



# CLASS STRUGGLE AND DISPLACEMENT: SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK AND FILM THEORY

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**ABSTRACT** In the following, I argue against cognitivist film scholars, such as David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, for the relevance of Slavoj Žižek in the field of film criticism and theory. I argue that Žižek's work presents a wholly new mode of criticism which focuses on the ideological displacement of class struggle in cinema. Class struggle, according to Žižek, represents the social Real, in the Lacanian sense. By focusing on the Lacanian Real, as opposed to the Imaginary or the Symbolic, Žižek accomplishes what early film theorists were only too eager (but unable) to develop: a psychoanalytic theory of film. However, rather than focus on film spectatorship, I claim that Žižek's work is useful in critiquing the content of films. The focus, here, begins with an

examination of early film theory and the critique thereof by cognitivist film scholars. Žižek's exegetic use of films is then examined before considering the concept of the Real in psychoanalysis. After considering the function of the Real in political analysis, I conclude by looking at the displacement of class struggle as the social Real in films.

KEYWORDS: class struggle, displacement, film, ideology, Žižek



It is by now common, both in popular culture and in works of theory, to allude to similarities between the structures of films and dreams.<sup>1</sup> There is, in fact, something about cinema spectatorship, a quality by which it must be implicated in social-political analysis, which is analogous to dreaming: that is, the repression of "trauma." When one awakens from a dream, a particularly traumatic dream, the response is generally one of relief: "it was only a dream!" Relieved that such a traumatic experience is not part of the real reality, but only the dream reality, the subject is able to go on with waking life, unaware of how the dream reality, the fantasy, structures reality itself (Žižek 1989: 47). The same can be said of the spectator's cynical response to the fantasy of film: "it's only a movie!" Such a gesture has the structure of fetishism disavowal: "*je sais bien, mais quand même . . .*" ("I know very well, but nevertheless . . .").<sup>2</sup> If the fantasy of the dream can be said to structure the reality of waking life, in what way can this cynical response to cinema be said to belong, similarly, to the structure of the political reality of subjects of postmodern capitalism? Is cinema, in fact, the place to search for political subjectivity?

Recent critiques of film theory would surely object to the claim that the cinema is the place to look for political subjectivity. In fact, it would seem that the whole notion of subjectivity (or "subject-position") in film studies has become something of a misnomer for spectatorship (that is, if one views David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's anthology, *Post-Theory*, as the "bible" of contemporary film studies). In opposition to psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship, made popular in the pages of journals such as *Screen* and *Camera Obscura* (mostly in the 1970s and 1980s), film scholars such as Bordwell and Carroll advocate for a "cognitivist" approach to film studies. According to Carroll, the cognitivist approach has its origins in attempts made by many film scholars and researchers to search for alternatives to the psychoanalytic approach to film theory, particularly in order to reassess questions posed by psychoanalytic film theory regarding spectatorship and film reception. Against the psychoanalytic theory of spectatorship (developed by theorists, such as Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz), the cognitive approach addresses questions of film viewing, as Carroll puts it, "in terms of cognitive and rational processes rather than irrational or unconscious ones" (Carroll 1996:

62). From this perspective, then, the contemporary philosopher and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek, appears to cognitivists as the ultimate antagonist of contemporary film studies.

Žižek is an unapologetic advocate of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Not only does Žižek's work with film appear to have little to do with "film theory," he shamelessly promotes the teachings of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, a figure who has generated a rather large amount of animosity from cognitivists. Lacanian psychoanalysis was popular among film scholars working towards psychoanalytic interpretations of film spectatorship, yet rather than add to or develop further insights into Lacanian film theory, Žižek uses films (mainly) as examples for illustrating the difficult and complex notions that Lacan developed in his work.<sup>3</sup> As Žižek explains in a recent interview, "My big obsession is to make things clear. I can really explain a line of thought if I can somehow illustrate it in a scene from a film . . . On the other hand, to analyze today's ideology, cinema is the best . . . the best cinema can be a medium of thinking" (Smith and Žižek 2006).

In contrast to cognitivists, such as Bordwell and Carroll, I argue that film scholars must take Žižek's psychoanalytic critique of ideology seriously. However, rather than building upon the Lacanian film theory of the 1970s, what Bordwell refers to as "subject-position theory," Žižek has developed a wholly new mode of ideological critique, not of the relation between films and spectators, but of culture (inclusive of film) itself. As the French philosopher, Alain Badiou comments in a recent interview, Žižek's work "is something like the creation of a conceptual matrix that has the power to shed light on a great deal of cultural facts: movies, books, sexual differences, sexual practices, psychoanalysis, and so on" (Miller and Badiou 2005: 41). Badiou claims that Žižek is not a philosopher per se, but is rather the practitioner of a new topology: "Žižek offers us something like a general psychoanalysis, a psychoanalysis that exceeds the question of clinics and becomes an absolutely general psychoanalysis. This is the first time that anyone has proposed to psychoanalyze the whole world" (ibid.). How, then, does Žižek's "conceptual matrix" bear upon film criticism, interpretation, and theory?

In the following, I advocate a Žižekian approach to the ideological critique of films. I begin by considering the work of early Lacanian film theorists, referring particularly to Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz, and the critiques made against film theory by Bordwell, Carroll, and Stephen Prince, in Bordwell and Carroll's anthology, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996). In examining the work of early Lacanian film theory, and the critiques pitted against it, I argue that it is not the use of Lacan for film theory that is problematic, but rather it is the misinterpretation, or the unfinished interpretation, of Lacanian psychoanalysis that causes difficulties for Lacanian film theory.<sup>4</sup> While early film theory focused on the Lacanian dimensions of the Imaginary and the Symbolic (the Imaginary represents Lacan's

conception of the ego, while the Symbolic represents the level of the “unconscious structured like a language,” what Lacan referred to as the “big Other”), little work was focused on the dimension of the Lacanian Real. Žižek, however, has been dubbed the “philosopher of the Real” (Myers 2003: 29). It is Žižek’s focus on the Real that marks the relevance of his reinterpretation of Lacan. The second part of my analysis thus focuses on the Real.

