

# Freedom in the Clouds: What is Possible and What is Impossible Today

Slavoj Zizek, Professor, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

10/21/2011, UIC

Susan Levine: Hello everybody. Is this on? It's not on. Now it is. Greetings. I know many of you have been here for awhile and I thank you for coming. We're going to get started. Louder, oh, is it working? Closer, oh, like that. Okay. I'm not so used to this. Okay, welcome everybody. I'm Susan Levine. I'm the Director of The Institute for the Humanities here at UIC and we're very happy to have you all here for this the Stanley Fish Lecture this year, sponsored by the Institute and the UIC College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and we're very pleased to have our guest this year, Slavoj Zizek, who is coming from Slovenia by way of New York and we're very happy to have you and we're also very happy to have Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins back here at UIC. Welcome as well.

The Stanley Fish Lecture is one of the signature events of the Institute. It happens every other year and is one of the many public programs that we sponsor. In addition to the lectures by our faculty we have a number of other lectures, working groups, seminars and conferences and you can find all of the schedule on our website or you can pick up a brochure as you leave, but we have a pretty \*\*\*\* way of humanities topics ranging from the Forum for Research on Law, Politics and the Humanities to the Chicago Area Food Studies Working Group and many more in between and I also would like to invite you to contribute to our efforts, both by coming to our events and if you wish, by picking up an envelope outside and making a contribution to the work of the Humanities Institute. We have a—to play in—at UIC as a

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public urban university and we cherish the humanities in that realm.

So this afternoon Astrida Tantillo, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is going to say a few words about the Stanley Fish Lecture and then Walter Benn Michaels from the UIC English Department is going to introduce our speaker Slavoj Zizek. Immediately after the lecture you are all invited to a reception at the Institute for the Humanities. It's in the basement of Stephenson Hall and if you don't know where that is we have maps outside for you as well.

So welcome to all and we're looking forward to a very lively discussion this afternoon.

Astrida Tantillo: So welcome and good afternoon. The Stanley Fish Lecture is designed to acknowledge the achievements of Stanley Fish, who was our dean here in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences between 1999 and 2004. It was initiated by the then dean, Chris Colmer in 2005. The lecture series has had a history of prominent scholars. The inaugural lecture was delivered in 2005 by Frederick Jameson, the William A. Lane Professor of Comparative Literature and Romance Languages at Duke University who spoke on how to fulfill \*\*\*\*\*.

In 2007 the Stanley Fish Lecture was given by Stephen Greenblatt, University Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University on Shakespeare and the limits of hatred. Most recently, Judith Butler,

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Maxine Elliot Professor, University of California Berkeley presented on the frames of war. The Stanley Fish Lecture has been sponsored by my college and the Institute of the Humanities along with a generous contribution in 2007 by the President of the New Century Bank Fay Pentazelos. Other generous contributors have also supported previous lectures and we are quite grateful to them.

We are probably all very well acquainted with Stanley's stature as a scholar and public intellectual. I would like to say a few words about Stanley's accomplishments during his years as dean here. When he came to UIC it was with a mandate to put us on the map. His arrival and time here were well documented from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to the *New Yorker*. It was an extremely exciting time. Suddenly, people were talking about UIC and they were talking about it because Stanley was here and he had big plans for us. He received especially a lot of press for the academic stars that he brought to our campus and many of these individuals are still here and contributing to the excellence of this urban, diverse and very high energy campus.

What is perhaps not as well known about his years here is that it was not just about the big names that he brought out here to build our reputation. It was the high number of junior scholars that he hired. By the time he had stepped down as dean he had hired a third of our faculty. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is still very much the house that Stanley built. I've had \*\*\*\*\* to think about his legacy in terms of creating a faculty because this university, as many others, has had years of budget cuts and we

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have suffered significant faculty losses. The excellence of Stanley's hires though has continued to make itself known. Our faculty of bringing in substantially more grants and winning many more awards than ever before despite our smaller numbers.

I worked with Stanley while he was dean here and whenever I would meet colleagues they would ask me, "What is it like to work with him?" He was a great mentor as an administrator because he always saw the big picture of why we were here. He always ridiculed senseless bureaucracy and tried to fight it in every way and most importantly, he conveyed a message that is all too rare in academe. It did not matter what a person's perspective, political, social or theoretical leanings were. He hired people on one criterion only, whether they were smart. I have never met anyone as intellectually open as Stanley. He loved a good argument and wanted to hire in a way that insured one.

It is such a pleasure to welcome Stanley and Jane back to campus and I'm sure we will have a very enjoyable afternoon.

Walter Benn Michaels: So I'm going to be quick, but I just have to say one thing. I mean I've known Stanley for a very long time and he is one of my two or three closest friends in the world, but Astrida made him sound a lot nicer than he actually is and a lot and she made the sort of debate thing sound a little bit anodyne and I want to say it's really like that. In fact, it's not like that in such a way that you feel a little trepidation introducing Slavoj Zizek to give the Stanley Fish Lecture. It's like taking one very sort of combustible like

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substance and then putting it into some other like even more horribly combustible substance and you think on the one hand like you totally want to see what happens, but on the other you're not sure, like the guys in back you could be totally happy because you're not sure you want to be around when the explosion takes place.

One has one might say, both the impulse to get closer and the impulse to get farther away, a contradictory desire that is of course central to Zizek's own Lacanianism, although a relevant difference between say the \*\*\*\* and Slavoj Zizek's Stanley Fish Lecture would be that one of them is forever unattainable, whereas, the other we are about to hear. It will not be, however, or not anyway not only be as one of the four most interpreters of Lacan that Slavoj Zizek speaks to us today, for as he has shown in an extraordinary number of books and I'm just going to name four or five out of the—actually the list is so long you kind of get bored reading it. You just can't keep on going down. It's like a Whitman Catalog of a certain kind, but and I'm just hitting some high points, *the sublime Object of Ideology* through *The Ticklish Subject* to *In Defense of Lost Causes* and *Living in the End Times*. He is not just a brilliant interpreter of Lacan, but also a brilliant reader of Hegel, Marcsum [ph] and in fact, in one of my absolute personal favorites, which I completely recommend to you, his book *Opera's Second Death*, not only of Wagner, but even of Puccini.

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Furthermore, and perhaps most relevant to today's lecture he has become the central figure in the effort to think through the meaning of the ongoing crisis in capitalism that is currently finding expression in phenomena like Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party or more locally, in the renewed desire to form unions and the renewed desire to keep unions from being formed. In this context a crucial element of Zizek's importance and a crucial contributor to the controversies his work has provoked has been his effort to put class at the center of analysis. The controversy is both on the right where the only acceptable use in the US of the term class is as an adjective modifying warfare and referring disapprovingly to poor people's collective desire to stop being so poor and also on the academic left, whereas, it's chaperoned by race, gender and sexuality class tends to be an object of some suspicion, which is presumably why as a colleague pointed out to me in a discussion the other day Ernesto Laclau has remarked that Zizek uses class as a sort of deus ex machina to play the role of the good guy against the multicultural devils.

You know and Laclau says that like it's a bad thing, but whatever your position on these issues if you've been paying any attention at all that position has been influenced and you're thinking has been sharpened by Zizek's work. I know you all look forward as I do to his lecture Freedom in the Clouds: What is Impossible Today and I hope you join me in welcoming him to UIC.

Slavoj Zizek: Thanks very much. I am really glad to be here. My gratitude to all of you here who helped to introduce me and I noticed that there were

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three before. I consider it beneath dignity if only one guy introduced me. There must be a guy introducing a guy introducing. No, but seriously, I'm especially glad to be here because of you Stanley, because you know how I intellectually fell in love with you. Didn't you write a book years ago? I think it was a book or a text, something like why there is such a thing like freedom of speech and why it's good that you know.

You know like this is rare today. Even a guy that most of us definitely don't like, like George Bush, the younger of the president, but my God, when he did that wonderful slip of tongue, you remember, I think I was miss underestimated. How cannot you love him for a brief second? The second more serious reason that I really like Stanley is wasn't it you gave an interview and you were asked when you were involved in all those \*\*\*\* affirmative action and so on but what are you and you said much more modestly, I am a Milton scholar, Miltonist or what, no?

Listen, this is what we should speak to today. Don't be blackmailed by this idea which may appear a leftist idea, but it's really the speech of those in power today that if you are doing just abstract humanities, whatever studies they like to make you feel guilty like you know all these disgustingly manipulative lines of thought like you can just study Milton or whoever here while—and then you have a list—while children are starving in Somalia or whatever. Now this—you know what, this is an obscenity which shows all that is—falls in this \*\*\*\* capitalism because I remember when I was young it's true leftists were saying you live in an ivory

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tower while people are starving, but it gave me an idea that something is wrong with this when I remember some—a couple of years ago Bill Gates started to talk like that. What does it mean all the Microsoft programs when people are dying of illnesses? And then I got it what it really means when he went on. So let's forget our ideological boring struggles, capitalism, socialism. Let's just all get together and do something. In other words, you see unfortunately, the children, starving children of Somalia, not to help them, but the other is give the stupid \$10 to help them and stop thinking and a true leftist doesn't, although-

Sorry, I don't mean it personally that I'm not stigma, but it's not like that. I hope Stanley that at least we agree on one thing. The Marx that maybe we both like is you know which one? In 1870 or '71 okay it wasn't really the possibility of a revolution, but like it appeared to some guys maybe there would be a revolution and then there is a unique letter from Marx to Angus which expresses Marx's deep worry like what are these guys doing, they want revolution now, I haven't yet finished *Capital*, you know what are they—I mean that is the attitude and all great guys are doing this. The world was in turmoil, 1914, what did Lenin do? He went to Switzerland and started in reading Hegel's logic and so on.

