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Performing the Real and Its Lack: the dialectical performances of Slavoj Žižek in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*

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Abstract:

This essay focuses on the dialectics of *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012). I argue both films translate into a dialectical encounter between cinema and performance. Each documentary's filmic texture offers a look at the shifting ideologies of the screened stage and critical theory. Both films use Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek as intermediary figures between elusive psychoanalytic/materialist ideas and performance. *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* does it in a glossy, beautifully filmed documentary, whereas *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* presents itself as its poor doppelganger. I propose here looking at the dialectical nature of both films through Žižek's performances: one of them evincing presentness and one a terrifying void. I will argue that through this lack and through the dialectic between the two, ideologies of cinema and performance emerge. The dialectic of Žižek's performances and Fiennes' films reveals the relationship between materialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic thought as well as the relationship between performance and cinema. Performance and cinema are entangled and when encountered in the two documentaries they offer something new leading to, as Žižek would say when discussing *The Matrix* (1999), "A third pill!"

When examined together, Sophie Fiennes' documentaries *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012) offer the viewer multiple dialectical relationships in flux. This essay focuses on the dialectical nature of Slavoj Žižek's performances in each film. The primary conceit of the documentaries consists of Fiennes directing Žižek's analysis of film, history, and popular culture as if he is performing in the film clip examples. For instance, when he discusses Andy and Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999), he sits in a chair that is made to look like the chair that Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, sits upon. Additionally, Žižek takes on aspects of Fishburne's performance. He does this with the many characters he stands in for as if in the original films. *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, is devoted to fantasy, cinema and Jacques Lacan whereas *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, is devoted to ideology wrapped in the revolutionary uniform of Marxist materialism. He begins *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* claiming cinema "tells you *how* to desire" and ends *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* by saying: "We are responsible for our dreams" (Fiennes 2006, 2012). This responsibility for dreams is crucial: dreams contain the potential for revolution--as does performance as Žižek demonstrates in both films.¹

The first way this essay defines performance is as an actor's interpretation of a role. He both is and is not himself; a dialectic opposition from within between self and character adds a tension to the performance. The second way this essay defines performance takes up Peggy Phelan's argument that performance disappears and "becomes itself through disappearance." (Phelan 1993: 146). I suggest that through his interpretations of the roles he stands in for in the films, Žižek achieves presentness--it is the quality of a moment in the now. Presentness and disappearance become two parts of a dialectic when considering the documentaries next to one another.

When Žižek's performance is positioned side by side with moments from film, popular culture, history, and documentary, I argue his philosophy translates

into a dialectical encounter between cinema and performance: he is both reproducible (as an absent image on film) and engaged in performance (becoming present through his very disappearance). Žižek accomplishes this using theatricality. Theatricality, here refers to a certain aspect of performance that has a largesse and self-awareness of being in front of an audience. I also mean theatricality by way of Samuel Weber's claim that it is a medium that can be installed anywhere, including within reproducibility (Weber 2005: 1-30). Theatricality builds stages wherever it goes. I have suggested interruptions of theatricality in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* create what I call a "screened stage"-- a moment when theatre, theatricality or performance appears within a film.² The result of the screened stage is both the presentness and, as in *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, lack in Žižek's performance.

Because Žižek's performance in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* creates presentness, it therefore, I posit, offers the emergence of the Lacanian Real (as defined by Žižek as that aspect of reality that is unfathomable, traumatic and occupies a psychic space other than the symbolic or imaginary) (Fiennes 2006). Conversely, I suggest that in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek performs the terrifying lack that he locates in Lacan's claim that a void exists at the center of the subject (Fiennes 2012). One is a film about how to desire; the other is a film about the ideology that structures desire and the invisible forces running the show that the subject takes part in creating and obeys. Both films use Žižek as an intermediary between psychoanalytic/materialist ideas and performance.

