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The Pervert's Guide To Cinema

By Slavoj Zizek

The problem for us is not,
"Are our desires satisfied or not?"
The problem is,
"How do we know what we desire?"
There is nothing spontaneous,
nothing natural, about human desires.
Our desires are artificial.
We have to be taught to desire.
Cinema is the ultimate pervert art.
It doesn't give you what you desire,
it tells you how to desire.
The Pervert's Guide to Cinema
Presented by
philosopher and psychoanalyst
Slavoj iek
Oh, I do like you, but it just isn't good enough.
Oh, I forgot.
Your mother asked me up for supper.
Okay. Bring some ice cream with you, will you?
Sure. What kind do you want,
chocolate or vanilla?
- Chocolate.
- Okay.
What we get
in this wonderful clip from Possessed
is commentary on the magic art of cinema
within a movie.
We have an ordinary working-class girl,
living in a drab, small provincial town.
All of a sudden she finds herself
in a situation where reality itself
reproduces the magic cinematic experience.
She approaches the rail,
the train is passing, and it is as if
what in reality is just a person
standing near a slowly passing train
turns into a viewer
observing the magic of the screen.
Have a drink?
Oh, don't go away. Looking in?
Wrong way. Get in and look out.
We get a very real, ordinary scene
onto which the heroine's inner space, as it were,
her fantasy space is projected,

so that, although all reality is simply there,
the train, the girl,
part of reality in her perception
and in our viewer's perception
is, as it were, elevated to the magic level,
becomes the screen of her dreams.
This is cinematic art at its purest.
This is your last chance.
After this there is no turning back.
You take the blue pill, the story ends.
You wake up in your bed
and believe whatever you want to believe.
You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland
and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.
But the choice between the blue and the red pill
is not really a choice between illusion and reality.
Of course, the Matrix is a machine for fictions,
but these are fictions
which already structure our reality.
If you take away from our reality
the symbolic fictions that regulate it,
you lose reality itself.
I want a third pill. So what is the third pill?
Definitely not some kind of
transcendental pill which enables a fake,
fast-food religious experience,
but a pill that would enable me
to perceive not the reality behind the illusion
but the reality in illusion itself.
If something gets too traumatic, too violent,
even too filled with enjoyment,
it shatters the coordinates of our reality.
We have to fictionalise it.
The first key to horror films is to say,
"Let's imagine the same story
but without the horror element."
This gives us, I think, the background.
We're in the middle of Bodega Bay,
where the action of Hitchcock's *Birds* takes place.
Birds is a film about a young, rich, socialite girl
from San Francisco who falls in love with a guy,
goes after him to Bodega Bay,
where she discovers
that he lives with his mother.

Of course, it's none of my business,
but when you bring a girl like that...

- Darling?

- Yes?

I think I can handle Melanie Daniels by myself.

Well, as long as you know what you want, Mitch.

I know exactly what I want.

And then, there is the standard oedipal imbroglio
of incestuous tension between mother and son,
the son split between

his possessive mother and the intrusive girl.

- What's the matter with them?

- What's the matter with all the birds?

- Where do you want this coffee?

- Here on the table, honey.

Hurry up with yours, Mitch.

I'm sure Miss Daniels wants to be on her way.

I think you ought to stay the night, Melanie.

We have an extra room upstairs and everything.

The big question about The Birds,

of course, is the stupid, obvious one,

"Why do the birds attack?"

Mitch...

It is not enough to say that the birds
are part of the natural set-up of reality.

It is rather as if a foreign dimension intrudes
that literally tears apart reality.

We humans are not naturally born into reality.

In order for us to act as normal people
who interact with other people
who live in the space of social reality,
many things should happen.

Like, we should be properly installed
within the symbolic order and so on.

When this, our proper dwelling
within a symbolic space, is disturbed,
reality disintegrates.

So, to propose the psychoanalytic formula,
the violent attacks of the birds
are obviously explosive outbursts
of maternal superego,
of the maternal figure preventing,
trying to prevent sexual relationship.
So the birds are raw, incestuous energy.

What am I doing? I'm sorry, now I got it.
My God, I'm thinking like Melanie.
You know what I'm thinking now?
"I want to fuck Mitch."
That's what she was thinking.
No. Sorry, sorry, sorry.
Oh my God, I got this spontaneous
confusion of directions.
Mrs Bates.
We are in the cellar of the mother's house
from Psycho.
What's so interesting is that
the very disposition of mother's house...
Events took place in it at three levels,
first floor, ground floor, basement.
It is as if they reproduce the three levels
of human subjectivity.
Ground floor is ego.
Norman behaves there as a normal son,
whatever remains of his normal ego taking over.
Up there, it's the superego.
Maternal superego, because the dead mother
is basically a figure of superego.
No, Mother. I'm gonna bring something up.
I am sorry, boy,
but you do manage to look ludicrous
when you give me orders.
- Please, Mother.
No, I will not hide in the fruit cellar.
You think I'm fruity, huh?
And down in the cellar, it's the id,
the reservoir of these illicit drives.
So we can then interpret the event
in the middle of the film,
when Norman carries the mother
or, as we learn at the end,
mother's mummy, corpse, skeleton,
from the first floor to the cellar.
You won't do it again. Not ever again.
Now get out.
- I told you to get out, boy.
- I'll carry you, Mother.
It's as if he is transposing her in his own mind
as the psychic agency from superego to id.