I mean don't conceit to this cheap blackmail, which is really a new form to prohibit thinking. If you play this game of how can you spend money here when—no, you—this is the new language of power today. So this is why I really feel here solidarity with you and for another reason I feel solidarity because even when—this is

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a friendly gesture—even when maybe if ever I take power and if you are still alive maybe you will have to take a special one-way train to Siberia, whatever you call it now, but still where you are at the best is you know today we don't need this well meaning liberal school always like paint to you some light at the end of tunnel, things better. What is most needed today is just an honest description of a deadlock that we are in. It's already the old Frankfurt School guy Max Horkheimer said once and \*\*\*\* repeated it, "Pessimism in theory, optimism in practice". We don't need optimism in theory \*\*\*\* one. This is why, to provoke you.

When somebody asked me recently okay what is good, what is bad in Hollywood today, I told him what I really hate is this feel-good, so-called Hollywood Marxism, you know like *Pelican Brief*, *All the President's Men*. It may appear very critical. My God, the president himself was corrupted together with some big company, but why do these films make us feel so good? Because you know the ultimate message is so comfortable. My God, what a great country we live in where two ordinary guys can overthrow the mightiest men in the universe and my provocation was I'm sorry to tell you I prefer *24* to this cheap liberalism. I'm talking very seriously about the last season. I didn't see it all. I don't have time, but the end. You remember what happened there? Greg Bower is no longer this kind of a similar style guy who is you know this rightwing hero where the idea is him \*\*\*\*. Everyone can be a hero in the sense of doing good things for his nation. A true hero is the one who is ready to dirty his hands to torture, to do horrible things, but towards the end he is no longer that. He gets

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totally desperate. He says everything must come open, I cannot live with it and his positive opposite, at least \*\*\*\*\* the more liberal president also gets entangled in a deadlock, has to step down.

So what I like is that there is no—we put it—bullshitting. The series ends up with a radical deadlock. Within present coordinates it's simply practical, impossible to find an ethical position. Isn't this a much more sobering lecture than you know that feel-good liberalism and so and so on? That's the spirit we need today. Don't go into this blackmail like you will bring us—you are bringing us only the bad news. No, the good news or I claim, I hope we again agree here Stanley, the good news should be like things like dignity or whatever, which are so-called they are necessary byproducts. If you directly aim at them it's counterproductive you know. If you try to act with dignity it's ridiculous. It must emerge spontaneously for—so I claim that if there is a hope today it can only emerge as a necessary byproduct of our pessimistic analysis. It's not that you paint it directly. So okay, after this stuff let's go to work. Okay, I would like to begin with a wonderful quote from my maybe known to some of, I'm sorry, of my preferred theologian, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who in his novel, *The Man who was Thursday* ironically proposed to install a quote, “special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers”. Here is a quote from Chesterton: “The work of the philosophical policeman is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to coffee houses to arrest thieves. We go to artistic tea parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a diary

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that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed.”, and so on and so on.

This may appear ridiculous, but would thinkers as different as Karl Popper, Theodor Adorno, Emmanuel Levinas not subscribe to a slightly changed version of this idea where actual political crime is called Totalitarianism and the philosophical crime is content in the notion of totality? A straight road leads from the philosophical notion of totality to political Totalitarianism, so these guys claim and so the task of philosophical police is to discover from a book of Plato’s dialogues or a \*\*\*\* social contract by Rousseau that a political crime like Gulag, whatever will be committed, as we said when I was young, from Plato to NATO, to \*\*\*\* line. The ordinary political policeman goes to secret organizations to arrest revolutionaries. The philosophical policeman goes to philosophical symposia to detect proponents of totality and so and so on.”

It’s nice, provocative idea, this idea by Chesterton, but I think at one crucial point he is nonetheless wrong. We philosophers at our best at least when we are truly philosophers we don’t try to destroy the system. We just observe and bring out signs, features which demonstrate that the system is undermining its own premises, undercutting itself. This is why—permit me a brief detour through Hegel. This is why I like Hegel’s notion of totality. It has nothing to do—in Hegel, this notion with this kind of a theological large encompassing unity you know like this may appear to you something horrible, but if you look from it all or it’s just part of the

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divine harmony and so on. No, for Hegel to locate a phenomenon and to reach totality does not mean to see the hidden harmony of the whole, but to include into a system all its distortions, antagonisms, inconsistencies and so and so on. This is for Hegel to totality.

For example, to make a quick jump to today's global politics. To observe capitalism as a totality doesn't mean that I should be telling you some nice fables about global market, bringing peace, prosperity, democracy, but to include into capitalism also phenomena for example like Congo. Take Congo, which is probably the hell on earth today, a country where according to *Time Magazine* reported a couple of years ago five million people died in the last years for unnatural reasons, a state which even doesn't function as a state. Look at it closely and you will see it's not some kind of Joseph Conrad heart of darkness out of our civilization. As such it's fully included in global capitalism. Most of some components of our computers, which make them workable, come from Congo and so on and so on.

So to put it in more philosophical terms thinking begins for Hegel when the distortion of a notion like you have a certain notion, capitalism, democracy and things are not well, so we say no, they didn't apply it correctly, it's a distort. The distortion of a notion becomes a distortion constitutive of this notion itself. You demonstrate how something which appears to be just a result of misapplication, incomplete realization of a project is a necessary constituent of this project. Again back to Congo. The point is to

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demonstrate that it's not that some of us here in Scandinavia are happy to live in highly developed capitalism, others slowly will approach it. No, the point is that we here Scandinavia and Congo we are all part of the same totality.

What does this mean, this brief \*\*\*\*\* introduction? How can we disengage or rather step—acquire a minimal distance to what is ideology today because we are being told repeatedly ideology no longer exists and so on and so on? To give you a good example of how ideology and technology can be deeply almost inexplicably mixed with each other I would like to recall to you, maybe you've heard about it, a strange invention which was developed by Pranav Mistry, an Indian who works at MIT Media Lab. He developed a wearable that you can wear, \*\*\*\*\* that are interfaced again called Sixth Sense two years ago I think.

Allegedly it works. I saw the presentation on TV and so on. What happens here? All you need is—the hardware you need is a small webcam which dangles from your neck, a pocket projector and a mirror all connected wirelessly to a smart phone in your pocket. That is all you need. The way it works is that you as the user you begin to handle objects and making gestures. The camera recognizes and tracks your hand gestures and the physical objects using computer vision based techniques. Then the software processes the video stream data reading it as a series of instruction and it retrieves the appropriate information, text, images and so on from the internet. The device then projects this information onto

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any physical surface, which is available there, walls, physical objects, whatever.

What does this mean? Here are some examples of how it functions. Let's say in a bookstore I pick up a book and just I hold it in front of me. Immediately I see projected onto the book's cover the latest reviews, ratings and so on because again, the camera processes the image. The image is recognized and then through the wireless connection all the data are mobilized. They come back. They are projected or if I want to check the time I only draw the circle on my left wrist and the project displays a clock on my right arm or when I hold my fingers at arm's length to form a square the system recognizes this gesture as framing a scene, snaps a photo and saves it and so you see you have this \*\*\*\* transparency.

It's a magic universe almost and of course \*\*\*\* sexist as I am from my, I admit it, male chauvinist perspective I immediately imagined how such a device could transform sexual interaction like I look at the woman and the projector immediately—sorry, it immediately projected on her characteristics, no easy to seduce, but likes \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*, good at fellatio, whatever you want. It's very practical. You just look at it, everything is—

In this way the entire world becomes a multi-touch surface while the whole internet in the cloud \*\*\*\* is constantly mobilized to supply additional data. Pranav Mistry, the guy who invented this emphasized the physical aspect of this interaction. Until now

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internet at computers isolated the user from the surrounding environment. The archetypal internet user is a geek sitting alone in front of a screen oblivious to the reality around him. With Sixth Sense, with this machine I remain engaged in physical interaction with objects.

The alternative either physical reality or virtual screen world is replaced by a direct interpenetration of the two. The projection of information directly onto the real objects with which I interact creates an almost magical, mystifying affect. Things appear to continuously reveal or rather emanate their own inter-protection. Paradoxically this means that the latest technological ideas bring us back to the pre-modern universe in which meaning resides in things themselves. The gap between reality and meaning, the defining feature of modernity is undone. This is why Sixth Sense does not simply represent a radical break with our everyday experience rather it openly stages what was always the case and that's what I want to insist on.