Returning to *The Matrix*, Žižek pays special attention to the scene when Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, is presented with two options in the form of two pills: the first pill makes you wake up in the illusion and the second pill makes you see the real behind the illusion. Žižek claims "I want a third pill!!" The "third pill" allows the viewer to see "the reality within illusion itself" (Fiennes 2006). This "reality within illusion itself" is unbearable to witness as it reveals the Real while simultaneously offering a peek at the ideologies that make up the invisible surface of the films. Narrative and language also cover the Real. When the Real is exposed it overturns the structure of reality in such a way that it is unbearable

for the subject and tears away their “coordinates of reality” (Fiennes 2006). The fact that Žižek’s performance is filmed, a deliberate work of cinema, also connects the “reality within illusion” to film’s reproducibility--its ability to seemingly infinitely repeat. Performance and cinema at these moments offer a “third pill” (Author 2015: 454-455). They oscillate in a dialectic between what is present and what is past.

I suggest the “third pill” is also Žižek himself--part Marxist Materialist and part Lacanian psychoanalyst. His performance consists of his own public persona as well as the characters that Fiennes frames as if he were in the film. These two types of performances highlight theatricality at the heart of the dialectic that splits Žižek’s subjectivity in two. Both cinema and performance form their own dialectic that Žižek is constantly negotiating in both films: his body overflows meaning at the same time as being void of meaning. Žižek becomes lack—that separation and emptiness. He does this by way of his performance of himself as if on a stage while on screen. His lack is expressed through his material absence from the viewer. He is an image, nothing more, emptied of all meaning. This emptying of meaning leaves the Real exposed in one film and ideology made visible in the other.

Žižek is able to repeat and he is also theatrical. In both documentaries Žižek becomes not unlike people at a midnight showing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) dancing in front of the screen reenacting while performing side by side with the absent images. The difference is that his performance is also recorded. He invites us into the illusion and “to see the reality in illusion itself.” Both Žižek and the audience viewing the film are asked to place themselves inside the film. For, in each, Žižek takes the role of analyst and analysand and performs a reading of himself and, because spectators project desires, them too.

Žižek performs alongside images of reproducibility. At the end of *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* there is a series of images of people stepping out from behind curtains of all sorts--crushed, blue velvet and red velvet. Žižek steps out from the curtains too. The montage of curtains unveils theatricality’s role in

cinema: Žižek's stepping out from behind the Lynchian red curtains offers his own presentness despite his absence. He becomes Lacan's subject who is "supposed to know" (Lacan 1978: 232). In *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, he is the analyst and in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* he pulls the curtain on reality and shows us the hidden forces running the show.

We can see these approaches even in the opening moments of each film. Each of the documentaries' styles is different. One, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, shows us Rorschach tests and a prologue where Žižek clearly states his thesis: "Cinema teaches us *how* to desire" and again that the key is to look for the "reality in the illusion itself" (Fiennes 2006). We see the sets that reproduce locations from the films that will be touched on--there is the swinging light bulb in the cellar of *Psycho* (1960), the windows in *Solaris* (1972) and David Lynch's iconic red curtains. The illusory aspect of Žižek's thesis is clear--all is theatrical, a show. *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* begins in the midst of a clip from *They Live!* (1988). No set up needed, we have been plunged into the reality within illusion itself. Two forces are at work: the Real and ideology. The collision between the two creates an opening. *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* does it in a glossy documentary, whereas, I suggest, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* presents itself as its poor doppelgänger. *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* has a grainy aesthetic quality derived from its examples. By "grainy" I am referring to the less than clear quality of the film's look and feel contrasted next to *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. The lighting is less seamless (despite the meta aspects in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*) and leaves Žižek in shadow and dressed in drab communist garb.

Part of the grainy aesthetic comes from the historical nature of many of the examples used--the film itself is grainy. The examples used in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* are by in large not from auteur/art house traditions and instead dip into the documentary and the actuality of history (rather the fantasy) by discussing the rise of fascism, World War II and also more contemporary events. The gloss of aesthetic beauty is removed to see the forces running the show. For instance, the film that opens *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, John Carpenters'

They Live!, has cheap production values that are easily recognizable in the fight sequences, quality of the aesthetic, and logic of the film which then rubs off on the production values of Fiennes' documentary. Its own graininess attempts to create the texture of ideology itself--to make it visible. The moment in *They Live!* when the hero puts on magical sunglasses and suddenly sees the truth of the alien invasion embedded within reality is a perfect metaphor for the two films. *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* offers the surface sheen of fantasy that conceals the Real whereas *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* contains the ideological messages that shape reality and fills the void: the lack within the subject.