Put me down. Put me down.
I can walk on my own...
Of course, the lesson of it is the old lesson
elaborated already by Freud,
that superego and id are deeply connected.
The mother complains first,
as a figure of authority,
"How can you be doing this to me?
Aren't you ashamed?
"This is a fruit cellar." And then,
mother immediately turns into obscenity,
"Do you think I'm fruity?"
Superego is not an ethical agency.
Superego is an obscene agency,
bombarding us with impossible orders,
laughing at us,
when, of course, we cannot ever fulfil its demand.
The more we obey it, the more it makes us guilty.
There is always some aspect
of an obscene madman
in the agency of the superego.
We often find references to psychoanalysis
embodied in the very relations between persons.
For example, the three Marx Brothers,
Groucho, Chico, Harpo.
It's clear that Groucho, the most popular one,
with his nervous hyper-activity, is superego.
Well, that covers a lot of ground.
Say, you cover a lot of ground yourself.
You better beat it.
I hear they're gonna tear you down
and put up an office building
where you're standing.
You can leave in a taxi. If you can't get
a taxi, you can leave in a huff.
If that's too soon,
you can leave in a minute and a huff.
You know you haven't stopped talking
since I came here?
Chico, the rational guy, egotistic,
calculating all the time, is ego.
Chicolini, you're charged with high treason,
and if found guilty, you'll be shot.
- I object.

- Oh, you object?
- On what grounds?
- I couldn't think of anything else to say.
Objection sustained.
And, the weirdest of them all, Harpo,
the mute guy, he doesn't talk.
Freud said that drives are silent.
He doesn't talk. He, of course, is id.
Who are you guys?
What are you doing in my room?
That's my partner.
But he no speak. He's dumb and deaf.
The id in all its radical ambiguity.
Namely, what is so weird
about the Harpo character
is that he's childishly innocent,
just striving for pleasure,
likes children, plays with children and so on.
But, at the same time,
possessed by some kind of
primordial evil, aggressive all the time.
And this unique combination
of utter corruption and innocence
is what the id is about.
Get off there. Get off that table.
What do you think this is here, anyway?
Put that down.
- Lunatic!
- Stop it.
Stop that, here!
- Hey, you want to break that?
- Get him out of here.
Here, let it alone.
- Dr Klein?
- Yes, I'm Dr Klein. This is Dr Taney.
- How do you do?
- I'm Sharon. Things have gotten worse
since I phoned you.
I think you better come upstairs.
- Is she having spasms again?
- Yeah, but they've gotten violent.
Did you give her the medication?
Voice is not an organic part of a human body.
It's coming from somewhere

in between your body.

- Mother, please!

- Mrs MacNeil, this is Dr Taney.

- Please, Mother, make it stop!

- What is it? What's happening?

- It's burning! It's burning!

- Do something, Doctor. Please, help her!

Whenever we talk to another person,

there is always this minimum

of ventriloquist effect,

as if some foreign power took possession.

Let the enemy have no power over her.

And the son of iniquity be powerless to harm her.

Your mother sucks cocks in hell,

Karras, you faithless swine!

Remember that at the beginning of the film,

this was a beautiful young girl.

How did she become a monster that we see?

By being possessed, but who possessed her?

A voice. A voice in its obscene dimensions.

See the cross of the Lord.

Begone, you hostile powers.

The first big film

about this traumatic dimension of the voice,

the voice which freely floats around

and is a traumatic presence, feared,

the ultimate moment or object of anxiety

which distorts reality,

was in '31, in Germany,

Fritz Lang's The Testament of Dr Mabuse.

You and the woman

will not leave this room alive.

Monster!

Stop, please!

We do not see Mabuse till the end of the film.

He is just a voice.

You will not leave this room alive.

And to redeem through your son,

who lives and reigns with you

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, forever and ever.

- Amen.

- Good Lord, hear my prayer.

So, the problem is, which is why

we have the two priests at her side,
how to get rid of this intruder,
of this alien intruder.
It is as if we are expecting
the famous scene from Ridley Scott's Alien
to repeat itself.
As if we just wait for some terrifying, alien,
evil-looking, small animal to jump out.
There is a fundamental imbalance,
gap, between our psychic energy,
called by Freud "libido," this endless undead
energy which persists beyond life and death,
and the poor, finite, mortal reality of our bodies.
This is not just the pathology
of being possessed by ghosts.
The lesson that we should learn
and that the movies try to avoid
is that we ourselves are the aliens controlling our bodies.
Humanity means that the aliens are
controlling our animal bodies.
Our ego, our psychic agency, is an alien force,
distorting, controlling our body.
Nobody was as fully aware of the properly
traumatic dimension of the human voice,
the human voice
not as the sublime, ethereal medium
for expressing the depth of human subjectivity,
but the human voice as a foreign intruder.
Nobody was more aware
of this than Charlie Chaplin.
Chaplin himself plays in the film two persons,
the good, small, Jewish barber
and his evil double,
Hynkel, dictator. Hitler, of course.
- Come on. Leave me alone.
- Why, you...
He bit my finger.
The Jewish barber, the tramp figure,
is of course the figure of silent cinema.
Silent figures are basically
like figures in the cartoon.
They don't know death.
They don't know sexuality even.
They don't know suffering.

They just go on in their oral, egotistic striving,
like cats and mice in a cartoon.
You cut them into pieces, they're reconstituted.
There is no finitude, no mortality here.
There is evil, but a kind of naive, good evil.
You're just egotistic, you want to eat,
you want to hit the other,
but there is no guilt proper.
What we get with sound is
interiority, depth, guilt,
culpability,
in other words, the complex oedipal universe.
Here you are.
Get a Hynkel button. Get a Hynkel button.
A fine sculpture with a hoey
on each and every button.
The problem of the film
is not only the political problem,
how to get rid of totalitarianism,
of its terrible seductive power,
but it's also this more formal problem,
how to get rid of this
terrifying dimension of the voice.
Or, since we cannot simply get rid of it,
how to domesticate it,
how to transform this voice nonetheless
into the means of expressing humanity,
love and so on.
German police grabs the poor tramp
thinking this is Hitler
and he has to address a large gathering.
I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor.
That's not my business.
I don't want to rule or conquer anyone.
I should like to help everyone, if possible.
Jew, gentile, black man, white,
we all want to help one another.
Human beings are like that.
There, of course, he delivers his big speech
about the need for love,
understanding between people.
But there is a catch,
even a double catch.
Soldiers, in the name of democracy,