What shocked me with this invention is that at its most magic it just brings out what we are all the time doing. Just replace the computer with the big stock of our ideological prejudices and so on and so on. Totalitarian to the consciously politically incorrect bad taste example that I gave forget about all this technology. If I am, I hope I'm not, who knows. If I am this kind of a male chauvinist sexist isn't this effectively happening when I look at an attractive woman. Would she like to do this? Does she like music or whatever? Or to give you maybe a clearer example isn't it that

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racism functions exactly like that? You see a person and the \*\*\*\*\*, the theological illusion of racism is that, of course not in a literal projection, but in a projection which is all the more brutal you see there all your ideological prejudices. For example, if you're anti-Semitic and the guy is a Jew and just simply smiles you see in this smile all the cunningness. Why is he friendly to me? What does he want from me? Man, does he want to cheat-?

You know so again what I like here, this is typical of the practice of ideology. It's how the more the experience is immediate and you can celebrate this like that guy Pranav Mistry does as the end of this alienating Cartesian, Descartes is one of the bad guys that I like you know, universe. I mean he is good here to be blamed for everything. All Gore, even blamed Descartes in one of his earlier books for all the catastrophes of ecology. No, because instead of this what should I call it, harmonious interpenetration between our universe and reality we get a radical gap between our world of meaning and reality out there and so and so on.

What we get here is an apparent return to pre-modernity, but nonetheless, which in a way is not simply to be condemned because I think what is nice in this example is that it's not that it's a fake. Now a traditional reactionary would have said no, this is technological fake. It's no longer through authentic pre-modern universe. I claim yes, it is a fake, but it is a fake which retroactively makes also the pre-modern experience something which was a fake like to give you a problematic example, this is I also think the catastrophe with so-called virtual sex. It's not that

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now we have virtual sex, once there was real sex. The problem with virtual sex is that in some sense you discover that sex always already was virtual. What do we mean by this? You know the popular definition of masturbation it is you do it to yourself, but with an imagined partner. Jacques Lacan, my favorite dogmatic point of reference once made a wonderful remark claiming that if masturbation is sex with an imagined partner, you're in reality alone, what if real sex has the structure of a masturbation with a real partner? That is to say the partner is there, but not as with all Judeo Christian theological weight, not as the neighbor, the abyss of another person, but just as a kind of a prop to enable you to stage your fantasies.

You are really with your fantasies here. In this sense what if our standard sexuality always is structured as masturbation with a real partner? That is to say you do not really relate to the other as other. You just use the real other as a prop to stage your fantasies. You remain within yourself and don't be shocked here. I'm a good guy here, very traditional. I believe in love. I'm not claiming all sex is this. I claim precisely a very simple romantic if you want this, is in love you do reach out to the other, which is why love is not, as this is usual mistake, love is not idealizing. In love you do not idealize your partner. Love is the magic moment when you are able to assume all the imperfections of your partner, but nonetheless all the magic remains there.

Okay, let's not get lost in this melodramatic point, but tell I claim that so when people talk about post modern, post secular world and

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so on this invention by Pranav Mistry is something which comes pretty close to it, that we have a kind of a return to pre-modernity but let's call it technologically reconstructed pre-modernity which again renders this fake inextricability between the universe of meaning and our perception of reality.

How to break out of it? The only way I think is what in structuralism we call the differential approach, differentiability in the sense that what matters is not only what you see, but what you don't see or don't say. What is absent is as Hegel would have put it, a determinate absence. It's constitutive of what is here. To give you an example, my God, the most classical one, you know we traveled from Silver \*\*\*\*\*, one of the \*\*\*\*\* stories, the best known lines from \*\*\*\*\* when \*\*\*\*\* asked an inspector do you remember the strange accident with the dog the last night. The other guy says, but the dog did nothing. This was the strange incident.

What does this mean? Where is the ideology here? Let me give you a wonderful—let me tell you a wonderful dialectical joke from Ernst Lubitsch film Ninotchka. In just a small short scene were the hero visits a cafeteria and orders coffee without cream and it's wonderful what the waiter replies. Maybe you know it. I'm sorry. The waiter replies, "Sorry, but we have run out of cream." "We only have milk, so can I bring you coffee without milk?" "Not coffee without cream. It's deeply true, although you will say, but that's exactly the same. No, it's not the same thing to get coffee without milk or coffee without cream.

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Here okay I'm sorry I don't have time to go deeply into the theory of what is implied here because why do we add cream or milk to coffee? Because coffee in itself as every commodity is not enough. You know as we say every commodity gets to have a certain magic like no, as they put it, Coke, that's it and that it's like when you fall in love with a woman. You never can say what it is, no. I mean that is elementary of love. If you can say I love her because of her legs, eyes, then you're already a mental accountant. You know like that girl has nice legs, eyes, that one has beautiful breasts, that one \*\*\*\* and then you say okay this one has four, five features, this one wins, I love you. It doesn't—it must be an X and this X as a rule I'm so sad we don't have time to go into this. The mystery of love is that this X should be a weakness, a failure, an imperfection.

I remember some—when were they still—in my youth—my God, time passes, some 20 years ago there were the ultra models, Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer and I read a simple stupid text about how people relate to the two of them and the result was that a large majority would prefer to live with Cindy Crawford and when they were asked why the answer was you remember she had a small mole here, they said the other too much anxiety, she is too perfect. You need a small imperfection and incidentally I'm so sad we don't have time to go into this because this is the problem with love today. If we will have time I will go a little bit more into it.

In our narcissistic era did you notice how love or fanatical sexual engagement are themselves becoming transgressive? Now you

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will say I'm bullshitting. Let me give you a couple of examples. Did you see the last James Bond film, *Quantum of Solace*? Politically quite progressive, to cut a long story short James Bond saves the Morales regime in Bolivia from some imaginary company, but did you notice something else? It's the first James Bond where at the end you don't have the sexual act between Bond and Bond girl? In all others you have. Now you will say this is one example. Let's go to the lowest of the lowest of the lowest, which means Dan Brown. Did you notice how in the *Da Vinci Code* you have Robert Langdon and the grand, grand, granddaughter of Jesus Christ? Did you notice no sex? And I even claim that this is why poor Jesus Christ himself has to be engaged in sex up there to mask, cover up the fact that there is no sex here you know. Like this is a very nice reading of *X Files* that a friend of mine, the British Lacanian Daniel Leader [ph] proposed, you know *X Files* all the time something happening from outer aliens. Why? To cover up the fact that nothing happens here between the two of them. All these poor aliens have to bang on our doors.

So what I'm saying here is that okay that is the *Da Vinci Code*. Then one of the big candidates for the worst novel of all times, the *Lost Symbol*, there is not even erotic tension there, nothing. Now things become mysterious. Let's go to *Angels and Demons*. There is sex there in the novel between Robert Langdon and Vittoria Vetra, but not in the film. Where are we? In the good old days of manipulative capitalism Hollywood as we say was adding sex to make things more attractive. Now Hollywood is deleting sex.

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I am tempted to link this to another phenomenon, which my good friend Alan Badu [ph] he drew my attention to it, namely, he read one of these—in a French daily newspaper one of these ads for dating and marriage agencies which goes like this. It works also in English because for falling in love we use the same word, to fall. It says some very precise. It says, “We will enable you to be se trouver, to find yourself in love without the fall, sans tomber” and that’s the point. In our narcissistic—this is why we like all these agencies and effectively I think we are gradually in a limited way, but nonetheless, returning to this pre-modern tradition of arranged marriages or dates, but okay, it’s no longer the relatives, but the specialists can do it.

The idea is the following \*\*\*\*\*. I mean falling in love is something terrible. Let’s admit it. You have a good, normal life. You drink in the evenings with friends, maybe a one-night stand here and there. Everything is perfect. Then let’s say you really passionately, with all sexual passion fall in love. You’re life is totally ruined. Everything turns around it and so on, which is why I read this today. I was shocked. This morning I flew from New York on United and on United their journal is *Hemispheres*. I opened it and it said there we are outsourcing work and so on. They forgot to add \*\*\*\*\* ones that we are outsourcing and then they claim isn’t it time for an active businessman or woman today to outsource love life and it’s the same idea, like we will organize all for you.

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I think it's too cheap to talk here about alienation and so on. The basic idea I claim is that we more and more fear this very openness exposure to the other, you know this moment of vulnerability, which let's be brutal, as you—Walter kindly mentions this class struggle versus multiculturalism, this moment which I detect in the topic of harassment. Harassment is I think one of ideological \*\*\*\*\* today. I don't mean this in any ominous, Stalinist sense. I mean ideology in the sense that you take a problem which is a real problem, but the way you formulate a problem mystifies it. Like harassment of course it describes a very real problem and I'm totally for harsh punishment, whatever you want, sexism, racism and so on, but unfortunately harassment tends to mean something more. Even its opposite I claim. Namely ask yourself the \*\*\*\*\* question, not what does it mean, but how does it work in our language against and so on.

Isn't it that we tend to use the word harassment when in whatever way the other as a desiring being becomes too intrusive, comes too close to us? For example, a typical French—I know \*\*\*\*\* here in France, racist today is a liberal. He will never admit he is racist. He will say oh I love blacks, they're music, beautiful, but and then comes the but.