This grainy lack emerges when in a darkened room in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek stands in the position of the Mother Abbess, played by Peggy Wood, in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* (1965). She sings "Climb Every Mountain" to the difficult Maria, played by Julie Andrews. The shot is dark, almost murky. Žižek, as Mother Abbess, analyzes the ideology within the song: the Catholic Church in essence tells Maria to be devout and by being devout she will "go forth and multiply" through her marriage to Captain von Trapp, played by Christopher Plummer (Fiennes 2012). The dark nature of the lighting in the scene offers the filmic argument that such things cannot be stated outright and instead must be disguised and contrasted in the stern but kind command of Mother Abbess and Maria's florid theatricality. Žižek's performance creates a void in the documentary where he tries and fails to become the filmic image. His own filmed image evinces a lack--he cannot truly be the Mother Abbess from the film although he tries. There is always the separation of the actor from character and of the film clips from documentary.

As a philosopher/ psychoanalyst, Žižek chooses not just to read or talk about his ideas: he chooses to perform them in an animated and entertaining way in one film and with a gritty sense of duty in the other. Yet, because he is performing he is missed--unable to be comprehended fully, particularly when he is part of the films he analyzes. He is what is missed despite being in plain sight.

This visible invisibility is the focus of Lacan's 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter.' Lacan recounts Edgar Allan Poe's story of the same name about a

missing letter. After none of the searchers can find the letter it is revealed that the missing letter is hidden in plain sight--the envelope has merely been inverted and the return address disguised. Theatricality is implicated in the revelation of the Real in the story. This disguised letter hides itself through the *appearance* of the writing. The envelope of the letter is costumed, an act. Yet, underneath is the real letter. In Lacan's analysis, the missing letter equals the subject's missed encounter with the Real (1999: 30). In the documentaries, Žižek becomes the letter within which is hidden an encounter with the Real. Both the fantasy of the encounter and ideology that covers it are present in the films. The only escape from the deadlock between the two is death of the subject or, in a revolutionary take, the death of the big Other.

Recall how Žižek sits in the chair Morpheus inhabits in *The Matrix*. It is a film obsessed with systems of reproducibility and presentness. They are linked by way of the Real and concealed by ideology. In *The Matrix* the characters are unable to apprehend reality fully and when they do, they go "down the rabbit hole" into the void that exposes the harsh reality of the Real. We can see this in the many of shots of the matrix as a white screen--an inescapable void that holds the illusion of another world-- filled in by the subject. The white screen is projectable upon and therefore holds many subjective gazes. The matrix to Žižek is many things: the big Other, lack, fantasy and ideology depending on how you view it. When Neo learns the trick of the "rabbit hole" of the matrix, he is exposed to a system that is so total an illusion that it appears as reality to the subjects embedded within it. Crucially, Morpheus and Trinity, played by Carrie-Anne Moss, both show Neo the way to spot the system of the matrix by looking for repetition. Neo sees what seems to be a real moment of a black cat running through an alley. Suddenly this scene repeats. Neo thinks he has experienced déjà vu. The supposedly live moment and its repetition are exact frame-by-frame duplicates. It is revealed to be a repetitive glitch in the system. As the system's program updates, the material fiber of the matrix briefly becomes visible. The repetition demonstrates excess in the system and that there is a crack in its façade. Some element that cannot be incorporated in the system returns as

repetition and therefore becomes a void that reality covers. The matrix can only reveal itself through moments of this void that is both surplus and emptiness. In this case, surplus represents an overflow of the system shown in the uncanny repetition of an image. In this repetition and the dialectic between the real and the simulated, the system reveals itself to be a fake.

By looking to such repetitions, different theories of lack and surplus that relate to notions of reproducibility and “reality” become visible. Žižek sees that *The Matrix* directly relates to the Real in its very impossibility of being seen except in certain glitches of the system (Wright 2004). Žižek’s performance in both *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* and *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* can be thought of as a kind of repetitive glitch in the cinematic system that allows reproducibility itself to be revealed through performance. As Morpheus, Žižek holds possibility in his hands. Later we see him at the center of a white screen inviting his void to be filled in by the spectator’s desires (Author 2015: 455). Desire drives the fantasy which creates a narrative around the lack of the white screen.