let us all unite!
People applaud exactly in the same way
as they were applauding Hitler.
The music that accompanies
this great humanist finale,
the overture to Wagner's opera, Lohengrin,
is the same music as the one we hear
when Hitler is daydreaming
about conquering the entire world
and where he has a balloon
in the shape of the globe.
The music is the same.
This can be read
as the ultimate redemption of music,
that the same music which served evil purposes
can be redeemed to serve the good.
Or it can be read,
and I think it should be read,
in a much more ambiguous way,
that with music, we cannot ever be sure.
Insofar as it externalises our inner passion,
music is potentially always a threat.
There is a short scene
in David Lynch's Mulholland Dr.,
which takes place in the theatre
where we are now,
where behind the microphone
a woman is singing,
then out of exhaustion or whatever,
she drops down.
Surprisingly, the singing goes on.
Immediately afterwards, it is explained.
It was a playback.
But for that couple of seconds
when we are confused,
we confront this nightmarish dimension
of an autonomous partial object.
Like in the well-known adventure
of Cheshire Cat from Alice in Wonderland,
where the cat disappears, the smile remains.
You may have noticed
that I'm not all there myself.
And the mome raths outgrabe.
The fascinating thing about partial objects,

in the sense of organs without bodies,
is that they embody
what Freud called "death drive."
Here, we have to be very careful.
Death drive is not kind of a Buddhist
striving for annihilation.
"I want to find eternal peace. I want..."
No. Death drive is almost the opposite.
Death drive is the dimension of what
in the Stephen King-like horror fiction
is called the dimension of the undead,
of living dead,
of something which remains alive
even after it is dead.
And it's, in a way, immortal in its deadness itself.
It goes on, insists. You cannot destroy it.
The more you cut it,
the more it insists, it goes on.
This dimension,
of a kind of diabolical undeadness,
is what partial objects are about.
The nicest example here for me,
I think, is Michael Powell's Red Shoes,
about a ballerina.
Her passion for dancing
is materialised in her shoes taking over.
The shoes are literally the undead object.
Perhaps the ultimate bodily part
which fits this role
of the autonomous partial object
is the fist, or rather, the hand.
This hand, raising up,
that's the whole point of the film.
It's not simply something foreign to him.
It's the very core of his personality out there.
Security?
I am Jack's smirking revenge.
What the hell are you doing?
That hurt.
Far from standing
for some kind of perverted masochism
or reactionary fantasy of violence,
this scene is deeply liberating.
I am here, as it were, on the side of the fist.

I think this is what liberation means.
In order to attack the enemy, you first
have to beat the shit out of yourself.
To get rid, in yourself, of that which
in yourself attaches you to the leader,
to the conditions of slavery, and so on and so on.

No, please stop!

What are you doing?

Oh, God, no, please! No!

For some reason,

I thought of my first fight, with Tyler.

There is always this conflict

between me and my double.

Motherfucker!

- You hit me in the ear.

- Well, Jesus. I'm sorry.

- Christ! Why the ear, man?

- I fucked it up, kind of.

No, that was perfect.

It is as if the double embodies myself,
but without the castrated dimension of myself.

There is an episode

in the wonderful British horror classic,

Dead of Night...

I knew you wouldn't leave me, Hugo.

I knew you'd come back.

...in which Michael Redgrave plays a ventriloquist
who gets jealous of his puppet.

Now don't get excited, I was only joking.

You know me. Maxwell!

Maxwell.

Maxwell! Take your hands off me!

- Stop playing!

- Maxwell!

Here, you fool!

Officer, quickly, open this door.

Quickly.

In an outburst of violence,
he destroys the puppet, breaks down,
then in the very last scene of the film
we see him in the hospital,
slowly regaining consciousness,
coming back to himself.

First his voice is stuck in the throat.

Then, with great difficulty, finally,
he is able to talk,
but he talks
with the distorted voice of the dummy.
Why, hello, Sylvester.
I've been waiting for you.
And the lesson is clear.
The only way for me
to get rid of this autonomous partial object
is to become this object.
- Any time you are ready, tell me.
- Okay, I'm ready.
Wait a minute. So that I don't confuse them...
Where is my key? My key is here.
This one is here.
Okay, any... You shout when.
I'm standing on the very balcony
where the murder,
the traumatic murder scene,
occurs in Conversation.
The murder of the husband,
observed through the stained glass in front of me
by the private detective, Gene Hackman.
The detective is in the nearby room.
Significantly, just before he sees the murder,
he observes the balcony
through a crack in the glass wall.
Whenever we have this famous,
proverbial peeping Tom scene
of somebody observing traumatic events
through a crack,
it's never as if we are dealing with two parts
on both sides of the wall of the same reality.
Before seeing anything
or imagining to see something,
he tries to listen. He behaves as an eavesdropper,
with all his private detective gadgets.
What does this make him?
Potentially, at least,
it makes him into a fantasised, imagined entity.
I can't stand it.
I can't stand it anymore.
You're going to make me cry.
I know, honey. I know. Me, too.

- No, don't.
- I have no idea what you're talking about.
He doesn't fantasise the scene of the murder.
He fantasises himself as a witness to the murder.
I love you.
What he sees on that blurred window glass,
which effectively functions
as a kind of elementary screen,
cinematic screen even, that should be perceived
as a desperate attempt to visualise,
hallucinate even,
the bodily, material support of what he hears.
- Hello, baby.
- Shut up!
It's "Daddy", you shithead! Where's my bourbon?
Dorothy's apartment
is one of those hellish places
which abound in David Lynch's films.
A places where all moral or social inhibitions
seem to be suspended,
where everything is possible.
The lowest, masochistic sex, obscenities,
the deepest level of our desires
that we are not even ready to admit to ourselves,
we are confronted with them in such places.
Spread your legs.
Wider.
Now show it to me.
Don't you fucking look at me.
From what perspective
should we observe this scene?
Imagine the scene as that of a small child,
hidden in a closet or behind a door...
Mommy.
...witnessing the parental intercourse.
He doesn't yet know what sexuality is,
how we do it.
All he knows is what he hears,
this strange deep breathing sound,
and then he tries to imagine what goes on.
At the very beginning of Blue Velvet,
we see Jeffrey's father
having a heart attack, falling down.
We have the eclipse of the normal,

paternal authority.