Usually in France they say I don't like the smell of their food, I find this intrusive or it can be I think the classical topic on which Spike Lee plays nicely, his \*\*\*\*\* , his early movie *To Do the Right Thing* is music, no. Blacks are okay, but in this boom box is their music annoys me and so on or the way they smell, the way they

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laugh and so and so on and again what makes me afraid in this topic of harassment is that hidden in it is the opposite of what we don't—it wants to be. Don't harass me means don't come too close to me, so in so far as we read tolerance as no harassment it means precisely I don't tolerate your over proximity.

Okay, but back to coffee, where we began. So we have this coffee and it's always missing the key ingredient, the mystical one. It's like you know in the woman that something which makes you fall in love and I claim that this is why we add things to coffee because coffee is not coffee in itself. It's a little bit like at some point in California it was even prohibited to import them. It had to be smuggled from Canada and Italy. Do you remember? Now you can get them I hope, so-called \*\*\*\* surprise egg. You know just an empty egg shell like egg and then within a small plastic toy. I like this because it's kind of a metaphor for a perfect commodity. It's a commodity chocolate, but it's as if they're telling you we know what is your dream. In commodity there is something more. Well here you have this stupid plastic toy. Here you have it.

The true mystery of commodity I claim is what? Now you will tell me, of course, but what about those purists who like coffee, just plain coffee? Again coffee can be its own supplement. How? If you know the history of cinema there is a wonderful example from Andre Bazin, the French great theorist of cinema who said you know in the late 40s western, the movies, the movie genre found itself more and more in crisis and as you probably know the first reaction was to combine it with another genre to escape this crisis,

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like you know *Seven Brides from Seven* whatever it's called. It's western with musical. Then even a very good one like Raul Welsh pursued with Robert Mitchum western with film noire. Then the problem comes. What about two films from a couple of years later, mid 50s, two mega westerns, *Shane* and *High Noon* and \*\*\*\* proposes a wonderful theory. This are \*\*\*\*. These are westerns, but where this \*\*\*\* dimension is western in itself. It's a western which as it were relates to itself as its own higher level norm.

So let me go on. What am I aiming here with this negation and so on like negation inscribed into the very identity? I can give you another wonderful erotic, I claim, example. Don't be afraid, very modest. It's from the old English working class drama *Brassed Off* with Ewan McGregor before he became a Jedi, when he was still a working class hero. There is in the middle of the film a wonderful scene where the hero accompanies a young pretty woman home. They are flirting. Then at the entrance she tells him, "Would you like to come up to my flat for a coffee?" He answers, "Yes, gladly, but there is a problem." "I don't drink coffee." Her answer with a smile, "No problem." "I don't have any." You see nothing is said, just something is offered and then taken back, but the result is not zero. The result is an almost embarrassing obscenely open invitation to sex.

Why lose time with these types of jokes? Because I claim they offer maybe one of the keys as to how ideology functions in our allegedly post ideological times. Today ideology is not so much in what is directly said, but you must locate, let's call it the

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determinate absence, what is not said, but implied. You must find you are getting coffee, ideological coffee, but the true question is am I getting coffee without milk or without cream. What is there? For example, there is already, I cannot restrain from doing it because I think that one of the great spiritual catastrophes implied by the fall of communist regimes is the disappearance of wonderfully refined, sometimes political jokes. Exactly the same paradox you find it in a well known joke socialist Poland where you know things were always not unavailable, usually in the stores, so a guy enters a store and asks, “You probably don’t have butter, no?” The answer, “Sorry, no, no we are the store which doesn’t have toilet paper, not butter.” “The other store that is the one which doesn’t have butter.” and so on.

So again it’s always this question. You know in Brazil they told me we are a wonderful nation. When there is a Carnival all people dance together. Yeah, I told them, but you know there is a poor worker who goes to Carnival and dances there just to forget that he cannot properly provide for his family and there is a rich guy who goes there to dance so that he feels one with the people or whatever. You know what I mean, one is dancing without coffee. The other—sorry, without milk. The other one is dancing without cream or to put it yet in another way. Let’s take again this *Brassed Off* example. I think we can well imagine a similar dialogue where the charming, seductive girl is Dick Cheney from late 2002 when the United States were preparing the invasion of Iraq. Let’s say Cheney went to Europe to convince Europeans to join them in attacking Iraq and he told them, “Would you care to join us in the

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attack on Iraq to find weapons of mass destruction?” The European replies trying to squeeze out, “No, but you are better to keep—we don’t have proper facilities to search for weapons of mass destruction.” And probably Dick Cheney answers something like, “No problem.” “There are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.”

You know what I mean by this? That let’s be clear. I’m not saying here I support Julian Assange, but in a very specific way what he did is not simply to bring everything out. From the most personal level to the international level of interstate relations, no, no, one has to be refined. You cannot simply say everything. It’s an obscenity already at the interpersonal level. Even Kant, who is the philosophy who is the fanatic of say everything, never lie considers that there are situations where you are obliged to lie and he in a very nice way gives as an example, for example, you have a friend who is mortally ill of cancer. You will not tell him, “Oh my God you look like shit.” “When will you drop down?” You will tell him of course, “Oh, you look a little bit better.” “I’m so glad to see you.” whatever.”

So the point is what? That when you say something like this a lie or not saying everything the problem is in what do you imply? Here I think we should refer to again a wonderful scene from a Marx Brothers movie which is otherwise not so good, one of the late ones, *Go West* where at the very beginning if you remember Groucho, yes, it’s Groucho, Groucho Marx enters a train station and there the—how do you call it—office, whatever wants to buy a

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ticket and then he gives to the salesperson there a whole bunch of dollar notes and says it's okay, don't count it and so on. The guy nonetheless counts them and says, but it's not enough and Groucho says well I told you not to count it and so on. You see he said don't count it, but with the implication don't bother, everything is okay.

Can't we again use the unfortunate Dick Cheney and claim that you know he said in an interview. I forgot to which public medium that let's be frank, he was of course referring to torture and so on: "Let's be frank. To really fight the war on terror some things have to be done discreetly. Let's not talk about it."

Something like that, but then we discovered what was included. We thought okay a little bit of hard pressure and so on, but then we discovered that there were many other things included in this like he privileging Halliburton and other companies and so on. We can well imagine him telling us okay some things have to be done discreetly, don't look into them, let's not look into them. Then we will tell him, but wait a minute we have here your own private interests, Halliburton and he would say, but I told you we shouldn't talk about it and so on.

You see this type of—how should I put it—this type of gap is crucial in today's ideology. Maybe the crucial dimension is not that lying is not so much lying about what you say, but lying about the implications. You manipulate at the level of generating the wrong implications.

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Permit me another example from cinema that I often like to use. Maybe you already know it. I'm sorry again. One of the true acclaimed masterpieces of Hollywood left John Carpenter's *They Live*, a very naïve from '88. It's a wonderfully naïve story of an unemployed guy called John Nada, nothing in Spanish, so \*\*\*\*, whatever you want who homeless, jobless wanders around LA and enters an abandoned church and finds there some glasses, sunglasses, mysterious. Then he walks around the city, put them on and discovers that there are literally critiques of ideology glasses, like you put them on and you see the true message. For example, he sees a big poster, go to Hawaii, have the holiday of your lifetime and so on. He puts the glasses on and it says enjoy stupid enjoyment, don't think and so on, but like the true message.

Now you will say this is simplistic, stupid. It's not so stupid. I'll immediately tell you why the movie is nonetheless more intelligent than it may appear. The first thing I like is that to see the truth, the true message you have to put glasses on. This is already a good beginning because our common sense would have tell us when we don't see things clearly we have some glasses which distort. What you have to do is to take the glasses off and see things the way they are. No, no, no, you need glasses, which means to put it, sorry, in half Stalinist terms, you need education. Truth doesn't come spontaneously.

I think we have to accept this pessimist message, which is why in a wonderfully ambiguous scene of the film when the hero tries to bring his best friend to put the glasses on the friend resists and there is a very strange fight which goes on for ten minutes. I mean

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the \*\*\*\* precisely this difficult message that freedom doesn't come for free.

Another thing that I like here is that the movie turns around the standard ideological gap. In the standard ideological gap it's the true message ideological that you get directly and as it were what you see implicitly for what you have to put the glasses on to see it directly. What is only implied is precisely the ideological enjoyment that with which ideology bribes you as it were.

So I've written three books celebrating \*\*\*\*, so don't take this wrongly, but nonetheless, I have just some problems with this Catholic pedophilia, the shameless way they treat it and I would say let me imagine in the same way you see a poster, "dedicate your life to God, become a priest" then what would you have seen putting on glasses? "And you can have the small boys if you do it discreetly" and so on or let me do it a more brutal racist example.

Imagine—of course they didn't function like that, but imagine we are in the 20s in the south of the United States Ku Klux Klan and so on. Okay, you see a poster like "defend our Christian way of life" and so on, whatever. You put the glasses on and you read "and if you do this next weekend we can go and \*\*\*\* some blacks and rape some black girls" or whatever. I mean this is—and it's—I don't have time to go into it, but this is an extremely important lecture I think which already was understood by Theodor Adorno Frankfurt School and by others that totalitarianism is not simply terror renunciation.