In *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* Žižek makes fun of the need by the viewer to project desires upon him. In a scene made to look like *They Live!*, he sits and theorizes about ideology in the beauty salon just as in the film, aliens, disguised as women, sit and have their hair and nails manicured. Žižek places himself in the position as an alien. Above his head is a sign that reads “No thought.” Part joke--pointing to a lack in Žižek--and part deadly serious-- thought adds up to a big zero, no thought. Here is where the symbolic fails. We are watching him think and yet ideologically his discourse is that of “no thought”. The ego ultimately is always incomplete: a void. The hidden message of ideology that *They Live!* captures posits ideology in two ways: invisible and enjoyable. Banal spaces of lack and fantasies, theatrical in their surplus frame the binary. The subject is caught between guilt for not enjoying enough and the sublime Real that emerges in fantasy.

Reality, embedded within the fantasy, drives the performance. As Žižek argues, “Coke is the Real Thing” in that its function makes you thirsty; it is a self-

perpetuating commodity that leads one to drink more coke. The lack is countered by its surplus: the “Real Thing” is the frenetic excess of its commercials. Fiennes cuts to the energetic explosion of youth and music. Colors are flashing everywhere in the red and white room on the brightly lit set and people dressed hip (for the time) do backflips excessively joyful about Coke’s “real”-ness. Žižek argues that when we are relentlessly obliged to enjoy as if it were a duty there is a “melancholic loss of desire” (Fiennes 2012). We cover this desire through theatricality like that featured in the commercial. Žižek climbs up a desert dune to at the top of which he enjoys his Real thing--Coke. He performs the desire in our place. A desire whose only purpose is to create more desire.

The first layer of the Real in relation to ideology is located in the subject and the subject’s desire (excess) and void (lack). This is what Žižek builds upon in the first part of *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* when he singles out the Marx brothers as examples of id, ego and super-ego. The subject is split by and for desire. Harpo’s silent antics verge on the childish and evil at the same time--his silence drives deep into the silence of the id itself. The ego, Chico, tries to live by the symbolic rules of society, whereas Groucho is the super-ego--that fast-talking-insult-machine. The split of the self constitutes itself through drives and desire. Yet, as *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* argues, ideology itself is the second layer that does not just respond to drives and desire, but makes the structure of their forms into our dreams. Žižek seemingly placed within the films performs the revolutionary potential of dreams and fantasies. Using a dialectic between Lacan and Marx, performance and cinema, the Real and lack, he demonstrates the way to see ideology and fantasy as intertwined. Our fantasies, he seems to claim, are our ideologies. To see this is painful and traumatic. It also leads to a similar kind of disappearance as performance, the dissolving of the ego. This dissolving of the ego points to the fact that: "The subject is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to the field of the Other." (Lacan 1988: 188). The problem is that we, the audience, don’t want to put on the sunglasses from *They Live!* that show the reality behind reality; the sunglasses let the wearer see the truth of dreams and their consequences along with the wearer’s complicity in

them.

The complicity of the subject is enacted in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, when Žižek asks of James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997): "what does the wreck stand for?" (Fiennes 2012). He points to the fact that the sinking happened in society of glitz, unaware of the impending world wars. For this reason, the ruin of *Titanic* has an excess of meanings. In it, Žižek points to the sacred and obscene overlap in a kind of petrified enjoyment that contains a grimace of pleasure and pain. Fiennes places Žižek in the lifeboat where the characters that survive the ship's sinking try to stay alive while floating in the frigid water. Žižek says, "I am in a scene from James Cameron's *Titanic*" (Fiennes 2012). He places himself within the film not as an outsider, but as an active agent in its drama. He cites the film as a supreme case of ideology. Žižek once again casts himself as a kind of junk that needs to be used and disposed of in capitalism. The ideology of the status quo uses the character to wring its emotional center and create the fantasy that one longs for one's waste.