I proceed to compare the Lacanian triad, Imaginary–Symbolic–Real (ISR), with Freud’s method of dream interpretation. I suggest that it is the comparison between films and dreams that will allow film scholars to reappropriate Lacanian psychoanalysis for film theory (or cultural theory in general). In doing so, interpretations and ideological critiques of film must begin to focus on processes of film-work, similar to those of dreamwork, such as condensation and displacement. Although condensation, or compression, has been given much attention by film scholars (particularly when it comes to questions of representation of identity, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.), the work of displacement has received little focus. Ideology in film, I claim, displaces the social Real. As Žižek puts it, “The easiest way to detect *ideological surplus-enjoyment* in an ideological formation is to read it as a dream, and analyze the displacement at work in it” (2002a: xci). The question, then, becomes: what is the social Real?

As Žižek continues to repeat, the Real of society is class struggle. Building upon Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s notion of social antagonism, Žižek argues that the antagonism central to society’s impossible closure or totality is represented by class struggle (or class antagonism). Thus, the political weight of a Žižekian interpretation of film rests upon uncovering the hidden dimension of class struggle and its ideological displacement. This conception of class struggle is further explained in the closing sections before discussing a Žižekian approach to film interpretation and criticism. However, before reaching this point, we must first examine the problematic nature of early Lacanian film theory.

### PSYCHOANALYSIS AND EARLY FILM THEORY

The two theorists who had the greatest impact upon film theory in the 1970s were Lacan and the French Marxist, Louis Althusser. In his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser argues that individuals are “interpellated” by ideology into subjects. The “ideological state apparatuses” (ISAs) are those institutions, according to Althusser, which reproduce dominant ideology, such as the family, the church, the media, schools, etc. . . . It was Althusser’s writing on ISAs that allowed film theorists to start asking questions about the role of the cinema as an ideological apparatus.

Althusser developed his theory of interpellation by drawing upon Lacan’s essay, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” where he argues that a

person's ego is formed as one's Imaginary relation to herself. Thus, according to Althusser, ideology is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 2001 [1971]: 109). However, as Fredric Jameson points out, this definition of ideology ignores the level of the Lacanian Symbolic (Jameson 1984: 92). This is immediately striking since Althusser's own explanation of ideological interpellation relies upon a strictly Symbolic relation between the subject (of ideology) and the Symbolic order.

In order to explain what he means by "interpellation," Althusser gives the example of a person walking along a street. Suddenly, someone (perhaps a police officer, or someone else in a position of authority) yells out: "Hey you!" By recognizing herself as the you of this hail, by recognizing herself as the addressee of the call, "Hey you!", the individual becomes a subject for the Other, not at an Imaginary level, but at a strictly Symbolic level (by identifying with the signifier "you," the individual gets caught in a Symbolic relation between herself and the Other). Early film theory saw in this conception of interpellation a way of explaining the relation between films and film spectators.

According to early film theory, the individual spectator is interpellated by ideology into a subject, or subject-position, by the film. In other words, as a viewer, the spectator is responding to the call of the film text – the film's "Hey you!" – and is transformed into a subject (or an "ideal" spectator) for the ideological text of the film. However, the problem with this interpretation of spectatorship is that, first, it suggests that all spectators are subjects of the film's ideology, and second, that all spectators occupy the same subject-position. These glitches are evident in Laura Mulvey's conception of the "male gaze."

In one of the most widely read essays of early film theory, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey advocates appropriating psychoanalysis as a "political weapon" for feminist critiques of mainstream cinema. Mulvey conceives the cinematic "gaze" as one that develops male scopophilia (the pleasure in using the sight of another for one's own sexual stimulation) through narcissism (identification with a visual representation). In her theory of the "male gaze," Mulvey refers to the Lacanian "mirror stage" as a way of explaining the development of the ego through narcissism.

As Lacan explains, the "mirror stage" represents the splitting of the ego into an *ideal* ego and an *Ego-ideal*. The "mirror stage" describes a time in a child's development, prior to her immersion into linguistic communication, wherein the child "imagines [her] mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than [she] experiences [her] own body" (Mulvey 2000: 486). The "mirror stage" explains a process whereby the child comes to recognize and identify with her own image, reflected in the mirror. However, while on one level there is a moment of recognition – the child recognizes that the image in

the mirror is her own – on another level there is also a moment of misrecognition in the “mirror stage.” According to Mulvey, “the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside the self as an *ideal ego*, the alienated subject, which reintroduced as an *ego ideal*, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others” (ibid., emphasis added). The “mirror stage,” thus, provides Mulvey with a mechanism for explaining spectatorship in cinema: the cinema, according to Mulvey, splits the subject from her reintroduced *Ego ideal* and presents her with new *Ego-ideals* “expressed particularly in the star system” (ibid.). In other words, Mulvey suggests that the cinema develops points of identification for the spectator through the production of *Ego-ideals*. Although Mulvey seems to skip over the difference between the *ideal ego* and the *Ego-ideal*, the relation between the two is important and deserves further explanation.

On the one hand, the *ideal ego* “stands for the idealized self-image of the subject (the way I would like to be, I would like others to see me)” (Žižek 2008a: 89). In other words, the *ideal ego* represents the image in which I appear likeable to myself. The *ideal ego* represents the subject’s Imaginary. On the other hand, the *Ego-ideal* is “the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and pushes me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize” (ibid.). The *Ego-ideal*, thus, functions as a point of Symbolic identification with the place from where I am being observed so that I appear likeable to myself.

The relation between *ideal ego* and *Ego-ideal*, thus, represents the Lacanian levels of Imaginary and the Symbolic. Put differently, the Symbolic (*Ego-ideal*) represents an inversion of the Imaginary (*ideal ego*).<sup>5</sup> In other words, “within the Imaginary itself, there is always a point of double reflection at which the Imaginary is, so to speak, hooked on the Symbolic” (Žižek 2002a: 10). Here, then, in the relation between Imaginary and Symbolic, we encounter a point of “double reflection,” whereby the Symbolic inverts the Imaginary. What gets left out in film theory’s relation between Imaginary and Symbolic is, however, the level of the Real, which is responsible for this double reflection.

Mulvey’s reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis is consistent with other appropriations of psychoanalysis for film theory in the 1970s. In the work of film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, psychoanalysis is used to develop an understanding of perception in the cinematic apparatus. Metz, for example, argued that “film is like a mirror,” but not the primordial mirror of the “mirror stage,” since the subject’s image is not reflected on the screen (Metz 2000: 414). The spectator’s absence from the image on the screen is made possible, according to Metz, by the primacy of the Imaginary, developed in the primordial “mirror stage.” Therefore, according to Metz, the cinema is on the side of the Symbolic (although, he refers to films as “imaginary signifiers”): the spectator does not identify with

her own image on the screen, but with the film projector or camera, “which has looked before [her] at what [she] is now looking at and whose *post* (=framing) determines the vanishing point” (ibid.). This vanishing point represents film theory’s version of the “all-perceiving” subject-position of the spectator. Early film theory, therefore, claimed that, as Joan Copjec puts it, “the cinematic apparatus functions *ideologically* to produce a subject that *misrecognizes* itself as source and centre of the represented world” (Copjec 2000: 448). This is, essentially, what David Bordwell (although critical of Copjec), means by referring to early film theory as “subject-position theory” (Bordwell 1996: 3).