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It always also bribes you with some kind of a false transgression like this was a wonderful discovery for me when I learned that Mikhail Bakhtin, maybe you've heard about him. He is the Russian fellow traveler of the—of formalists who in his book from mid 30s the work of Francois Rabelais celebrated this carnival culture you know the magic moment when \*\*\*\*\* are suspended, \*\*\*\*\* is beggar and all my leftist friends are ecstatic. Oh my God, it's like you utopia.

Unfortunately, a friend of mine, a Russian theorist of \*\*\*\*\* told me that now they discovered the archives of Mikhail Bakhtin who was exiled to Kazan, a small city and it's absolutely clear that far from celebrating carnival his book on Rabelais it's kind of a coded theory of Stalinist \*\*\*\*\*. The real carnival were the Stalinist \*\*\*\*\* where precisely today you are the king member of \*\*\*\*\* bureau. Tomorrow you are in Gulag, the English spy traitor or whatever and all of Stalinism played wonderfully with this code that way wonderfully, wonderfully in a terrified way.

For example, my favorite story of this qualification is that Molotov and some point the second, third guy after Stalin got into total panic at some point. How? You know when there was the big political trials it was very important to read closely what the accused were accused of because you get—this is the \*\*\*\*\* , much more interesting than Robert Langdon because many things you can learn.

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For example, when there was the—I don't know the trial against whom. I think this was already late Stalin, the Jewish plot so-called. The idea was that the doctors were a part of the imperialist plot to kill Soviet leaders and they were enumerated then, Stalin, Molotov and so on and so on. Then a week later perhaps the \*\*\*\* that now the investigation came to new results and again this list of victims, the ones whom the plot or strike to kill was printed and Molotov got into a panic because his name was not there. This meant he is not in you know because his name was not—I mean it's a crazy universe I admit it.

So let me go on not to lose time. So again what I find interesting in this glasses theory is that it doesn't follow this traditional way where again you get explicitly the direct ideological call sacrifice yourself, whatever and with glasses on you see the obscenity, small boys, raping blacks, whatever that you get. It's the other way around. The direct message is the obscenities, pleasure, whatever. The implicit message is the injunction which sustains it and I think that this brings me back to the beginning. It would be very interesting I claim maybe, to just imagine when you are not sure about certain humanitarian ads or whatever. Imagine you putting glasses on and imagine what can one read there.

For example, the classic example, you see an ad with disgusting manipulation, the disfigured face of a black, young boy and then the message something like for the price of a couple of cappuccinos you can make a difference, you can save his life. Okay, fine. Let's put the glasses on. Isn't it something? We know

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there is big injustice in the world, but for a price of a couple of cappuccinos you can not only not care about it, but even feel good that you really did something or whatever. That is the whole point I claim. It's the same as with—now I will be very brutal. You will not like it probably.

Let's take all this ecological bullshit. No, again, ecology is the problem today, but what is bullshit is how it is ideologically refreshed through this lifestyle ecology you know, trying to make you feel guilty. Did you recycle that can of Coke and so on? Which is—or let's go even further. Let's take organic apples. You buy them. I also do, but do you ever ask yourself why do you buy them? I claim that the majority of us don't really believe that they are any better than those beautiful genetically manipulated apples. It's more that we are buying ideology by paying more. It makes us feel good. Isn't it wonderful? Even when I buy apples I'm part of a big project to save the Mother Earth. I'm doing something and so on and so on. It's a wonderful way of \*\*\*\* activity.

You know \*\*\*\* activity in this sense of my friend Austrian philosopher Robert Fowler drew attention to this paradox of magical thinking today, you know the most stupid example. You sit at home at the TV. You watch your favorite basketball, baseball, whatever you want, \*\*\*\* and you shout there go on, go on. Of course you don't believe it, but nonetheless you act as if your shouting can magically influence the game. I claim when you buy organic apples you do something quite similar to this frankly.

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I mean again I'm not saying we shouldn't do it. I'm saying let's just be aware that when we are doing it we are also doing it to forget about what is really to be done and again I'm sorry if I repeat another example, but I like to repeat it.

Here the ultra example is Starbucks. I think they should be awarded a kind of a Nobel Prize, not for economy, but for literature or if there would be Nobel Prize for thought or what. You know why, because they did something quite ingenious. In the dark old days of ordinary capitalism we were consumerists. Then we felt bad for being consumerists and you had to do something against it, whatever, dedicate your life to big humanitarian causes, do something, whatever, but it is there was a gap. What is Starbucks doing? I love them. I love them, which means I would bomb them, but cannot.

You remember all the posters you get when you enter Starbucks Coffee House, like basically the message is our cappuccino is more expensive, true, than with the others, but 1% goes to Guatemala children, the other to I don't know, bring war—bring water, sorry, to the desert, whatever. Isn't this a wonderful thing? The message is you don't have to stop being a consumerist because the price of redemption, anti-consumerists' cry for solidarity we include it in the price of a commodity you know. So it's included. You can go on and you can feel well and so on and so on.

Okay, so now we have a problem. The problem is oh my God, I will kill myself. Okay, now I will do something. I will. Don't be in a panic. I will stop shortly. What I only want to do is to play

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this game. Let's say it's the end and the debate begins and I ask myself a question. What did you want to say in the remaining part of your talk? I will be brief.

Okay, first unfortunately I didn't have time. I wanted really to develop just an idea of what is going on today. The basic idea was already proposed by some economists that the role of being unemployed is changing today radically. It's not just the old Marxist notion of reserve army of labor. The system is more than ever systematically producing a large number of people who all of the sudden became basically for life unemployable or even worse, the big crisis in Europe with students. They are educated, but it's in advance clear there will be no job for them, so that we have radically to expand, change the notion of exploitation.

Connected to this I wanted to develop how I don't like with all the discourse, analysis and so on this notion of you know how we always like to focus on domination, how we are dominated, regulated and so on.

I claim that domination without exploitation becomes something all too ideological for me. It obfuscates the basic capitalist paradox and so on. So then I wanted to do something which I hope that you—I don't know why—I felt that it should be standing in your spirit, to show up how to obfuscate all this stuff, ideology functions. For example, my—one of the guys that I really like from Jean Pierre Defui [ph], the French theorists of catastrophes and so on has shown how continuously and injustice of capitalism.

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This is how ideology works its best, best, I mean and most efficient. Far from being an obstacle to the functioning of capitalism is what makes capitalism palpable and he gives this very simple example of for example, injustice. I work hard. You are lazy, but because of some irrational, unexpected market movements I go bankrupt. You succeed. This is what makes capitalism tolerable. From what point? From the point of resentment and envy because in this way I can retain my fake dignity. I can tell to myself oh that guy is a jerk, blah, blah, but that's capitalism.

It's all contingent and so on. It would have been much more difficult and dangerous to have a society where the success of people would have been really determined by their actual achievements, merits and so on because if then you are a loser then you are really a loser, no way to claim you know. It would have led to much harsher, which is why I'm deeply suspicious of the idea of intolerance. I don't know why I asserted this idea with your, in good sense, even spirits you know. Sorry.

The next thing I wanted to develop against the same line is that I'm sick and tired of this religious idea. Even on Wall Street you can see it. Oh, against greed and so on. Don't blame it on psychology. If anything, capitalism at its purest it's not a point of egotism and so on. True evil is not egotism.

Here I wanted to develop a wonderful theory of Rousseau where he says that egotism is not evil. It's very easy in contrast to what

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theologians are saying to pass from your egotist concern to the common good. With a little bit of reasoning you get it. Evil begins when, and this is the famous Rousseau distinction between l'amour des autres, love of the self, which is natural and l'amour propre, the perverted preferring of one's self to others. L'amour propre is not simply I want my own profit, but you know as they say about capitalism it's not enough for me to win. The other has to lose and that matters more than me winning.

The logic is the one which is maybe constitutive of my nation because one of the proverbial attitudes of a Slovene farmer is you know a fairy comes to him and tells him, "Would you like for me to give you a cow for free, but I warn you I will give to your neighbor two cows?" He said, "No, rather kill one of my cows, but kill two of the neighbor." You know like all this—in other words, my point was that we cannot criticize capitalism in the sense of oh it's greed. No, capitalism \*\*\*\* mean there are other \*\*\*\* unfortunately, was right. Capitalism has destruct. It's a perverted religious ethics. Capitalism says expansion; self reproduction of the capital must go on no matter what the utilitarian human costs and so on and so on. So you don't need any mega ethics. You can criticize capitalism precisely from a simple utilitarian standpoint and so on, which now brings me to my conclusion.

Now that we live in these times of turmoil and so on what would have been—I don't have the right to give any advice, but nonetheless, I will do it. Precisely the first attitude would be don't blame people and their attitudes. The problem is not corruption or

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greed. The problem is the system which pushes you to be corrupt. I'm here a kind of Brechtian, not cynic, but you know Bertolt Brecht, I don't like him too much, but at some point what I like in him is this implicit, very Protestant theology, which emphasizes the fall of man. His idea is you can't change man. Man is by nature evil and so on and there is a wonderful dialogue of Herb Coiner [ph], Mr. Coiner stories where a guy says people are manipulated by media, by newspapers. We have to change people, so that they will not fall for this manipulation and Herb Coiner, Mr. Coiner, the good guy Brechtian Hero says no, people are the way they are, you can only change newspapers, change newspapers, not people.