Mommy.

- Mommy loves you.

- Baby wants to fuck!

It is as if Jeffrey fantasises
this wild parental couple of Dorothy and Frank
as kind of a phantasmatic supplement
to the lack of the real paternal authority.
Get ready to fuck, you fucker's fucker! You fucker!
Don't you fucking look at me!

Frank, not only obviously acts, but even overacts.
It is as if his ridiculously excessive gesticulating,
shouting and so on,
are here to cover up something.

The point is, of course, the elementary one,
to convince the invisible observer
that father is potent,
to cover up father's impotence.

So the second way to read the scene
would have been as a spectacle,
a ridiculously violent spectacle,
set up by the father
to convince the son of his power,
of his over-potency.

The third way would have been
to focus on Dorothy herself.

Many feminists, of course, emphasise
the brutality against women in this scene,
the abuse, how the Dorothy character is abused.
There is obviously this dimension in it.

But I think one should risk a more shocking
and obverse interpretation.

What if the central, as it were, problem,
of this entire scene is Dorothy's passivity?

Don't you fucking look at me!

So what if what Frank is doing
is a kind of a desperate, ridiculous,
but nonetheless effective attempt
of trying to help Dorothy,
to awaken her out of her lethargy,
to bring her into life?

So if Frank is anybody's fantasy,
maybe he is Dorothy's fantasy.

There is kind of a strange,

mutual interlocking of fantasies.
You stay alive, baby.
It's not only ambiguity,
but oscillation between three focal points.
This, I think, is what accounts
for the strange reverberations of this scene.
This brings us to our third
and maybe crucial example,
what is for me the most beautiful
shot in the entire Vertigo.
The shot in which we see Scottie
in a position of a peeping Tom,
observing through a crack.
It is as if Madeleine is really there
in common reality,
while Scottie is peeping at her
from some mysterious inter-space,
from some obscure netherworld.
This is the location of the imagined,
fantasised gaze.
Gaze is that obscure point, the blind spot,
from which the object looked upon
returns the gaze.
After suspecting that a murder
is taking place in the nearby hotel room,
Gene Hackman, playing the private detective,
enters this room and inspects the toilet.
The moment he approaches
the toilet in the bathroom,
it is clear that we are in Hitchcock territory.
It is clear that some kind of intense,
implicit dialogue with Psycho is going on.
In a very violent gesture,
as if adopting the role of Norman Bates's
mother, the murderer in Psycho,
he opens up the curtain, inspects it in detail,
looking for traces of blood there,
even inspecting the gap, the hole,
at the bottom of the sink.
Which is precisely another of these focal objects,
because in Psycho, the hole, through fade-out,
the hole is morphed into the eye,
returning the gaze.
We say the eye is the window of the soul.

But what if there is no soul behind the eye?
What if the eye is a crack
through which we can perceive
just the abyss of a netherworld?
When we look through these cracks,
we see the dark, other side,
where hidden forces run the show.
It is as if Gene Hackman establishes,
"No, we are nonetheless not in Psycho."
"Let's return to my first object
of fascination, the toilet bowl."
He flushes it,
and then the terrible thing happens.
In our most elementary experience,
when we flush the toilet,
excrements simply disappear
out of our reality into another space,
which we phenomenologically perceive
as a kind of a netherworld,
another reality, a chaotic, primordial reality.
And the ultimate horror, of course,
is if the flushing doesn't work,
if objects return,
if remainders, excremental remainders,
return from that dimension.
The bathroom.
Hitchcock is all the time playing
with this threshold.
Well, they've cleaned all this up now.
Big difference.
You should've seen the blood.
The whole place was...
Well, it's too horrible to describe. Dreadful!
The most effective for me
and even the most touching scene
of the entire Psycho,
is after the shower murder,
when Norman Bates tries to clean the bathroom.
I remember clearly when in my adolescence
I first saw the film,
how deeply I was impressed
not only by the length of the scene,
it goes on almost for 10 minutes,
details of cleansing and so on and so on,

but also by the care, meticulousness,
how it is done,
and also by our spectator's identification with it.
I think that this tells us a lot
about the satisfaction of work,
of a job well done.
Which is not so much
to construct something new,
but maybe human work at its most elementary,
work, as it were, at the zero level,
is the work of cleaning the traces of a stain.
The work of erasing the stains,
keeping at bay this chaotic netherworld,
which threatens to explode at any time
and engulf us.
I think this is the fine sentiment
that Hitchcock's films evoke.
It's not simply that something
horrible happens in reality.
Something worse can happen
which undermines the very fabric
of what we experience as reality.
I think it's very important how the
first attack of the birds occurs in the film.
When a fantasy object, something imagined,
an object from inner space,
enters our ordinary reality,
the texture of reality is twisted, distorted.
This is how desire inscribes itself into reality,
by distorting it.
Desire is a wound of reality.
The art of cinema consists in arousing desire,
to play with desire.
But, at the same time,
keeping it at a safe distance,
domesticating it, rendering it palpable.
When we spectators are sitting
in a movie theatre,
looking at the screen...
You remember, at the very beginning,
before the picture is on, it's a black, dark screen,
and then light thrown on.
Are we basically not staring into a toilet bowl
and waiting for things

to reappear out of the toilet?
And is the entire magic of a spectacle
shown on the screen
not a kind of a deceptive lure,
trying to conceal the fact
that we are basically watching shit, as it were?
There was a young lady of Ongar
Who had an affair with a conger
They said, "How does it feel
To sleep with an eel?"
"Well," she said, "just like a man, only longer"
Usually, people read the lesson
of Freudian psychoanalysis
as if the secret meaning of everything
is sexuality.
But this is not what Freud wants to say.
I think Freud wants to say the exact opposite.
It's not that everything
is a metaphor for sexuality,
that whatever we are doing,
we are always thinking about that.
The Freudian question is, but what are
we thinking when we are doing that?
In sexuality, it's never only me and my partner,
or more partners, whatever you are doing.
It's always... There has to be
always some phantasmatic element.
There has to be some third
imagined element
which makes me... makes it possible for me,
which enables me to engage in sexuality.
If I may be a little bit impertinent
and relate to an unfortunate experience,
probably known to most of us,
how it happens that while one is engaged
in sexual activity,
all of a sudden one feels stupid.
One loses contact with it.
As if, "My God, what am I doing here,
doing these stupid repetitive movements?"
And so on and so on.
Nothing changes in reality,
in these strange moments
where I, as it were, disconnect.