According to Bordwell, film theory appealed to psychoanalysis in order to answer the question: “What are the social and psychic functions of cinema?” (Bordwell 1996: 6). Film theory’s psychoanalytic reading of spectatorship, according to Bordwell, concluded that “cinema constructs *subject positions* as defined by ideology and the social formation” (ibid.: 8, emphasis added). However, the problem with this theory, as Bordwell and others have rightly pointed out, is that it applies “psychoanalytic concepts to the cinema without regard for empirical evidence that [does not] conform to the theory” (McGowan 2007: 4). In other words, early film theory, by focusing simply on the axis Imaginary–Symbolic, over-theorizes the subject-position of the spectator, with few conceptions of spectatorship that diverge from this universal reading of the subject. As Stephen Prince puts it, film theorists “have constructed spectators who exist in theory” (Prince 1996: 83).

While Bordwell and Prince attribute this problem to theory in general, we should be careful not to dismiss film theory (particularly Lacanian film theory) outright. In fact, the problem with early film theory is not so much its desire for a psychoanalytic reading of cinema, or for its questioning of the ideological elements of films and spectatorship, but rather its misreading of Lacanian theory, or its lack of attention to the later Lacanian theory of the 1960s and 1970s, when Lacan turned from a focus on the relation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic to a focus on the Real (or, from a focus on the subject to a focus on the object). Furthermore, by focusing on an interpretation of the spectator (of course, this was done in order to construct a strictly filmic theory, rather than a theory of interpretation that could be applied to other media, such as literature), rather than the film’s text, early film theory set itself up for critique.

### “THEORY” OR “INTERPRETATION” ... OR IS IT THEORY?

Other charges laid against film theory suggest that it confuses theory with interpretation. For instance, Noël Carroll charges that: “Not only do contemporary film scholars pretend to find technique after technique and film after film that exemplify this or that general pattern – such as imaginary identification or subject positioning – film scholars also claim to find films that express the theories in

question . . ." (Carroll 1996: 43). In this description, one cannot help but imagine that Carroll is referring precisely to Žižek himself. 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" (Bordwell 2005). A quick glance at any of Žižek's texts can surely back up this claim. For example, Žižek often refers to David Lynch's film, *Lost Highway* (1997) in order to explain the paradox of desire and drive in Lacanian theory.

In an attempt to articulate the relationship between desire and drive in psychoanalytic theory, Žižek refers to the convention of the "time-loop" (which is a popular convention in science fiction stories, such as *Back to the Future* (1985) or *The Terminator* (1984), but as Žižek points out with *Lost Highway*, it is not exclusive to science fiction narratives) (Žižek 1999a: 299). The main "ingredient" of *Lost Highway*, as well as other Lynch films, according to Žižek, "is a phrase, a signifying chain, 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 the last spoken words in the film, 'Dick Laurent is dead'" (Žižek 1999a: 299). With the latter example, Žižek points out that the narrative of the film takes place in its entirety in between these two moments in a kind of "suspension of time." In this way, Žižek argues that the point of the entire film is to demonstrate the impossible gesture of the film's hero ever encountering himself (ibid.).

This impossibility is what relates *Lost Highway* to the notion of the "time-loop." The paradox of the "time-loop" consists in the fact that the subject can never encounter the object being sought (himself). To do so would unravel the chain of signification which led the hero to this very conclusion. It is fantasy which, in fact, stands in as a screen for the desire of the Other (Žižek 1989: 118) and separates desire from drive (Žižek 1997: 32). Žižek, thus, explains the relation between *Lost Highway* and psychoanalysis as follows:

at the beginning, 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 . . . The temporal loop that structures *Lost Highway* is thus the very loop of psychoanalytic treatment in which, after a long detour, we return to our starting point from another perspective. (Žižek 1999a: 299–300)

*Lost Highway* helps, not only to explain the process of psychoanalytic treatment, it also helps to explain the complex relationship between desire and drive in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, and the



role of fantasy in structuring the reality of the subject. The object-cause of desire (the Lacanian *objet petit a*) separates the subject from herself, which launches her into a repetitive cycle of “the same.” The narrative provides the subject with a form for explaining repetition (fantasy) without ever undoing the cause: desire. Repetition ends once desire is satisfied, at which point the subject returns to the place from which she began, however, from a different perspective. Therefore, fantasy plays a pivotal role in structuring the reality of the subject and “provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire” (Žižek 1997: 32).

Carroll’s critique seems most evident with regards to this kind of conflating of theory and interpretation. This is a common critique made by film scholars against Žižek: he does not use theory to interpret the film; instead, he uses the film to interpret theory. However, Žižek defends this mode of interpretation by way of a comparison between modernist and postmodernist modes of interpretation. In the introduction to the anthology, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan... (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992), Žižek argues:

What is usually left unnoticed in the multitude of attempts to interpret the break between modernism and postmodernism is the way this break affects *the very status of interpretation*. Both modernism and postmodernism conceive of interpretation as inherent to its object... The break between modernism and postmodernism is thus to be located within this inherent relationship between the text and its commentary. 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 state and enables us to integrate this shock – it informs us, say, that this trauma registers and points towards the shocking depravity of our very “normal” everyday lives... 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... 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 in following? Yet without taking into account... /the difference between symptom and *sint hom* [etc.]... you’ve totally missed the point!” (Žižek 1992: 1–2)

Why does Žižek advocate this need to detect in films the illustration of theoretical doctrine in works with mass appeal? Why not simply appeal to the modernist (straightforward) mode of interpretation in order to locate the prevailing ideology within the text? Žižek's answer comes in his book on Krzysztof Kieslowski, *The Fright of Real Tears* (2001) – which, incidentally, is his only full-length book that directly addresses Bordwell and Carroll's *Post-Theory*, and the cognitivist critique of film theory.<sup>6</sup>

In the introduction to *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek asserts that he refers to films, not to talk about the work of the filmmaker; rather, he refers to films “in order to accomplish the work of Theory” (2001: 9). What, then, is the “work” of Theory? It is my claim that, in the strict Althusserian sense, the work of Theory is the critique of ideology. Or, put differently, the work of Theory is what Fredric Jameson refers to as “cognitive mapping,” which is a term he uses to discuss “class consciousness” (Jameson 1998: 49). Žižek's use of popular films to explain Theory, thus, serves as a tool for “cognitive mapping.” It helps us to understand the difficult concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis. These are concepts which can then be used to “do the work of Theory”: Žižek's “wager” is that we can use psychoanalysis to critique ideology and to understand the ideological displacements of political struggle (i.e. class struggle) at the heart of the (capitalist) economy. What I begin to develop in the following sections is (what I perceive to be) a Žižekian Theory for a psychoanalytic critique of ideology in film.