Žižek calls *Titanic*, a kind of "Hollywood Marxism," complete with fake concern for the working class. The first class passengers are portrayed as verging on evil. He asks: "What role does the iceberg play in development of the love story?" (Fiennes 2012). The answer is cynical: the true problem is that the love affair will fade away. To Žižek, the function of Jack, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, in the film is to support and reinvigorate the ego of Rose, played by Kate Winslet. The film is a new version of an upper class myth of how they look to the lower class as containing a kind of life energy that revives them enough so that they then can go back to their upper class lives. It is precisely when the two decide to stay together that the iceberg hits. The iceberg creates a seeming possibility of utopia of class equality, yet, of course, Jack dies, leaving Rose able to go back to her upper class life and return restored and changed with her encounter with "the other". To Žižek, the love story in the film is just a trap to open us up for conservative message that rich people revitalize themselves by using the energy of poor people.

Ideology itself is trumped when at the end of *The Pervert's Guide Ideology*,

staged as a surprise, Žižek exclaims, “All ice in the world cannot kill a true idea” (Fiennes 2012). Žižek rises from the depths of the water with his fist raised up in a defiant gesture. Fiennes has reimagined the moment from *Titanic* when Jack dies and is let go into the water by Rose thus reclaiming her “natural” upper class way of life. Žižek becomes a revolutionary urging us to fight, not drown and disappear. Žižek performs this through a gesture of force. To Žižek and Fiennes, ideas, particularly dialectical ideas, have the potential to be revolutionary and combat prevailing ideologies. In many ways the film is a blueprint for a way of thinking that allows one to make visible the normally invisible ideological state of things. This visibility, like an analysand in psychoanalysis, makes conscious what is normally under the surface running the show--much like the unconscious. In this way the dialectic between the two films shows itself to be very much two sides of the same coin. On one side, psychoanalytic thought offers a way out from the tyranny of the big Other; on the other side, seeing ideological currents that structure our daily social reality allows a subject to subvert, revolutionize, or at least become aware of the reality within illusion and the dangers of our fantasies.

The surfacing of ideology at times takes a turn towards theatricality. In *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, Fiennes edits together moments from Stalinist musicals. Workers are pictured gathering hay in wide brightly lit shots. The scene is theatrical--the emotions expressed by the workers are joyful and expressive. The Stalinist musical's surface is bright, hopeful and covering the Real of the ideology below. Workers are shown reveling in tilling the soil and making hay. Under these scenes could be said to be the invisible command: “work and enjoy”. Ideology and desire are intertwined and cannot easily be severed. The same can be said for the Hollywood musical, certainly the most theatrical of the cinematic genres, which performs to conceal the hidden ideology running the show. Songs are the ruptures of the ideology. In real life these moments threaten great violence. Žižek comments: “Every violent acting out is a sign that there is something that cannot be said in words” (Fiennes 2012). Not having access to language is a signal from the Real that expresses itself in action, in performance.

This idea goes even further in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* when Žižek turns from historical propaganda to *West Side Story* to gritty 1970s American cinema, tracing the violence that comes from subsisting outside the dominant ideology. Žižek looks to Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), a film obsessed with exclusion and suicidal violence directed outward. Travis, played by Robert DeNiro and his exclusion from capital ideology wants to stand "up to the scum" and save Iris, a prostitute, played by Jodi Foster (Fiennes 2012). Travis, according to Žižek, is bothered by his fantasies of her. Pointedly Žižek claims fantasies are the central stuff that ideology is made from. The subject imagines being desired by others. Violence, to Žižek, is basically suicidal--outburst of violence to self--in what in yourself chains or ties you to the ruling ideology. Žižek places himself in Travis' cot. He folds his arms behind his neck, just like Travis does in the film. Taking the violent character's position, with the same overhead shot in the film as Travis dies after his rampage, Žižek once again performs thought by becoming the very dialectical set of oppositions that he discusses. Žižek stages the deadlock and performs as the victim of the suicidal violence.

The violence of exclusion litters history, as the documentary soon shows by showing a clip of Adolf Hitler's arrival by plane in Nuremberg in Leni Riefenstahl's documentary *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Žižek claims that the film performs the fascist dream: "to have cake and eat it too" (Fiennes 2012). Žižek describes his thesis on Fascism as if sitting in Adolf Hitler's seat the plane. Fiennes stages him exiting the door of the plane just as Hitler did, putting himself into the free floating ideological position of the fascist big Other. Performing in Hitler's place, Žižek acts the part taking on ideology itself. By positioning himself in such a way, he performs the part of the film that does not take place in the long shot of the plane's approach--the point of view of Hitler and the reality of his past presentness. The danger of film itself is approached when considering the ideological role that the documentary played in history. The flickering stuff of film's dreams can lead astray.