There is an irresistible power of fascination,
at least for me, in this terrifying scene
when Neo awakens from his sleep
within the Matrix
and becomes aware of what he really is
in that foetal container,
floating in liquid, connected to virtual reality,
where you are reduced to a totally passive object
with your energy being sucked out of you.
So why does the Matrix need our energy?
I think the proper way to ask this question
is to turn it around.
Not why does the Matrix need the energy,
but why does the energy need the Matrix?
That is to say, since I think that the energy
we are talking about is libido, is our pleasure,
why does our libido
need the virtual universe of fantasies?
Why can't we simply enjoy it directly,
a sexual partner and so on?
That's the fundamental question.
Why do we need this virtual supplement?
Our libido needs an illusion
in order to sustain itself.
One of the most interesting motifs
in science fiction is that of the id machine,
an object which has the magic capacity
of directly materialising, realising in front of us,
our innermost dreams,
desires, even guilt feelings.
There is a long tradition of this
in science fiction films,
but of course the film about id machine
is Andrei Tarkovsky's, *Solaris*.
Solaris is the story of Kelvin,
a psychologist, who is sent by a rocket
to a spaceship circulating around *Solaris*,
a newly discovered planet.
Strange things are reported from the spaceship.
All the scientists there are going crazy,
and then Kelvin discovers what is going on there.
This planet has the magic ability
to directly realise
your deepest traumas, dreams, fears, desires.

The innermost of your inner space.
The hero of the film finds one morning
his deceased wife, who made suicide years ago.
So he realises not so much his desire,
as his guilt feeling.
When the hero is confronted
with the spectral clone, as it were,
of his deceased wife,
although he appears to be deeply sympathetic,
spiritual, reflecting and so on,
his basic problem is how to get rid of her.
What makes Solaris so touching
is that, at least potentially,
it confronts us with this tragic
subjective position of the woman,
his wife, who is aware
that she has no consistency,
no full being of her own.
I don't even know my own self.
Who am I?
As soon as I close my eyes I can't
recall what my face is like.
For example, she has gaps in her memory
because she knows only
what he knows that she knows.
Do you know who you are?
All humans do.
She is just his dream realised.
And her true love for him is expressed
in her desperate attempts to erase herself,
to swallow poison or whatever,
just to clear the space,
because she guesses that he wants this.
It's horrifying, isn't it?
I'll never get used
to these constant resurrections!
It's relatively easy to get rid of a real person.
You can abandon him or her,
kill him or her, whatever.
But a ghost, a spectral presence,
is much more difficult to get rid of.
It sticks to you as a kind of a shadowy presence.
-Do I disgust you?
-No.

-You're lying!

-Stop it!

I must be looking disgusting!

What we get here is the lowest male mythology.

This idea that woman doesn't exist on her own.

That a woman is merely a man's dream realised

or even, as radical, anti-feminists claim,

the man's guilt realised.

Women exist because male desire got impure.

If man cleanses his desire,

gets rid of dirty material,

fantasies, woman ceases to exist.

At the end of the film,

we get a kind of a Holy Communion,

a reconciliation of him not with his wife,

but with his father.

- Did you see Hitchcock's Vertigo?

- Sorry, I don't understand.

Sorry. Hitchcock's Vertigo, the film.

Alfred Hitchcock.

I think it happened here, you know.

- Oh, you don't know the scene, okay.

- Probably.

Often things begin as a fake,

inauthentic, artificial,

but you get caught into your own game.

And that is the true tragedy of Vertigo.

It's a story about two people who,

each in his or her own way,

get caught into their own game of appearances.

For both of them, for Madeleine and for Scottie,

appearances win over reality.

What is the story of Vertigo?

It's a story about a retired policeman

who has a pathological fear of heights

because of an incident in his career,

and then an old friend hires him

to follow his beautiful wife,

played by Kim Novak.

The wife mysteriously possessed

by the ghost of a past deceased

Spanish beauty, Carlotta Valdes.

The two fall in love.

The wife kills herself.

The first part of Vertigo,
with Madeleine's suicide,
is not as shattering as it could have been,
because it's really a terrifying loss,
but in this very loss, the ideal survives.
The idea of the fatal woman
possesses you totally.
What, ultimately, this image,
fascinating image of the fatal woman
stands for is death.
The fascination of beauty is always
the veil which covers up a nightmare.
Like the idea of a fascinating creature,
but if you come too close to her,
you see shit, decay,
you see worms crawling everywhere.
The ultimate abyss is not a physical abyss,
but the abyss of the depth of another person.
It's what philosophers describe
as the "Night of the World."
Like when you see another person,
into his or her eyes, you see the abyss.
That's the true spiral which is drawing us in.
Scottie alone, broken down, cannot forget her,
wanders around the city
looking for a woman, a similar woman,
something like the deceased woman,
discovers an ordinary, rather vulgar, common girl.
The denouement of the story, of course,
is along the lines of the Marx Brothers' joke,
"This man looks like an idiot, acts like an idiot."
"This shouldn't deceive you."
"This man is an idiot."
The newly found woman looks like Madeleine,
acts like Madeleine, the fatal beauty.
We discover she is Madeleine.
What we learn is that Scottie's friend,
who hired Scottie, also hired this woman, Judy,
to impersonate Madeleine in a devilish plot
to kill the real Madeleine, his wife,
and get her fortune.
We could just see a lot of each other.
Why? 'Cause I remind you of her?
It's not very complimentary.