### **DREAMWORK: DISPLACEMENT AND THE REAL**

In an introduction to one of his earliest essays using film, Žižek contends that:

The English reception of Jacques Lacan . . . has still not integrated all the consequences of the break marked by the seminar on *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–60), a break which radically shifted the accent of his teaching: from the dialectics of desire to the inertia of enjoyment (*jouissance*), from the symptom as coded message to the *sinthome* as letter permeated with enjoyment, from the “unconscious structured like a language” to the Thing in its heart, the irreducible kernel of *jouissance* that resists all symbolization (1999b: 14).

Žižek points the finger at early Lacanian film theory, arguing that “[t]he Lacan who served as a point of reference for these theories . . . was the Lacan before the break” (ibid.). He claims that the break is best exemplified by Lacan's shift from a focus on the signifier to a focus on the “object.” This break also signals Lacan's focus on the Real, or the “remnants and leftovers” of the Real “that elude the structuring of the signifier,” such as, what Lacan refers to as “gaze” and “voice” (Žižek 1999b: 14). Žižek, here, is referring to what Lacan

described as the “object of psychoanalysis”: the *objet petit a*. The “gaze,” on the one hand, represents the *objet petit a* in the visual field (or the scopic drive), while, on the other hand, “voice” represents the *objet petit a* in the aural field (or the invocatory drive).

In his recent book, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (2007), Todd McGowan explains the relation between the “gaze” and *objet petit a*. As he points out, Lacan explains, in his *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, that the gaze is the “*objet a* in the field of the visible” (Lacan 1977: 105). Therefore, in opposition to the theory of the “gaze” in early film theory (such as Mulvey’s “male gaze”), here, the “gaze” refers to something that is on the side of the object, rather than the subject. The “gaze” marks “the gap within the subject’s seemingly omnipotent look. This gap within our look marks the point at which our desire manifests itself in what we see” (McGowan 2007: 6). The *objet petit a* represents a “lost object,” which

the subject separates itself from in order to constitute itself as a desiring subject. It is the loss of the object that inaugurates the process of desiring, and the subject desires on the basis of this loss. The subject is incomplete or lacking because it doesn’t have this object, though the object only exists insofar as it is missing. As such, it acts as a trigger for the subject’s desire, as the object-cause of desire, not as the desired object. Though the subject may obtain some objects of desire, the *objet petit a* lacks any substantial status and thus remains unobtainable. (Ibid.)

As McGowan points out, “Early Lacanian film theory missed the gaze because it conceived of the cinematic experience predominantly in terms of the imaginary and the symbolic order, not in terms of the real... As a manifestation of the real rather than the imaginary, the gaze marks a disturbance in the functioning of ideology rather than its expression” (ibid.: 6–7). McGowan attributes the renewed focus on the Real to Žižek’s reinterpretation of Lacan. However, as he points out, because Žižek’s discussions of film focus on film content rather than spectatorship he has been dismissed as a film theorist (even by practitioners of psychoanalytic film theory, such as Stephen Heath) (McGowan 2007: 213–14, n.19). This, however, should not bother us in the least in our efforts to develop a Žižekian model of film interpretation and ideological critique. Žižek’s work on film is not intended as a supplement to Lacanian film theory, although it has been useful for this purpose. He has left that work to other Lacanians, such as McGowan and Joan Copjec (1994). However, it is, in fact, Žižek’s focus on the Real which concerns us most.

In order to understand the meaning and relevance of the Lacanian Real, one must place it within the other two central categories of Lacanian theory: the Imaginary and the Symbolic. One way of

understanding the triad Imaginary–Symbolic–Real (ISR) in Lacanian theory is by comparing it with Freud’s distinction, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, between manifest dream-content (Imaginary-Real, or fantasy) – the “text” of the dream, latent dream-thoughts (the Symbolic “shell,” or form of the dream) – the interpretation of the dream formed through the “talking cure” (free association, and so forth), and wish fulfillment (Real as the reality of desire which resists symbolic integration; the Real of an unconscious desire; or, the Real of impossible *jouissance*).

Freud argued that every dream is an attempt on the part of the psyche to fulfill a wish or desire. Interpretation involves locating, within the form of the dream (the dreamwork: condensation and displacement), the desire that the dreamer wishes to fulfill (Freud 1976: 417). For example, in his analysis of his own dream of “Irma’s Injection” (ibid.: 199), Freud discusses how, in recalling and pondering upon elements of his dream, certain imagery reminded him of other, non-dream, elements that were, in fact, related to the content of his dream. Freud considers the following element of his dream: “*I took her to the window to look down her throat. She showed some recalcitrance, like women with false teeth. I thought to myself that really there was no need for her to do that*” (ibid.: 185). He then analyzes this segment of the dream:

I had never had any occasion to examine Irma’s oral cavity. What happened in the dream reminded me of an examination I had carried out some time before of a governess . . . The way in which Irma stood by the window suddenly reminded me of another experience. Irma had an intimate woman friend of whom I had a very high opinion. When I visited this lady one evening I had found her by a window in the situation reproduced in the dream, and her physician, the same Dr. M., had pronounced that she had a diphtheritic membrane. The figure of Dr. M. and the membrane reappear later in the dream. It now occurred to me that for the last few months I had had every reason to suppose that this other lady was also a hysteric. Indeed, Irma herself had betrayed the fact to me. What did I know of her condition? One thing precisely: that, like my Irma of the dream, she suffered from hysterical choking. So in the dream I had replaced my patient by her friend. (Freud 1976: 185)

Here, we see clearly what Freud means by the condensation and displacement at work in dreams. In discussing the dream, Freud points out how particular images in the dream led him to recall other (non-dream) contents, to which the dream images referred. Freud then claims that interpretation is concluded with the discovery of an unconscious wish or desire (ibid.: 198–9). He arrives at the following conclusion regarding the Irma dream:

I became aware of an intention which was carried into effect by the dream and which must have been my motive for dreaming it. The dream fulfilled certain wishes which were started in me by the events of the previous evening. . . . The conclusion of the dream . . . was that I was not responsible for the persistence of Irma's pains, but that Otto was. Otto had in fact annoyed me by his remarks about Irma's incomplete cure, and the dream gave me my revenge by throwing the reproach back on to him. The dream acquitted me of the responsibility for Irma's condition by showing that it was due to other factors. . . . The dream represented a particular state of affairs as I should have wished it to be. *Thus its content was the fulfilment of a wish and its motive was a wish.* (Ibid.)