In the same—sort of the same \*\*\*\* fear the second thing that I think should be emphasized is that this moment here is a dangerous one.

You know my old joke how the system is offering us more and more a product without its—how should I put it—dangerous ingredients, coffee without caffeine, ice cream without fat, beer without alcohol and so on. The danger is that this protest will also turn into—and incidentally, that is my problem with multiculturalism, the official one. The other it celebrates its decaffeinated other, this shitty other with holistic attitudes and so on.

My cure against it was years ago when I was in Missoula, Montana I encountered a Native American, Indian. He gave me the lesson

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of a lifetime. First he said: “I hate the name Native Americans. What does it mean? You are cultural Americans. We are Native or what?” And he told me, “I prefer to be called Indian.” He gave me his reason. He said, “Because at least then my name is a monument to the stupidity of white men who thought they are you know.” Then he said, “I hate this patronizing attitude you know you have the holistic attitude towards nature.” And he told me, “I can give you books which demonstrate that we have burned more forests and killed more buffalos than you ever will do white man and so on.” This is true antiracism, not that patronizing idealization.

So again, what I'm saying is that at this point we should resist—they are easy to resist—direct enemies who say you know lazy guys who do nothing, they destroy property, American values. To them it's, I claim, pretty easy to answer like property. My God, I already said this on Wall Street. Maybe you know it. When demonstrators are reproached for destroying private property, listen the 2008 crisis if by property we mean what even Tea Party mean, not some financial speculations, but real hardworking people earning their houses then 2008 destroyed more private property than all the left united if we were just destroying property and so on.

So the other thing that you know we are one sense in a fragile moment and here and not bullshitting, I'm precisely not saying oh the first moment of a communist revolution. I am not crazy. I mean communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century sense is over. It was a

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catastrophe. Even I'm claiming that the only thing that remains of communism are the problems, problems of commons, nature and so on. Communists are well in the life today. They are willing. They are today as you know when they are in power the most efficient capitalists, no.

When I was in China I read a wonderful commentary where they said 40 years ago Deng Xiaoping thought only capitalism can save China. Now in a crisis we behave as if only China can save capitalism and there is a very serious problem here, which is that the marriage between capitalism and democracy seems to be over. What is really emerging in China, Singapore and spreading around is capitalism more efficient, dynamic, productive, destructive than ours, but which fits perfectly an authoritarian regime.

So what I'm saying is that what I like about these protests is the fact that a certain taboo is broken. To go back to my beginning it's no longer just we have to get rid of corruptive people or whatever. It's allowed to think that there is maybe something wrong with the system as such, but that's it. Let's be clear.

At least we don't have the answers, which is why we should absolutely resist that kind of a blackmail, which I call clinching blackmail. You know what is clinching in boxing I think. You don't want to be beaten, so you embrace the enemy. The biggest practitioner of clinching is I think Bill Clinton. You know here is his reaction to Wall Street. He said protests are on balance a positive thing, but he said, I quote him, "They, protestors, need to be for something specific, not just against something because if

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you are just against something someone else will fill the vacuum you create.” So then he said, “Support Obama’s plan for \*\*\*\*.”

But I claim this precisely is what we should resist today, not because there are some ominous plans to destroy this. A certain dissatisfaction emerged and let’s use it as a, as it were, zero level starting point to start thinking where no one has the privilege to pretend to have any answers.

I am absolutely not saying that we intellectuals know, although it’s incredible what a demand there is on this. I mean there are people, as you probably know, better than me who don’t take me seriously, but nonetheless, I got many messages where people told me, “Professor, could you write us a precise program?” “What should we do next week?” I don’t know. I mean so we intellectuals don’t know. Those who have programs are bluffing or are like Clinton and I’m not saying he is immoral. He just—what does it mean what he says? You know if you are a woman you know how this works when you are in so-called, which I think is a very subversive thing, hysterical outbursts? You do hysterical outbursts and then a man says, “But what do you want really?” This what do you want is very oppressive. It really means compelling you to translate your rage or whatever into the form of a demand, which is already part of the \*\*\*\* system and so on and so on.

So I think that precisely we should resist this. We should simply start thinking without delusions. We don’t know, but also we should avoid this kind of \*\*\*\* fascination trust the people, they

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know it. No, people also don't know it. Nobody knows. We don't know. People don't know.

We maybe know what is the problem and here the metaphor I like is that of Claude Levi-Strauss who said something wonderful about the prohibition of incest, that it's not a problem, but an answer to a question that we don't know what is the question and maybe this would maybe be the formula of what we should do. We should look at the protests as reactions, answers to a question which we should formulate maybe.

We cannot provide answers. Maybe we can ask the right questions and through this interaction something may emerge. Why, because to conclude just the last lines. They are maybe even known to some of you. I've already published them. You know the immediate reply would have been but are you dreaming, is the change possible and so and so on.

What is possible? What is impossible today? You may have noticed it is an extremely ideologically invested matter. Did you notice how on the one hand concerning technology and private pleasures more and more everything is possible, like you know the media telling us my God, I read on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October in Pittsburgh. It's pretty terrifying. Did you read it? It's the first time that the guy, a crippled guy already learned how to move his hand just by the power of his thoughts. They implanted some stuff here which is not even invasive, penetrative, but just reads the

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signals and after practicing for a month he can move objects just by thinking about it.

Now this is nice, but it has its dangers because our most elementary sense of freedom is my thinking is here, reality is out there. What happens to our subjectivity and so on? I'm not a catastrophist. I'm just saying we have to think. There are problems today, ecology, biogenetics and so on. We have to start thinking. The only way in which I am a communist if you want is only in the sense that the problems we are dealing with are the problems of commons, ecology, our commons, biogenetics, our commons and so on. I'm not saying oh return to Leninist Party, which is ridiculous. But what I want to say is that okay in the domain of technology and then through cloning we can become practically mortal, all these new organs, all these \*\*\*\* and all the obscenities that I like to tell here like I was told, I cannot resist saying it. In New York there is now surgeon who specializes in cutting a penis into two. You can do it with two—whatever, okay.

All this is possible, but did you notice how then, but when you say let's spend half a percent more money for healthcare, impossible? We will become uncompetitive whatever and so on. This is the sad thing for me how we can, as Fred Jameson put it, your guest also here, we can imagine the end of the world \*\*\*\*, whatever. We cannot imagine spending a little bit more on healthcare or whatever. And it's not \*\*\*\* impossible. Are we aware to what extent even today's capitalism functions on certain ideological prejudices? For example, recently I was in Norway and friends

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told me that there, and it's not any socialists terrors of social democratic government, it's simply part of their social pact, shared national concerns that in an average private also company the gap between the lowest paid cleaning man or lady and the top CEO is one to four, maximum, one to five and again it's not some state regulation. It's simply people somehow accept it.

So what I'm saying is that this is the problem as again Fred put it nicely. We can imagine the end of the world. We cannot imagine a small change in capitalism. So really now the conclusion.

In mid April of this year something wonderful happened in China. I love this accident. The government—it's not a joke. I checked it with my friends there because it sounded too crazy to be true, but it is. The government issued a regulation prohibiting in all narrative media, that is to say cinema, TV, TV stories, comics, novels, literature all topics concerning alternate realities and time travel. The official explanation was that it's too serious a matter, history, the great history of Chinese people to be left to such stupid play. Of course the fear is it's not good to allow the people to even imagine alternative possibilities, but I think this is a good sign for China. Do you know why? Because at least people still obviously imagine it, so they need censorship. The tragedy of us is that we don't even need this censorship. We already cannot imagine it.

So maybe, maybe this is the stuff of us intellectuals. We are not magicians. We don't know what to do. My God, but what we can do is just to use all these demonstrations, etcetera, to, as it were,

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open up the space for thinking, to widen the scope of what is considered possible or even what is considered impossible because I hope you Stanley would also like—we both share a certain—now we will both be linked for this, dogmatic Stalinist period. What do I mean by this?

For example, when people say democracy, blah, blah, blah, no, in certain things I like total dogmatism where let's take rape. I wouldn't like to live in a society where you freely debate rape. No, sorry to tell you. I would to live in a society where the idea that rape is something horrible, inadmissible is totally dogmatically accepted, so it's not even a matter of debate. If somebody advocates rape you don't have to—you know if you debate it you already made the Reagan mistake. You know what I mean by Reagan mistake? Reagan, this was a wonderful moment 30 years ago, 20 ago. I remember President Reagan was once accused that he is close to those, some people who advocate, who deny the Holocaust and his defense was a legendary one. It was no, it's not true, whenever at my dinner someone denies Holocaust I always fight him. Of course the question is what kind of friends does he have that he has all the time to defend that there was a Holocaust.