The profile shot in Vertigo is perhaps
the key shot of the entire film.
We have there Madeleine's, or rather Judy's,
identity in all its tragic tension.
It provides the dark background
for the fascinating other profile
of Madeleine in Ernie's restaurant.
Scottie is too ashamed,
afraid to look at her directly.
It is as if what he sees is the stuff of his dreams,
more real in a way for him
than the reality of the woman behind his back.
That's not very complimentary, either.
I just want to be with you as much as I can, Judy.
When we see a face,
it's basically always the half of it.
A subject is a partial something,
a face, something we see.
Behind it, there is a void, a nothingness.
And of course, we spontaneously tend
to fill in that nothingness
with our fantasies about the wealth
of human personality, and so on.
To see what is lacking in reality,
to see it as that, there you see subjectivity.
To confront subjectivity means
to confront femininity.
Woman is the subject. Masculinity is a fake.
Masculinity is an escape from the most radical,
nightmarish dimension of subjectivity.

- Scottie, what are you doing?
- I'm trying to buy you a suit.
But I love the second one she wore.
- And this one, it's beautiful.
- No, no. They're none of them right.
I think I know the suit you mean.
We had it some time ago.
Let me go and see. We may still have that model.
Thank you.
You're looking for the suit that she wore, for me.

- You want me to be dressed like her.
- Judy, I just want you to look nice.
I know the kind of suit
that would look well on you.

No, I won't do it!

Judy.

It can't make that much difference to you. I just want to see what...

No, I don't want any clothes.

I don't want anything.

- I want to get out of here.

- Judy, do this for me.

Here we are.

- Yes, that's it.

- I thought so.

When Judy, refashioned as Madeleine, steps out of the door, it's like fantasy realised.

And, of course, we have a perfect name for fantasy realised.

It's called "nightmare."

Fantasy realised. What does this mean?

Of course, it is always sustained by an extreme violence.

The violence in this case of Scottie's brutal refashioning of Judy,

a real, common girl, into Madeleine.

It's truly a process of mortification, which also is the mortification of woman's desire.

It is as if in order to have her, to desire her, to have sexual intercourse with her,

with the woman,

Scottie has to mortify her, to change her into a dead woman.

It's as if, again, for the male libidinal economy, to paraphrase a well-known old saying,

the only good woman is a dead woman.

Scottie is not really fascinated by her, but by the entire scene, the staging.

He is looking around, checking up, are the phantasmatic co-ordinates really here?

At that point when the reality fully fits fantasy, Scottie is finally able to realise

the long-postponed sexual intercourse.

So the result of this violence is a perfect co-ordination

between fantasy and reality.

A kind of direct short-circuit.

In Lynch's films, darkness is really dark.

Light is really unbearable, blinding light.
Fire really hurts, it's so hot.
At those moments of sensual over-intensity,
it is as if events on screen itself,
threatens to overflow the screen
and to grab us into it,
to reach towards us.
It's again as if the fantasy-space,
the fictional, narrative space, gets too intense
and reaches out towards us spectators
so that we lose our safe distance.
This is the proper tension
of the Lynchian universe.
The beauty of Lynch, if you look closely,
it's never clear.
Is it really the brutal real out there
which disturbs us, or is it our fantasy?
At the very beginning
of David Lynch's Blue Velvet,
we see an idyllic, American small town.
What can be more normal
than father of the family,
in front of a white clean house,
watering the lawn?
But all of a sudden, father has a heart seizure,
falls down to the grass.
And then, instead of showing
the family confused,
calling for an ambulance, whatever,
Lynch does something typically Lynchian.
The camera moves extremely close to the grass,
even penetrates the grass,
and we see what is the real
of this idyllic green lawn.
We should not forget this,
how this happens precisely
when father has a seizure.
That is to say when, symbolically,
the paternal authority breaks down.
I'll send you straight to hell, fucker!
In dreams, I walk with you.
In dreams, I talk to you.
The logic here is strictly Freudian,
that is to say we escape into dream

to avoid a deadlock in our real life.
But then, what we encounter in the dream
is even more horrible,
so that at the end,
we literally escape from the dream,
back into reality.
It starts with, dreams are for those
who cannot endure,
who are not strong enough for reality.
It ends with, reality is for those
who are not strong enough to endure,
to confront their dreams.
Lost Highway and Mulholland Dr.
are two versions of the same film.
What makes both films,
especially Lost Highway, so interesting
is how they posit the two dimensions,
reality and fantasy, side by side,
horizontally, as it were.
It must be from a real estate agent.
What we get in Lost Highway
is the drab, grey,
upper-middle-class suburban reality.
Hero, married to Patricia Arquette,
obviously terrorised by the enigma of his wife,
who doesn't respond properly to his advances.
When they have sexual intercourse,
he miserably fails.
What he gets from her is a kind
of a patronising pat on the shoulder.
It's okay.
It's okay.
Total humiliation.
It's okay.
After killing her in an act of frustration,
the hero enters his fantasy-space,
where he, as it were, reinvents not only himself,
but his entire social environs.
Captain, this is some spooky shit we got here.
In what? In a kind of a universe
which we usually found in film noir.
The hero's wife, who is a brunette,
becomes a blonde.
In reality, she's restrained.

Here, she praises the hero
within the fantasy-space all the time
for his sexual capacities and so on.
So it seems as if the dream
is the realisation of what he was looking for.
In reality, the obstacle was inherent.
Their sexual liaison simply didn't function.
Within the fantasy-space,
the obstacle is externalised.
It's a beautiful day.
Mr Eddy is the master of Patricia Arquette
within the fantasy-space.
He is the obstacle to sexual intercourse.
If I ever found out
somebody was making out with her,
I'd take this and I'd shove it so far up his ass,
it would come out his mouth.
The properly uncanny moments
are those when the second shift occurs,
when the fantasy-space, the dreamscape,
as it were, is already disintegrating,
but we are not yet back into reality.
This intermediate space,
neither fantasy-space nor reality,
this space of a kind of primordial violence,
dispersion, ontological confusion...
This is the most subversive moment,
the true horror of these films.
Towards the end of this fantasy episode,
when we get the sexual act,
there the woman also avoids the hero.
You'll never have me.
Whispering, "You will never have me."
And at that traumatic point,
we are drawn back to reality,
when the hero encounters
exactly the same deadlock.
What the film truly is about, its focal point,
it's not the hero, it's of course
the enigma of feminine desire.
I'm involved in a mystery,
I'm in the middle of a mystery.
And it's all secret.
- You like mysteries that much?