Žižek explains Freud's mode of dream interpretation in the following way: "[t]he relationship between the 'latent thought' and what is called the 'manifest content' of a dream . . . [is] that between some entirely 'normal,' (pre)conscious thought and its translation into the 'rebus' of the dream. The essential constitution of dream is thus not its 'latent thought' but this work (the mechanisms of displacement and condensation . . .) which confers on it the form of a dream" (Žižek 1989: 12). In other words, in contrast to Freud's conclusions regarding wish-fulfillment, according to Žižek, the only place for the unconscious desire is in the *form* of the dream itself: "the real subject matter of the dream (the unconscious desire) articulates itself in the dream-work, in the elaboration of its 'latent content'" (ibid.: 13).

With the Lacanian concept of the Real, we begin to understand this unconscious desire in a more uncanny form. The Real represents the traumatic aspect of unconscious desire. The desire itself, in other words, is so traumatic that it gets repressed by the censoring mechanism (ego). Since it is too traumatic for the subject to encounter the Real (reality of desire), since it has been repressed by the censoring mechanism of the psyche, it gets condensed and displaced into a more abstract form. The Real, therefore, represents an "absent cause" (an inherent impossibility) which resists symbolization and is therefore impossible to grasp completely, in its entirety, through all variations in interpretation; although, the Real, as an "absent cause" is responsible for the variations in symbolization. The Real, in other words, is the gap which exists within the interstices of various interpretations – what Žižek refers to as a "parallax gap" (Žižek 2006a: 4).

Žižek explains further that the Real "produces a series of structural effects (displacements, repetitions, and so on). The Real is an entity which must be constructed so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure" (Žižek 1989: 162). The Real, in other words, represents that which is lacking in the Symbolic. It is the gap in the Symbolic. This is how Žižek explains the Real as a

“traumatic event”: it is “a fantasy-construct filling out a certain void in a symbolic structure and, as such, the retroactive effect of this structure” (ibid.: 169). Therefore, the Real as an unconscious desire in the dream “is not simply its core which never appears directly, which is distorted by the translation into the manifest dream-text, but the very principle of this distortion” (Žižek 2008a: 72). The role of fantasy is, therefore, to condense and displace this “traumatic event” onto some externalized obstacle.<sup>7</sup> How, then, can we begin to conceive the relation between the film fantasy and the social Real?

### **CLASS STRUGGLE: THE SOCIAL REAL**

One of the most distinguishing claims made by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, is the suggestion that “‘Society’ is not a valid object of discourse” (2001: 111). It may be difficult to ignore the Thatcherite overtones of this statement; however, this point is central to the theory of articulation that forms the core of Laclau and Mouffe’s strategy of “radical democracy.” According to them, the hegemonization of political forces in a particular era is accomplished by a logic of historical contingency (ibid.: 48). As they put it, “Hegemonic practices are suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social, by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier. This original lack is precisely what the hegemonic practices try to fill in” (ibid.: 88 n.1). In their critique of the social “totality” (by which they mean the Marxian base–superstructure model), Laclau and Mouffe work towards bridging several post-structuralist concepts with the concept of hegemony, in order to explain the contingency of every social formation. They claim that hegemonic contingency is possible because no discursive formation is a sutured totality (ibid.: 106); and therefore, it must be articulated through particular discursive formations.

Laclau and Mouffe explain their theory of articulation by appropriating the notion of “suture,” developed in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (by Jacques-Alain Miller). The articulation of meaning within a discourse is made possible by fixing the “flow of differences,” or the field of “floating signifiers,” through points of “partial fixation,” or “nodal points” (the Lacanian *points de capture*). These nodal points, points of articulation within the field of discursivity, suture meanings; nodal points, in other words, “quilt” together meanings in ways that are socially signifying. These points of articulated (sutured) meanings are only “partial” since, according to Laclau and Mouffe, every meaning is contingent and arbitrary. Thus, the concepts that Laclau and Mouffe provide for their theory of articulation must be studied next to their conception of “antagonism,” which represents the impossible closure or totality of society – the impossibility of permanently fixing meaning. Antagonism, in other words, reconstitutes the limits of society (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 125).

It is this conception of antagonism which allows Žižek to relate Laclau and Mouffe's theory regarding the impossible "totality" of society to the Lacanian concept of the Real. Antagonism, like the Lacanian Real, according to Žižek, is a "traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized" (Žižek 1989: 45). However, the Real, which can only be represented through the Symbolic, is still grasped through its effects, and is constructed retroactively from the point of these effects, "as the traumatic point which escapes them" (ibid.: 163). The name that Žižek assigns to this social antagonism, the Real of society, is "class struggle." Class struggle is the social antagonism at its purest. In other words, "politics [i.e., class struggle] exists because 'society doesn't exist'" (Žižek 1999a: 177).

As Žižek often repeats, class struggle is the Real of society. As the Real of society, class struggle represents "an impediment which gives rise to ever-new symbolizations by means of which one endeavors to integrate and domesticate it . . . but which simultaneously condemns these endeavors to ultimate failure" (Žižek 2002a: 100). Or, to use Ernesto Laclau's terms, "'Class struggle' designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole" (Žižek 1994: 21).