Yet, matter, the stuff of the world plays a role in ideology as well. During *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, the subject turns to Andrei Tarkovsky's films,

Žižek points to his use of form that represents something singular in the world of cinema. While he narrates about Tarkovsky's materialism of pre-narrative density we see a shot of water from a Tarkovsky film, the objects half-buried in the sand. This is a materialism of time itself. Cinema by way of Tarkovsky creates a material presentness. We see this in both its theatricality and the materiality of Tarkovsky. The world contains things that perform onscreen. We see time in Tarkovsky's films through the texture of matter. Time emerges as we watch Žižek's performance gradually disappear.

Žižek often is shown in the midst of disappearance. For example, in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek sits in an airplane junkyard in Mojave Desert. He titles it the other side of capitalism (which is all the time in crisis) its tremendous amount of waste. Žižek claims we should leave it as it is by invoking Walter Benjamin talking about history: "we experience history when we see waste of culture overtaken by nature" (Fiennes 2012). Žižek becomes the waste in the desert. He is the abandoned plane: our reminder of time and history. Žižek sits in abandoned airplanes while discussing ideology, lingers over Tarkovsky images of submerged objects while conjuring time and where once he played Hitler emerging to crowds of fanatical supporters, now he plays at being the abandoned junk of the 20th century.

The subject too can become the abandoned junk thrown away by society. In Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), military discipline means following rules and becoming a killing machine or disposable. Žižek ponders on a representation of the latrine toilet where Pvt. Leonard 'Gomer Pyle' Lawrence, played by Vincent D'onofrio, shoots his sergeant, played by R. Lee Ermey and then himself. His brains splatter the wall behind where Žižek's sits squarely on the (toilet) seat of the insane soldier. He mutters, "Why then will I soon shoot myself." Žižek becomes implicated in the performance, losing his own distance between himself and the character. He then clearly defines the problem: "If you identify with it too much, believe the ideological content, it becomes the voice of super ego. You kill the self" (Fiennes 2012). The shot then jumps from Žižek, to the shot in *Full Metal Jacket* when the private kills his sergeant then himself.

Fiennes once again kills Žižek metaphorically as he expresses the urgency of the ideas. The lack and the presentness of his performance happen all at once, leading to a dialectic perpetually deadlocked. This deadlock suspends any emergence of synthesis. Part of the dialectic occurs within each of the films' positioning of performance and cinema--Žižek performs creating presentness and is simultaneously absent, a lack . Additionally, there is the dialectic between the two documentaries--the tension between the Real and lack maintains the tension in Žižek's analysis.

This deadlock arises in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* when Žižek dwells on the Silencio Café scene in Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* (2001). In the scene a woman sings then falls to the ground and her voice continues. The "live" performance is recorded. The stage within the film operates as a space where time is fluid. Its houses performances that enact the complexity at the heart of being real and absent simultaneously. Instead of Tarkovsky's objects that merge with the earth, we have time as a stage. Somehow the stage is both limit and infinity. Žižek's presence on the stage frames a moment of theatricality both cinematic and performed. He becomes the master of ceremonies slowly but surely stripping the subject bare and revealing the Real in all its unfathomability. Describing Lynch's movies Žižek says: "When [fire] is hot it is *really* hot" (Fiennes 2006). This disturbing over-proximity of Lynch's fire reveals the surplus of the Real. However, its opposite, lack, makes Žižek perform its disappearing act. Žižek both there and not.

Ultimately, Žižek's performance circles around this question of presentness and absence. In *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* Žižek reminds us what Sartre lectured in 1946: "If there is no God, everything is permitted" (Kaufman 1975: 353) . Žižek argues that Sartre is wrong, that "If there is God, then everything is permitted" (Fiennes 2012). When self-perception makes a person a direct instrument of divine will, all moral obstacles disappear. Totalitarianism works like that, even when it claims to be atheist in nature. To Žižek, Stalinism, although atheist, plants the ideological desire in its populace to be perfect servants to the big Other. Žižek defines the big Other as the basic element of ideological edifice-

-the secret order of things. Fate and divine reason can both be the big Other. But so too can a mother or a father or a boss.