- Yeah.

You're a mystery.

I like you

very much.

The enigma of feminine subjectivity

in David Lynch's films,

it's a gap between cause and effect.

You do something to a woman,

but you never know what the reaction will be.

Jeffrey, don't, please.

My relationship towards tulips

is inherently Lynchian.

I think they are disgusting.

Just imagine. Aren't these some kind of,

how do you call it, vagina dentata,

dental vaginas threatening to swallow you?

I think that flowers are something

inherently disgusting.

I mean, are people aware

what a horrible thing these flowers are?

I mean, basically it's an open invitation

to all the insects and bees,

"Come and screw me," you know?

I think that flowers

should be forbidden to children.

Suddenly I saw two figures jumping

about on the rocks above us.

They hid and peeped out occasionally.

"There are two boys looking at us,"

I said to her. Her name was Katarina.

"Well, let them look," she said,

and turned on her back.

It was such a strange feeling.

I wanted to run out and put on
my costume, but I just lay still...

On my belly with my bum in the air,
totally unembarrassed, totally calm.

We men, at least in our standard
phallogocentric mode of sexuality,

even when we are doing it with the real woman,
we are effectively doing it with our fantasy.

Woman is reduced to a masturbatory prop.

Woman arouses us in so far as

she enters our fantasy frame.

With women, it's different.
The true enjoyment is not in doing it
but in telling about it afterwards.
Of course, women do enjoy sex immediately,
but I hope I'm permitted as a man
to propose a daring hypothesis,
that maybe, while they are doing it,
they already enact or incorporate
this minimal narrative distance,
so that they are already observing themselves
and narrativising it.
There is in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*
a wonderful scene where
Bibi Andersson tells to mute Liv Ullmann,
a story about small orgy on a beach
which took place years ago.
This scene is so erotic
precisely because Bergman successfully resisted
the temptation of a flashback.
No flashback. Just words.
Probably one of the most erotic scenes
in the entire history of cinema.
Katarina unbuttoned his trousers
and started playing with him.
When he came she took him in her mouth.
He bent down and started kissing her on the back
She turned around, took his head in
both hands and gave him her breast.
The other boy got so excited,
so he and I started again.
It was as nice as the first time.
Then we swam and parted. When I
came back, Karl-Henrik had returned.
We had dinner together and drank
the red wine he had with him.
Then we slept together.
It's never been as good, before or since.
Can you understand that?
Although sexuality seems to be about bodies,
it's not really about bodies.
It is how bodily activity is reported in words.
The ultimate sexual seduction resides in words.
I can be whatever you want me to be.
You want me to romance you,

take you to a classy restaurant, no problem.
You want me to be your best friend
and fuck you...
Treat you good...
Lick your pussy...
No problem.
Ain't much I haven't done.
The only thing I won't do is beat you up.
The strange tension, and at the same time
interconnection, between reality and fantasy
we can get it at its purest
in the strange case of pornography.
Pornography is, and it is, a deeply conservative genre.
It is not a genre where everything is permitted.
It's a genre based on the fundamental prohibition.
We cross one threshold,
you can see everything.
Close-ups and so on.
But the price you pay for it is that
the narrative which justifies the sexual activity
should not be taken seriously.
The screenwriters for pornography cannot be so stupid.
You know, these vulgar narratives
of a housewife alone at home...
A plumber comes... Fixes the hole...
Then the housewife turns to him,
"Sorry, but I have another hole to be fixed,
can you do it?" or whatever.
Obviously there is some kind of a censorship here.
You have either an emotionally
engaging film
But then you should stop,
just before showing it all: sexual act.
Or you can see it all but
you are not allowed to
then to be emotionally
seriously engaged.
So that's the tragedy of pornography.
It tries to be as realistic as possible,
but it has to maintain the minimum
of phantasmatic support.
Well...
I first saw him that morning in the lobby.
He was... He was checking into the hotel

and he was following the bellboy with his luggage to the elevator.

He...

He glanced at me as he walked past.

Just a glance.

Nothing more.

But I could hardly move.

Eyes Wide Shut is a film which has an incredibly precise lesson about fantasy.

She tells him, not about herself effectively cheating him, but about fantasising about cheating him with some naval officer they met in a hotel and so on and so on. The entire film is his desperate attempt to catch up with her fantasy, which ends in a failure.

Many people don't like, in that mysterious rich people's castle where they meet for their orgies, the big orgy. They complain, this orgy is aseptic, totally non-attractive, without erotic tension. But I think that's the point.

This utter impotence of male fantasising.

The film is the story of how the male fantasy cannot catch up with the feminine fantasy, of how there is too much of desire in feminine fantasy and how this is the threat to male identity.

Where do we find this aspect in Vertigo?

Isn't it that in Vertigo, on the contrary, all of the activity is on the side of Scottie?

But I think that precisely because of this, his activity is extremely brutal, mortifying.

He has totally to erase the woman as a desiring entity.

That's for him the condition to desire.

"Let's annihilate the woman,

"let's mortify her so that my fantasy alone rules."

The other solution is, of course, the masochist solution, which is,

"Let me maintain the appearance

of the woman, domina, as the boss.

"I accept my inferior role

"but secretly I am the master

"because I write the very scenario
of my inferiority."

But

I do love you.

And you know

there is something very important
that we need to do as soon as possible.

What's that?

Fuck.

It's as if our inner psychic space is too wild
and sometimes we have to make love,
not to get the real thing
but to escape from the real,
from the excessive real
that we encounter in our fantasising.