As Jodi Dean explains,

Žižek conceives class struggle as the struggle over the meaning of society: which [particular] class stands-in for society as a whole and which class is thereby constituted as a threat to it? He thus does not view class struggle in positive terms, that is, as referring to an opposition between existing social groups. To treat class struggle positively would be to integrate it within the symbolic, to reduce it to already given terms, and thereby to eliminate the very dimension of antagonism . . . Representations of class, in other words, occlude social division, substituting distinct, naturalized categories for the reality of conflict . . . Class struggle designates the impediment that gives rise to these different symbolizations, to the differing ways that the extremes are posited . . . (Dean 2006: 57)

The ruling class is, thus, the particular group that assigns meaning to society; it fills in the empty place of the Universal. However, class struggle must *not* be perceived as just another case of identity politics:

It is not one among a variety of struggles for hegemony in the social field. Class struggle operates according to a logic fundamentally different from that of identity politics. The basic goal of feminist, gay, and anti-racist activists is to find ways of getting along, to find new ways of accepting and valuing the diversity of ways of becoming, "to translate antagonism

into difference.” In contrast, the aim of class struggle is to intensify antagonism, to transform the multiplicity of differences into a division between us and them and then to annihilate them... The goal is not mutual recognition and respect. It is transforming the relations of production so as to eliminate capitalists altogether. (Ibid.: 57–8)

As Žižek himself puts it: “class struggle is *real* in the strict Lacanian sense: a ‘hitch,’ an impediment which gives rise to ever-new symbolizations by means of which one endeavors to integrate and domesticate it ... but which simultaneously condemns these endeavors to ultimate failure” (Žižek 2002a: 100).

Class struggle is thus Real in the sense that it eludes the Symbolic representation of the ruling class, not only to the subordinate classes, but also to the ruling class itself; the ruling class must present itself as Universal (in the form of what Lenin referred to as the “class state”). In other words, in order for the ruling class to legitimize itself it has to imagine itself as completely self-contained; as non-antagonistic; it has to expel any conception of itself as non-all within the Symbolic order.

Class struggle represents an exception to the concrete universality of the ruling ideology; it presents a contradiction between the Particular content that fills out the place of the Universal and its exception. Ideology, therefore, displaces this exception in order to represent the Particular as Universal. However, in opposition to Marx and Engel’s famous line about ideology in *The German Ideology*, Žižek claims that the ruling ideas are *not* the ideas of those who rule: “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” (Žižek 1999a: 184). It is for this reason that politics, for Žižek, is not identity politics, which the ruling ideology can incorporate into its own particular form of universality, but class struggle.

In conceiving the Real of society as class struggle – that is, the trauma of any particular society characterized by its status as “non-all”; the leftover of surplus-enjoyment that is beyond the grasp of the Symbolic – Žižek provides us with a hypothesis regarding the subject of history (as opposed to substance) that is displaced by ideology: class struggle. For instance, in comparing the “two totalitarianisms” of the twentieth century (Nazism and Stalinism) Žižek suggests that the difference between the two has to do with their relation to class struggle. On the one hand, Stalinism represents the perversion of an authentic revolution: “Under Stalin, all people were, theoretically, equal” (Žižek 2005). However, on the other hand, Nazism represents an inauthentic revolution because of the way it displaced class struggle onto Jews:



Nazism displaces class struggle onto racial struggle and in doing so obfuscates its true nature. What changes in the passage from Communism to Nazism is a matter of form, and it is in this that the Nazi ideological mystification resides: the political struggle is naturalized as racial conflict, the class antagonism inherent in the social structure reduced to the invasion of a foreign (Jewish) body which disturbs the harmony of the Aryan community. It is not ... that there is in both cases the same formal antagonistic structure, but that the place of the enemy is filled by a different element (class, race). Class antagonism, unlike racial difference and conflict, is absolutely inherent to and constitutive of the social field; Fascism displaces this essential antagonism. (Ibid.)

It is in this way that we should conceive the relation between class struggle and ideology. Ideology displaces class struggle onto some other condensed representation, as is the case with Rightist populism, “which presents itself as speaking on behalf of the people, while in fact advocating the interests of those who rule ... this constant displacement and ‘falsification’ of the line of (class) division is the ‘class struggle’: a class society in which the ideological perception of the class division was pure and direct would be a harmonious structure with no struggle” (Žižek 1999a: 187). This mode of interpretation – the relation between class struggle and displacement – provides us with a way of critically analyzing and interpreting the displaced Real of society in cultural texts, such as film.

### BEYOND REPRESENTATION: IDEOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT IN FILM (AND THEORY)

In *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008a), Žižek produces some of his clearest analysis of films, based upon the work of displacement. The displacement of class struggle in film comes across most potently in his analysis of James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997):

One should be attentive to the precise moment of the disaster (in *Titanic*): it takes place when the two young lovers (Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet), immediately after consummating their amorous encounter in the sexual act, return to the ship’s deck ... on the deck, Kate passionately tells her lover 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; at *this* moment the ship hits the iceberg, in order to *prevent* what would undoubtedly have been the *true* disaster, namely the couple’s life in New York. One can safely guess that the misery of everyday life would soon have destroyed their love. The accident thus occurs in order to save their love, in order to

sustain the illusion that, had it not happened, they would have lived “happily ever after” . . . (Žižek 2008a: 57–8)

In this case, the romance between the two protagonists displaces the class antagonism between them, as if “love will conquer all.” As Žižek points out, the disaster of the *Titanic* truly allows their love to conquer all by displacing the traumatic effect that the class division would have on their lives. In addition, Žižek asserts that, “[a] further clue is provided by the final moments of Di Caprio”:

He is freezing to death in the cold water, while Winslet is safely floating on a large piece of wood; aware that she is losing him, she cries: “I’ll never let you go!” all the while pushing him away with her hands – why? Because he has served his purpose. For, beneath the love story, *Titanic* tells another tale, that of a spoiled high-society girl in an identity crisis: she is confused, does not know what to do with herself, and, much more than her lover, Di Caprio is a kind of “vanishing mediator” whose function is to restore her sense of identity and purpose in life, her self-image . . . (ibid.: 58)

Thus, Žižek argues that despite Cameron’s superficial Hollywood Leftism, the true narrative of the film, the one that is displaced by the love story, is the one that sustains the class struggle.

The love story in *Titanic* also provides a clear example of the way in which knowledge and belief are distanced from each other in ideological formations, such as in the structure of fetishism disavowal. If we accept the love story in *Titanic* and take it at its face-value – that is, even if we ignore the way in which the love story in the film displaces the class antagonism – the film still functions ideologically to reproduce the belief in the bourgeois notion of romantic love. In this way we come up against the structure of fetishism disavowal: “I know very well [that the love between the ‘rich society girl’ and the poor artist could never last in (really existing) class society], but nevertheless [I believe in the love story on the screen].” This element of fetishism disavowal on the part of the spectator lends itself well to the Lacanian thesis that the unconscious is outside: belief is “out there.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the spectator’s knowledge of class antagonism is displaced in the fetishistic disavowal onto the big Other (the symbolic order), who believes in her place. Therefore, it is not necessarily the spectator’s own belief in bourgeois romantic love that displaces the class antagonism (both in the film and in everyday, functional reality); it is, rather, the spectator’s belief in the big Other – the belief in the Other who believes in her place – which displaces class antagonism.

