of the subject.

The subject and the class struggle, in Žižek's conception, are Real in the Lacanian sense. This, however, represents the *non-historical* kernel of history. But, as Alenka Zupančič points out, the subject of an historical act is not necessarily a 'full' subject, "who knows exactly what he wants." Rather, the (ethical) subject, she argues, "is realized', 'objectified' in this act: the subject passes over to the side of the object. The ethical subject is not a subject who *wants* this object, but rather, this object itself."⁴ An historical materialist account, I claim, must focus on the historical conditions, not of the subject, but of desire, as the *objet petit a*.

While the dialectical materialist critique of ideology focuses on the subject in ideology, I argue that an historical materialist analysis should focus on the objective

conditions of desire, that which attaches the subject to ideology. An historical materialist theory of film, I claim, therefore requires investigating the historical modes of desire in the cinema. This is an element that is lacking in Žižek's interpretive framework.

This historical analysis of desire in cinema would differ significantly from the historicist analysis of both cultural studies and post-Theory, which focus on the Symbolic level of history, i.e., histories of the Master-Signifier. Žižek, as I have claimed, occupies the position of the *objet petit a*, but in the form of perversion, i.e., the *pervert's* guide to cinema. This position is perverse because the subject 'knows' that she is the object of history. The subject, in other words, 'knows' that she is the object of desire for the Other. Interestingly enough, this is how Žižek describes the Stalinist subject, who applauds himself for 'serving' history.⁵ In his role as the pervert-analyst of cinema, Žižek, I claim, is at his most Stalinist.

One does not become a revolutionary subject of history, I claim, until one occupies this position in the form of the analyst. This is a position that one can occupy only when revolution is a question of *must*, as opposed to *ought*. The revolutionary subject asks, not what *ought* I to do. She asks, rather, what *must* I do. At the same time, I claim, this 'must' can only be registered after the fact – historical inevitability, in other words, is only possible after the fact, when contingency is retroactively posited as necessity.

Returning, finally, to the present case, I argue that the film theory of ideology has as its goal not simply the interpretation of films, but also an active, engaged interpretation that responds to the truth of subject's own position vis-à-vis her material conditions of existence. A film theory of ideology, in other words, produces knowledge, not of the

film, but of the spectator, of the subject to herself. It teaches her something about herself that she missed in focusing only on the film object. In rejecting Theory, post-Theorists ultimately miss out on this dimension of interpretation and they lose sight of their own subjective position, vis-à-vis the class struggle.

I propose, then, that an historical materialist analysis of desire is still necessary and can be conducted using the theoretical approach of someone like Fredric Jameson. Jameson is an historical materialist in the sense that he investigates the relationship between various modes of theoretical analysis and the historical transformations of modes of production.⁶ This, again, is something that I tried to practice in thinking through the antagonism between Theory and post-Theory. However, it is my contention that a full historical analysis of ideology requires investigating both the levels of interpretation – the level of the Symbolic – and the more abstract level of the desire, the surplus-enjoyment, attached to historical modes of interpretation. Suffice it to say that the mode of interpretation that I have uncovered in Žižek's work offers the beginnings of this kind of analysis.

NOTES:

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 184.

² See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York and London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 90-99.

³ Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT, 2006), p. 304.

⁴ Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 104.

⁵ Žižek, *Parallax View*, p. 291.

⁶ See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971); and, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981).