So what I'm saying is that at this level of what is considered possible, impossible maybe it's our duty to change, like maybe we will not be, at least not in this easy way, immortal, but maybe we can change social regulations a little bit because you know again to conclude with my standard line, remember the true utopia is not to change things. Unfortunately, the true utopia is that the way they

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are things can go on indefinitely. This is the true utopia, which is why we who without any communist dreams, new party or whatever, we who just want to open up the space of questioning a little bit. We are the true anti-utopians.

I'm sorry if I was too long, but at least you maybe understand now why my friends call me Fiddle [ph], not because of politics, but you know Fiddle comes, Comrades, just ten minutes of remark and then if he is very tired it's three hours. Thanks very much for your patience. Thank you.

Now Walter, yes, if you want to become part of our Stalinist club I hope you did your duty and distributed questions so that there will be an appearance of free debate, but you know.

Walter Benn Michaels: It's not ideal to actually give me a question. They planted a question, but I'm not—only to be used if no one else had questions. I'm up here just to say there are microphones on either side of the room and what we thought we'd do is just have people line up at the microphones and then go back and forth from one to the other. So I'm going to wait for a second to give people a chance to get to the microphones and if no one is at the microphone then I will have to ask the extremely obscene question that I was planted with and I won't do it, so just give it a second.

Slavoj Zizek: I don't know what game you are playing now.

Walter Benn Michaels: I'm not. I'm not playing. Here.

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Slavoj Zizek: Do you really want to ask the question?

Walter Benn Michaels: No, I don't. I'm done.

Slavoj Zizek: I think you are bluffing and you don't even have the question. Sorry, please, yes.

Walter Benn Michaels: It was about a dog.

Slavoj Zizek: Just I hope it works with sound.

Walter Benn Michaels: You just go there and there and I'll let you go \*\*\*\*.

Slavoj Zizek: No, but the mic. I hope it works.

Female: No, it doesn't. Okay.

Slavoj Zizek: It does. Perfect, thank you. It does.

Female: One of the premises of critical thinking of course it's reflectivity and it's the awareness of the conditions of possibility of and when you talk about this incredibly charming and of course I'm enthusiastic about it in a—more in a political sense and in epistemological one this idea of putting the lenses and kind of seeing the truth. I mean there is a fiction of transparency that we as intellectuals are able to unveil the reality, but of course we have to be aware of our own standpoint when we do that. So I don't know. I'm very curious

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about that idea of the sort of standpoint we don't have the answers, which I think it's something that I appreciated listening to you saying that in the last part, but this idea that there is a move of unveiling and there is an assumption that there is some hidden truth out there that we're going to be able to find and how do you reconcile that as a standpoint of being an intellectual with the reflectivity of actually being aware of their own condition \*\*\*\*\*? It's a relative condition.

Slavoj Zizek: It's a wonderful question. Again the only problem is that it's, as you admitted, it's a one-hour answer question. Okay, very briefly.

Female: Give me a short answer.

Slavoj Zizek: Very briefly, my answer would have been that the truth to which we do have access is not a positive truth in the sense of I magically step out of myself and see the things the way they really are. What we can see is the inherent untruth of what is going on.

What do I mean by this? A wonderful example that I really liked, for example, Jacques Lacan says somewhere something which has a male chauvinist, which I don't like that, but if you take the form of it it's wonderfully true. He says let's take a husband who is pathologically jealous about his wife sleeping with other men and he says even if all his suspicions are true, the wife is really doing it, his jealousy is still pathological and in this sense you know I'm not saying compare it with truth.

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I would like to apply this to racism. For example, I already did in one of my books to anti-Semitism. Let's say we are in the 30s, late 30s in Germany. I am a Nazi. You are not a Nazi. We debate the role of the Jews. The moment we formulated \*\*\*\*\* let's compare racist prejudices with the truth the way they really are. If you are the anti Nazi you so sell your soul to the devil because the true problem is not that of abstract truth in the sense of are Jews really like that. Once you debate about this you come to some kind of a stupid mixed result. Jews exploit the Germans. Well in some vulgar sense this was up to a point, true because, purely \*\*\*\*\* sense, because some Jews definitely were rich and you know or I don't know. Jews were seducing and corrupting German girls. Well I hope they did. You know what I mean.

That is not the problem. The problem is not is it true. The problem is why did the Nazis in order to sustain the consistency of their ideological project, why did they need the figure of the Jew? And at this level you can tell the truth. It's an imminent truth. It's a truth of what pushes you to say what you say. It's not the objective truth. In this sense I believe this is the truth that critique of ideology can bring out.

It's not objective theory of society independently of a standpoint. I'm sad that I cannot development, but quite on the contrary, what already Hegel know and what we should keep from Marx is that universality and parties \*\*\*\*\* in the sense of taking sides are not mutually exclusive.

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To go even further, and that's a great ethical idea I claim that truth is partial and doesn't lose because of this paradoxically its universality. In other words, when you have a complex situation of struggle the right position is not oh, you are claiming this, you are claiming that, I will step back and look from it objectively and see truth is somewhere in the middle. No, in the radical struggle one part, even if it's formally a minority stands for the truth.

For example, again back to Germany. You cannot say Jews were right, but they exaggerated a little bit. Hitler was a little bit right, so somewhere in the middle. No, Hitler was a lie, even if maybe. I'm not saying, definitely not \*\*\*\*. Even if you prove me that some minor things that he claimed he said about Jews are literally true it's still a total lie. So again I'm not—when I criticize ideology I'm not talking about some kind of objective truth independent of engagement. Truth is for me a category of an engaged partial category, partial, but nonetheless, universal.

Okay, I cannot go. I would love to, but-

Male: \*\*\*\* over here.

Slavoj Zizek: You are now opportunist oscillating between left and right. It's noticed.  
Please.

Male: This is a question in honor of the sadly recently deceased media theorist Friedrich Kittler. You were mentioning the Sixth Sense technology and to me you seemed to describe it as though this technology is

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somehow mapped with certain ideological like almost mapped by its ideological environment. I was wondering if you had—if you could think of an example where perhaps it's in fact the media that generates ideology, that maybe the causality might be reversed.

Slavoj Zizek: Now you caught me here. I don't like to bluff. Sorry. You caught me here. I don't want to bluff too much, but for what I know I think it is clear that it's not so much that there is ideology, but that for example if you take cinema isn't it clear there \*\*\*\*\* dictate historical analysis demonstrating how the whole idea of camera, cinema registration, the way we have it predisposes the typically modern notion of perspective reality and so on, which is by no means natural? Or to go even further, isn't it clear that what happened with this privatization of listening to music where listening to music is no longer a public experience, but more you alone, isn't this also a clear case of technology causing-? Although you know I'm here trying to be more open in the sense that I'm not sure I would totally agree here with Kittler, although I mean he had also he wasn't alone. He had some pupils who were doing an excellent job and you must know the irony how they were referred to, Kittler-ugans [ph], you know. I cannot resist saying it.

But what I want to say is that nonetheless I claim that the relationship is one of mutual influence. I don't believe that you can isolate some purely technological mechanism which is the zero level and then maybe it's retroactively influenced by ideology, but no, if anything, I claim that ideology has a priority, that there is no zero level technology which does not already materialize a certain

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set of ideological predispositions, but of course here ideology is not the traditional ideology. I mean in this sense of a worldview, blah, blah, blah.

What interests me much more is this let's call it Michelle Fucal [ph] , Fucal \*\*\*\* micro ideology you know as I did in that stupid passage, which everyone is quoting, but I'm horrified by it from the beginning of *Plague of Fantasies*, the structure of toilets, American, European, German you know. No, I found this—I may not tell you this story. You all know it, but what interests me is this ideology and apparently this disgusting, private ritual sitting, going to toilet you see were are there already in ideology, but so again this would have been maybe my prejudice that I don't—not against Kittler, but because it's more unclear how he means, but against this simplistic reading of technological inventions generating ideology. I think that the technological inventions are rather open and even if an ideology was a work in how they were conceived they can escape this control of ideology and so on. So again I would just render the things more complex here. Sorry I don't have a more intelligent answer here.

Male: Thanks. I guess my question is you talked about the financial crisis and also simultaneously a crisis of imagination. So the first part of the question is, what would it take for that to change and the sort of alternatively, why don't you start a Leninist Party?

Slavoj Zizek: Sorry. Why don't I-?

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Male: Why don't you start a Leninist party, like if it's absurd?

Slavoj Zizek: This is—I think that unfortunately, although it's much more complex.

Now I will do a little bit of self propaganda. The big answer would be the book that I've just finished on Hegel where I try to do the return from Marx to Hegel and this book it's a modest, short book. It will have just 1,200 printed pages, so it's madness, but there I try to point in what sense Marx and especially Lenin are in a way more idealists than Hegel. Marx and Lenin imply something which for Hegel is totally prohibited and unthinkable, the idea that a determinate historical agent like working class of party can get to know the general tendency of history. I can't be put in a more crude way. We are realizing historical necessity or in a more subtle way like in the \*\*\*\*\* and so on, but nonetheless, kind of a get to know the general tendency of history and then act as an agent based on this knowledge. This is for me what is too much already in Marx, especially in Lenin.