Yet another indication of displaced class antagonism in *Titanic* comes from the appearance of the character Molly Brown (played by Kathy Bates).<sup>9</sup> In *Titanic* (1997), Brown is described by the old Rose,

the narrator of the film, as "...what mother called 'New Money.'" What is interesting about Brown's appearance is the way in which she is sited as a "stain" of class-consciousness. This is most apparent by the way in which she is situated in the first-class dining room on the *Titanic*. Here, there is a clear antagonism between class positions that refers to political-cultural status, i.e., knowledge of bourgeois culture. In the dining room scene, Brown is contrasted with the "Old Money" characters through her southern accent, her use of slang, and her wild bodily gestures (the wild flailing of her arms and so forth), as opposed to the refined bodily and "linguistic" control of the old bourgeoisie. Brown's class status is given further detail by way of her immediate camaraderie with Jack (Di Caprio). The fact that her non-knowledge of class norms is presented as a point of comic relief only highlights the class antagonism inherent in the *Titanic* narrative. Here, humor displaces class antagonism.

Displacement is also a concern for Theory itself, particularly in the context of displaced class struggle. This is made evident by the subtitle to *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski between Theory and Post-Theory*. In the first lines of his introduction to *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek asserts that had this book "been published twenty-five years ago, in the heyday of 'structuralist Marxism,' its subtitle, undoubtedly, would have been 'On Class Struggle in Cinema'" (Žižek 2001: 1). Why does he shift the focus from class struggle to the opposition in film studies between Theory and Post-Theory? The key point here is to assert the central role that Theory plays in the critique of ideology. Although Bordwell, Carroll, and Prince assert their eagerness to examine ideological elements of films, they offer a cognitivist approach for of ideological critique: a cognitivist form of ideological critique is one which focuses on (what Althusser referred to as) particular ideologies as opposed to ideology in general. The difference is one between the authentic popular beliefs and ideas of communities (however broadly defined) and the ideological twist that is given to these ideologies by the ruling class. Ideology in general stands for the work of displacement involved in this distortion of the authentic, particular, ideologies. However, here, we are not talking about ideology in the old sense of "false-consciousness."

When dealing with the contemporary ruling ideology, we must assert that we are not dealing with ideology as "false-consciousness" (Marx's formula from *Capital*: "They do this without being aware of it" (1976: 166–7)). That is, we are no longer dealing with a particular content (or object) that stands in to mask the real conditions of existence (relations of production and consumption, for example). Instead, as Žižek points out, with contemporary ideology we are dealing with a case of fetishism disavowal (as opposed to Marx's "commodity fetishism"), which takes the form of "*je sais bien, mais quand même...*" ("I know very well, but nevertheless...") (Žižek 1989: 18, 28–9). The goal of analysis is to uncover the fetish that allows the subject (or spectator) to disavow the reality concealed

by the fantasy. Therefore, when dealing with the critique of ideology in film, we must be careful not to focus on simple representations (of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. as a chain of equivalence in identity politics). Rather, we should be more thorough and investigate how these representations condense and conceal, i.e. displace, the structuring element of class struggle.

Rather than explain a whole series of Lacanian strategies and concepts that Žižek uses for his psychoanalytic critique of ideology (such as “suture,” “gaze,” “voice” “interface,”),<sup>10</sup> all of which are relevant for analyzing the displaced Real of class struggle, I want to briefly mention just one strategy: what Lacan referred to as “anamorphosis.” In *Seminar XI*, Lacan refers to Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* to denote a certain “error of perspective” (Žižek 1989: 99). In the foreground of this painting, there appears to be a blurred and distorted image of a skull. If we look at the painting directly – that is, if we look at it from the “ideal” subject-position of the spectator – we miss what is directly in the foreground. In order to see what is truly in the foreground, the spectator must constantly shift positions, looking at it sideways, from different angles. According to Žižek, “[t]he criticism of ideology must perform a somewhat homologous operation” (ibid.). This is, precisely, what Žižek does in discussing Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men* (2006).

In an interview on the DVD release of *Children of Men*, Žižek explains that the focus of ideological critique should be the background of the narrative. What we get in the background of the film is the “oppressed social dimension.” In the foreground, the spectators are invited to join the protagonists in a typical action adventure. For Žižek, the film succeeds in showing the dimension of social oppression because of the way that the film makes this gap between foreground and background so apparent. In order to develop an accurate reading of ideology in film, it is important to take into consideration the work of ideological anamorphosis and to focus on the background of the film. In other words, one should ask: how do the fantasmatic elements in the foreground (love story, family narrative, action adventure, etc.) conceal and displace the elements of class struggle in the background (or in the setting of the film)? Such a line of questioning, I argue, will allow for an interpretation of the displaced elements of class struggle.

## CONCLUSION

Žižek’s model of psychoanalytic ideological critique allows us to focus interpretations of films on the displacement of class struggle as the Real, traumatic element that resists symbolization. What sets a Žižekian interpretation of film apart from a cognitivist approach is, thus: (1) a focus on ideological displacement (as opposed to representation); and, (2) a focus on class struggle (the social Real) as the hidden, displaced, content of the text.

Although the focus I have presented is centered on film content, it is still important to consider the relation between films and spectators. While the work of early film theory attempted to do so, they ultimately failed by not taking into consideration the level of the Lacanian Real. A focus on the Real allows us to ask questions about the displacement of class struggle in ideology. However, a focus on content must be supplemented with a focus on spectatorship. Although early film theory over-theorized the subject-position of the ideal film spectator, this should not excuse film theory from a focus on spectatorship; and, while the cognitivist approach seems to consider the conscious responses of viewers towards film content, a psychoanalytic critique of ideology is still necessary in order to understand the function of ideology and its role in unconscious distortions of popular authentic content of particular social groups for the benefit of the ruling class. In other words, a psychoanalytic critique of ideology in film has to begin to understand the cynical response to films: that is, the response which disavows the film reality, the fantasy – “it’s only a movie!” – and helps to structure social reality.