Žižek then comes to the core lesson of both films: There is no big Other. Always in our subjectivity lies hysteria; it is the way we question our identity. Hysteria is a question of social identity. It is a question addressed to authority: “why am I what you are telling me that I am” (Fiennes 2012)? The hysterical position is one of doubt and therefore it is productive. Žižek suggests Christianity throws these questions onto God as a subject. Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) shows Christianity as a delegitimizing suffering alternating between anxiety and love. The question becomes: “What do you want?” Christianity resolves tension through love. God says he loves us. However, what dies on the cross is the guarantee of the love the big Other. To Žižek it is the disintegration of the god that guarantees that the subject has meaning and what is left is another question: “Father why have you forsaken me?” From this subjective destitution, Žižek intones, the subject steps out of domain of symbolic identification (Fiennes 2012). Because there is no god. According to Žižek, Christianity becomes atheist through Jesus, within which there is no point of reference that guarantees meaning. Fiennes stages Žižek standing outside on dirt as if he is in the position to see Christ on the cross. By “witnessing” Christ’s death in the film, Žižek places himself in the position to witness the death of God. The atheist position is the one that does away with the big Other and lives free to dream differently. Fiennes stages the death of the big Other and Žižek performs its agony and radical freedom. Ideology is made real through Žižek’s performance--particularly its revolutionary potential.

However, fantasy teaches us how we stop this potential. Žižek connects the death of God with fantasy in his analysis of John Frankenheimer’s *Seconds* (1966). The film tells the story of an agency that can be hired to give a person a different life. The agency makes a corpse look like it is the consumer’s own body and stages an accident. The agency makes the world think that Arthur Hamilton, played by John Randolph, is dead. The agency organizes an alternate life for Arthur. Reborn as painter Tony Wilson, played by Rock Hudson, is given

everything he wants: looks, sex and money. Yet, Tony misses his old life as Arthur. Haunted by his past, he goes the agency and wants to return to his old existence. Žižek makes the point that the past was erased of its material existence and a new environment was provided. What remains the same are his dreams--he followed his dreams, but they were the wrong dreams. Žižek muses on a stretcher like Tony when he realizes, to his horror, that he will be used as cadaver for another to be reborn. Žižek takes the ultimate position in his performance. Fiennes stages him as death itself--the very disappearance that makes performance performance.

To Žižek, right dreams venture beyond the existing society. Wrong dreams are idealized: a mirror reflection. Dreams come from unfathomable depths for the subject. Yet, in cinema we are responsible for our dreams according to Žižek. Cinema, through Žižek's performance on the screened stage that alternates between lack and surplus, gives the subject the freedom to change dreams. Ultimately, Žižek proposes that killing old dreams in exchange for new ones hurts and yet it is what must be done. Performance in this equation is key: it is how Žižek makes his urgency known. Cinema, through Žižek's performance, offers the revolutionary knowledge that no one is watching over us, the big Other is dead and therefore we can dream different dreams. Dreams through cinema make reality through performance. Žižek dances between the two--attempting to catch glimpse of the oscillation between ideology and the Real.

Žižek's performance becomes a void, where the "no thought" of *They Live!* makes his position difficult to read. There is a shot in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* of Žižek standing at a plane's exit door, this time just like Stalin, even wearing the beige of a communist uniform. Yet, despite his performance there is the question of whether or not what he is wearing is for real or for show. Is he acting? Within reproducibility, the ultimate ideological mechanism, Žižek performs the dialectic between performance and reproducibility, the past and the present. He concludes there is a space for a different dream. Žižek's rejection of synthesis leaves that space open yet unfulfilled. The dialectic in both films pivots between performance (Žižek) and cinema (lack). Ultimately, Žižek's performance

ends where it started with provocation to learn *how* to desire. He accomplishes this through his dialectical performance between the Real and ideology.

Notes:

¹ This essay builds upon previous work I have done on the subject exploring *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* in relationship to performance and theatricality. It differs by exploring both films and focusing on the dialectical encounter that they create when viewed side by side (Author 2015: 442-463).

² These moments that screened stages emerge are in surplus to the narrative of the film and as such offer a glimpse of what is normally invisible or under the surface of the filmic narrative (Author 2015: 442, Author 2009).

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