Now I'm not saying that we should simply go back to some kind of abstract decisionism, you don't know what you are doing and so and so on, but certainly I find problematic this idea of legitimizing your activity by direct historical knowledge so that you can say I know where things are moving, I am the agent of this change. If Hegel's idea of list \*\*\*\*\* cunning of reason has any meaning it is precisely that whenever you do \*\*\*\*\* things, do these things always get wrong. This is why incidentally I am also absolutely for Hegel's idea of cunning of reason. It's not a primitive theological idea, we do what we do, but some mysterious reason steers us,

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control us. It's on the contrary. The cunning of reason means basically when you plan something one thing is sure. It will for sure go wrong. Like there will be another result out of it.

So again, this is my basic. This is my basic problem, although Lenin again is here more ambiguous, even Lenin, but nonetheless, the basic idea of the avant-garde party is this one and I think that again, without celebrating the spontaneity of the working class. I'm not saying against Lenin that we should trust the ordinary people. No, nobody knows, neither the party, nor the people, but from there—but their gap should be maintained.

Like I always deeply distrust those who celebrate the wisdom of the ordinary people. These are usually the true elitists because you know the trick is that when you celebrate the wisdom of the ordinary people it always usually means that you are the one who speaks for them, who knows better than themselves.

There is a wonderful line in Orson Wells—you all know it—*Citizen Kane*. You remember in the middle of the film Kane is accused by a conservative banker who comes to visit him. Like it's horrible. You try to please the crowd. You evoke the lowest instincts of the poor. You speak for them, for the rebel and you must remember Kane's, Orson Wells' answer. It is, "Yes, I speak for the poor ordinary people, but are you aware that if I don't speak for them they may start to speak for themselves?" You know and that will be the truly dangerous moment, no.

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Sorry. So again don't you think that one of the problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was precisely that this idea went triumphantly wrong? I still think the beginning of the October Revolution was an incredible emancipator moment. I absolutely insist on it, but on the other hand unfortunately, I cannot buy the simplistic narrative of some of my \*\*\*\*\* friends that you know. Oh, if only Lenin were to survive three years more, made the pact with Trotsky then we would have a wonderful thriving socialist democracy.

It was an authentic tragedy. I mean maybe it wasn't inevitable, but we can see logically how it became Stalinism, but nonetheless, we should not—this doesn't take anything away from the greatness of the origins. You know what I mean. It's an authentic tragedy. In contrast to Nazism there is no tragedy like that. Nazis were, to put it in naïve terms, very bad people who said if we take power we will do some bad things and what a miracle when they did take power they did these bad things. You don't have this, which is why in fascism, especially Nazism you don't have dissidence. I mean nobody reproached Hitler of—maybe \*\*\*\*\* at some crazy \*\*\*\*\*--of betraying the inner essence of Nazism or whatever.

Again this is—but I agree with you. This is a very complex topic and maybe I exaggerated a little bit too much. I am not an irrational decisionist. I am not saying we know nothing. We should just act or whatever. No, we need knowledge more than ever. You know who is my hero here—maybe you know the story—I I excuse myself—of this false identity with ordinary people? Terri Eagerton [ph] told me what happened 30 years ago

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when the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm gave—it was fashionable at that point—gave a talk to ordinary workers in a factory and to kiss their ass—how do you put it—started in this in a way of listen I don't know anything basically more than you, it's not only the \*\*\*\*\* keeping you here, I'm here to learn from you, you know playing this solidarity with the people and then a miracle happened. One ordinary worker stood up and said literally: “Fuck off. You are bullshitting. You know. You are educated, paid to know. You should teach us what you know. Don't give us this bullshit.” You know this is the only honest attitude. This means not patronizing ordinary people.

So again I'm not saying we know nothing. We know many things we should, just you know this knowledge does not have this strong predictive let's call it performative form. There is a gap there.

Sorry again. I didn't answer, but that's life.

Walter Benn Michaels: One more here and then we'll-

Male: Well question here. So you remember-

Slavoj Zizek: Are you a Russian like me, Slovak?

Male: No, I didn't say Slovak. I said you remember that-

Slavoj Zizek: No because of the accent.

Male: -that \*\*\*\*\* called youthful idiot, so Russian—So Putin organized a channel in United States called Russia Today where all kind of youthful idiots

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described how United States doing very poorly. At the same time he already 12 hours in power put some kind of \*\*\*\* president and supposed to be president of Russia for life, like a \*\*\*\* something. How would you commend this kind of event of transfer from socialism, communism so-called to capitalism?

Slavoj Zizek: Maybe my answer will surprise you. First let me make it absolutely clear. I have no sympathy whatsoever for Putin. I've visited once Russia two, three years ago and I didn't know who invited me. It was that guy called Glad [ph] something who-

Male: Pavoloski [ph], Glad Pavoloski.

Slavoj Zizek: Yeah, who afterwards I \*\*\*\* my God this guy is Putin's PR man.

Male: He was fired now.

Slavoj Zizek: Really?

Male: \*\*\*\* then, perfect, okay. And this is why then I didn't want to visit Russia because I was afraid again of getting caught into some kind of game like that, but you know what makes me really sad it's relatively easy to explain how it came out the way it came out. I don't think—the truly sad thing is that okay maybe not Putin. The sad thing about Putin Regime for me and although it was the \*\*\*\* was different. It started already under Yeltsin is that the tragedy of Russia I think is that the way they passed to capitalism is to open up the field for the most nonproductive capitalism, your privatized

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banks, national resources, sorry, natural resources like the Chinese did it in a much more intelligent way.

They started with small companies producing for consumerist market, private, you know where you were able to slowly see how it works and nonetheless, ordinary people felt some—in Russia this is for me the tragedy. The whole structure remained inefficient. All that—if I simplified—happened was that some guys monopolized natural resources. Banks were privatized. It's horrible. And here I'm almost paranoia claiming maybe all the advice given to Russians by American economists were not so innocent. Maybe they said maybe we should help Russia a little bit to remain weak.

But you know what really made me sad when some of my friends were in Russia? How even if there is still very little I know, but some kind of freedom. You can criticize a little bit Putin, but aren't people more or less resigned already? People more and more I was told, especially intellectuals they really they accept it. It's horrible, but it's fate, probably nothing will change, it will go on like that and I'm just very sad for Russia at this level. I don't know what could happen. It's a certain—do you—maybe you have—this is what I meant interrupting you. Sorry.

Male: They are resigned in the sense that they don't believe that there is a legal way to change this regime.

Slavoj Zizek: Yeah.

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Male: Any illegal way what happens it could not be predicted. Everybody predicts this in 2 years, in 20 years, but it's all not \*\*\*\*.

Slavoj Zizek: But didn't this already start, this cynicism? For example, I don't have again any illusions about Khrushchev, but one thing was interesting. Wasn't Khrushchev the last moment of the Communist Regime when even if it all was a cynical fake there was some kind of belief you know we will maybe over take United—no, believe in we are doing something that may succeed?

Male: \*\*\*\* a miracle in 1980.

Slavoj Zizek: Yeah, isn't that with Brezhnev the game was over, not even Lamenatur [ph] , nobody believed in it, so this confirms my tragic experience in my country, which how more and more this is my personal experience, in ex Yugoslavia in the last 20 years. It wasn't only that the ideology was cynical in the sense of people didn't take it seriously. You were prohibited to take it seriously. I had two friends who worked in Central Committee of some cultural commission, whatever and they really believed in Yugoslavia self management socialism. They lost their job because the \*\*\*\* thought that like you know sincerely believing in official theology meant the first step towards dissidence. So and I'm sorry again. We don't have time.

I have wonderful—and Slovenia was a small country where everybody knew everybody well. So as a young student I was

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once there when General Secretary of the party gave a speech where he says you young communists should not only do theory. You should also follow the fourth \*\*\*\*\* of \*\*\*\*\*. Philosophers have only inter \*\*\*\*\* the world. We have to change it. Then afterwards I approached him and said please Comrade Secretary if you will repeat this speech be careful, it's the 11<sup>th</sup> \*\*\*\*\* you know.

You know what his answer? I know it, but that was my message, I don't care. You know then he in a nice way—and this is what really fascinates me. This is more and more—I'm sorry if I will conclude with an old joke of mine—how ideology functions today. It's not only it doesn't matter if you believe it. You actively should not. Like I'm sorry if a repeat this for the tenth time, but it's perfect. You know that Bor [ph] story. He was visited by a friend in the countryside. The friend saw a horseshoe, superstitious item in Europe. If you put a horseshow above the entrance to a house evil spirits will not enter it and he asks Bor: “My God are you crazy? Aren't you a scientist? Do you really believe in this superstition?” And Bor gave him a perfect answer. He says: “Of course I don't believe in it. I'm a scientist, but I have it there because I was told that it works even if you don't believe in it.”

This is ideology today. We don't have to believe in it. We just practice ideology. So thank you, but again, this will be a wonderful debate because I think—but let's agree in one thing. Don't you agree that the political jokes from communist countries

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were a great spiritual legacy, which unfortunately disappeared now?

Male: Of course, but they will appear with jokes about Putin now.

Slavoj Zizek: Yeah, but aren't they just a pale repetition of the true greatness of jokes on Stalin? Thank you.