Even when spectators are engaged with the most politically potent films, a psychoanalytic critique of ideology has to ask: what is the fetish that enables subjects to disavow the hard reality of struggle presented (or displaced) in the film? How, in other words, does the film fantasy, like the dream fantasy, effectively construct reality for the subjects of contemporary capitalist society? Part of this answer requires further elaboration of the relation between the Real and the Lacanian *objet petit a* (the object-cause of desire). If the Real represents an inherent impossibility (class struggle, which represents society as an impossible universal totality), what is its relation to the externalized obstacle onto which this impossibility is displaced (i.e. capital as *objet petit a*)? It is here that a Žižekian analysis of film has to make the link between “gaze” as *objet a* in the scopic (visual) field, and the fantasy that displaces class struggle onto some other externalized obstacle. This is one particular direction for further inquiries into Žižek’s psychoanalytic critique of ideology. A psychoanalytic critique of ideology, particularly in contemporary capitalist society, must begin to understand the relation between capital (as *objet petit a*, externalized obstacle) and class struggle (Real), and the way in which they are displaced onto non-class struggles (such as the contemporary American led “War on Terror”). This is something that should be addressed through interpretations of films (since they are pieces of ideology).

Thus, while here I have focused on the displacement of the Real, further interpretation of Žižekian analysis must focus on the relevance of the *objet petit a* and the fantasy-constructs that displace capital with some other fetish, or externalized obstacle (such as the bourgeois, middle-class, notion of “love,” i.e. love story, or the science fiction notion of the “alien invader”). The film fantasy, like

the dream fantasy, constructs the reality of a universal, totality (of *inclusion, without exclusion*) by displacing the Real in social life, and it is only through this displacement that the ruling class can present society as a unified whole.

While critics of Žižek focus on his hermeneutic use of films, to explain Lacanian theory, I argue, in contrast, that it is his psychoanalytic model of ideological critique that is most relevant for film analysis. His interpretations of Lacan which use films as allegories of theory only help to clearly elaborate the relevance of Theory. The work of Theory is ideological critique, and it is the ideological critique of culture that makes Žižek's work most valuable for film studies.

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### NOTES

1. As Elizabeth Cowie suggests, cinema is the "dream factory *par excellence*" (Cowie 1999: 368). Toby Miller adds that: "the similarity between film going and dreams . . . is matched by a likeness in the texture of film narrative and the unconscious" (Miller 2000: 475). Todd McGowan notes how, "In dreams, we do not approach things, but things show themselves to us. This showing is what allows us to experience the gaze in the dream: when we encounter the gaze, we encounter an object that shows itself to us but which does not fit within our visual field. The form of the dream, like the form of the cinematic experience, makes this encounter possible. In both, the fact that things show themselves to us holds the key to the encounter with the gaze *qua objet petit a*. This is what the cinema offers us that we cannot find anywhere else outside our dreams" (McGowan 2007: 15–16). This is one reason why the ideological critique of cinema is useful step forward towards the ideological critique of politics. As Žižek adds: "Hollywood is literally a 'dream factory': its main function is to fabricate hegemonic ideological dreams, to provide individuals with the co-ordinates for their private fantasies" (Žižek 2002b: 240).
2. It is important to keep in mind, as Jacqueline Rose reminds us, that in psychoanalysis, fetishism disavowal deals with the question of sexual difference. For Rose's critique of early film theory on the question of disavowal see "The Cinematic Apparatus – Problems in Current Theory" (Rose 1986a). For Žižek's elaboration on the Lacanian "logics of sexuation" see chapter 2 in *Tarrying with the Negative* (Žižek 1993) and chapter 4 in *For They Know Not What They Do* (Žižek 2002a). Žižek also relates the Lacanian "logics of sexuation" to class struggle (see in particular Žižek 2006b: 82–3).

3. See *Looking Awry* (1991), *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (2008b), and *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan... (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992), and the film, *Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006).
4. Here, I am drawing on arguments made by Jacqueline Rose (1986b) and Joan Copjec (2000).
5. Jacqueline Rose makes a similar point regarding the distinction between the ideal ego and the Ego-ideal in the Lacanian Imaginary. As Rose explains, the ideal ego corresponds to the way in which the subject perceives what she herself was, while the Ego-ideal corresponds to what the subject would like to be: "[t]he ideal ego would therefore be a projected image with which the subject identifies, and comparable to the imaginary captation of the mirror-phase; the ego ideal would be a secondary introjection whereby the image returns to the subject invested with those new properties which, after the 'admonitions of others,' and the 'awakening of his own critical judgment' are necessary for the subject to be able to retain its narcissism while shifting its 'perspective'" (Rose 1986: 177).

To this it is necessary to add that the re-introjection of the Ego-ideal corresponds to the Lacanian master-signifier, a condition which allows the subject entry into the symbolic order. According to Rose, this introjection is a "symbolic moment" which is necessary for the formation of the superego. Žižek, in contrast, argues that the Ego-ideal corresponds to the Lacanian Symbolic, while the superego corresponds to the Real (Žižek 2008a: 89).

6. Žižek also addresses post-theory in his short essay, on Lynch's *Lost Highway*, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime* (2000).
7. It is important to recall, here, that Žižek refers to three modes of the Real: the real Real, the imaginary Real, and the symbolic Real (Žižek 2002a: xii). The real Real represents an inherent impossibility (fundamental fantasy in psychic reality; society in social reality – class struggle represents the inherent impossibility of society as a consistent, universal, totality); the imaginary Real represents an externalized obstacle that displaces the inherent impossibility (the Lacanian *objet petit a*; the Jew in Nazi Germany; capital as the limit of capital itself); the symbolic Real represents the leftover of the externalization of the obstacle, the Real in the form of the Symbolic "not-all" (the master-signifier).
8. Referring to the Lacanian thesis that, "the unconscious is outside," Žižek often refers to the famous line from the opening of the TV show, *The X-Files*: "The truth is out there" (Žižek 1999c: 89).
9. Molly Brown attained fame as one of the real life survivors of the Titanic disaster. She has been portrayed in several films, including the 1964 film, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, based on a musical of the same name. She has also been portrayed in the TV movie *Titanic* (1996), and in the films *S.O.S. Titanic* (1979) and *A Night*

to *Remember* (1958). Each of these films contains a scene in which Brown is situated in the first-class dining room.

10. For detailed discussions of Gaze as *objet petit a* in film, see McGowan's recent book, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (2007). For a discussion of Voice as *objet petit a* in film, see Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema* (1999).

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