But you know what,

we also we have, don't forget

from Wild at Heart, Bobby Peru, the rape.

Say:

- And I'll leave.

- No way, get out!

Say it!

I'll tear your fucking heart out, girl!

Say:

Say:

Then I'll leave. Say: "Fuck me."

Whisper it. Say it.

Say it. Say it.

Say:

Whisper it:

Bobby Peru enters the room where
the young girl, played by Laura Dern,
is resting and
slowly he terrorizes her.

"Fuck me."

"Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuck me."

- "Fuck me. Fuck me."

- Fuck me.

Someday honey, I will!

But I gotta get goin'!

Sing!

Don't cry...

Bobby Peru, as it were,

changes the register.

All of a sudden he adopts

a nice, polite, smiling face and says:

"Oh, thanks for the offer, but I've got to go now,
maybe another day."

Just arousing the fantasy

and then rejecting the act

results in utter psychological devastation.

It is a case of a mental rape

which can be worse than physical rape.

The point is

the fragile balance

between reality and fantasy dimension

in our sexual activity.

Michael Haneke's Piano Teacher

is the story of an impossible love affair

between a middle-aged,

deeply traumatised woman

and her young student.

She's in a way a person

who is not yet sexually subjectivised.

She lacks the phantasmatic co-ordinates

of her desire.

This accounts for a couple of

very strange scenes in the film,

like when she goes to a pornographic store

and then watches in a closed, small room

a scene from a hardcore film.

The way she watches it, it's not to get aroused,

but she watches it as a pupil in a school.

She simply watches it

to get the co-ordinates of desiring,

to learn how to do it, how to get excited.

"...next take off the blindfold, please,

"and sit down on my face

"and punch me in the stomach

"to force me to thrust my tongue in your behind."

The notion of fantasy in psychoanalysis
is very ambiguous.
On the one hand,
we have the pacifying aspect of fantasy.
Piano Teacher plays with the opposite
aspect of fantasy.
Fantasy as the explosion of wild,
unbearable desires.
What we found in the middle of the film
is probably, arguably,
the most depressive sexual act
in the entire history of cinema.
As if to punish her
for disclosing the fantasy in her letter to him,
he literally enacts her fantasy
in the way he makes love to her,
which of course means
that fantasy is lost for her.
When fantasy disintegrates, you don't get reality,
you get some nightmarish real
too traumatic to be experienced
as ordinary reality.
That would be another definition of nightmare.
Hell is here.
Paradise, at least this perverse paradise, is hell.
Stop, please.
One cannot here just throw out the dirty water,
all these excessive, perverse fantasies and so on,
and just keep the healthy, clean baby,
normal, straight or even homosexual, whatever,
but some kind of normal, politically correct sex.
You cannot do that.
What if we throw out the baby
and keep just the dirty water?
And put it as a problem:
how to deal with dirty water.
And put some order
in the dirty water of fantasies.
This is I think precisely what happens
for example in Kieslowski's Blue.
During the ... were you conscious?
I'm sorry to have inform you...
Do you know?
Your husband...

died in the accident.
You must have been unconscious.
Anna?
Yes, your daughter, too.
You can organise, people do it,
your life in mourning the lost object.
Julie, in Blue, discovers that
her husband wasn't what she thought he was.
That he was cheating her,
that he had a mistress who is pregnant.
This is the most terrifying loss,
where all the co-ordinates of your reality
disintegrate.
The problem is how to reconstitute yourself.
In a wonderful short scene,
the heroine of Blue, after returning home,
finds there on the floor
a group of newly-born mice,
crawling around their mother.
This scene terrifies her.
She is too excessively exposed
to life in its brutal meaninglessness.
What she is able to do at the end
is to acquire a proper distance towards reality.
This is what happens in the famous circular shot
where we pass from Julie's face,
while she is making love.
This magical suspension
of temporal and spatial limitations,
this free floating in a fantasy-space,
far from distancing us from reality
enables us to approach reality.
She is putting together the co-ordinates
which enable her to experience her reality
as meaningful again.
As if the lesson is,
not only for men but also for women,
that you can sustain sexual intercourse,
sexual relationship,
only through the support of fantasy.
The problem of course is,
is this fantasy reconstituted?
Is this the ultimate horizon of our experience?
The function of music here

is precisely that of a fetish,
of some fascinating presence
whose function it is
to conceal the abyss of anxiety.
Music is here what, according to Marx, religion is,
a kind of opium for the people.
Opium which should put us asleep,
put us into a kind of a false beatitude,
which allows us to avoid
the abyss of unbearable anxiety.
We see Julie crying, but through a glass.
This glass stands for, I think,
fantasy reconstituted.
These are, I'm tempted to say,
the tears of happiness.
"I can mourn now because
it no longer immediately affects me."
Blue proposes this mystical communion,
reconstituted fantasy,
as sustaining our relation to the world.
But the price we pay is that
some radically authentic moment
of accepting the anxiety
at the very foundation of human condition
is lost there.
If anything, anxiety at the vocal level
is silence.
It's silence. It's a silent scream.
In Hitchcock's *The Birds*,
when the mother, of course who but the mother,
finds the neighbour dead,
his eyes picked out by the birds,
she shouts, but the shout
literally remains stuck in her throat.
To return from cinema to so-called real life,
the ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis
is that exactly the same
goes for our real life experience,
that emotions as such are deceiving.
There are no specifically fake emotions
because, as Freud puts it literally,
the only emotion which doesn't deceive
is anxiety.
All other emotions are fake.

So, of course, the problem here is, are we able to
encounter in cinema the emotion of anxiety,
or is cinema as such a fake?
Cinema, as the art of appearances,
tells us something about reality itself.
It tells us something
about how reality constitutes itself.
Not that way!
Ripley.
Ripley, come on.
Ripley, we've got no time for sightseeing here.
Ripley, don't.
There is an old Gnostic theory
that our world was not perfectly created,
that the god who created our world
was an idiot who bungled the job,
so that our world is a half-finished creation.
There are voids, openings, gaps.
It's not fully real, fully constituted.
In the wonderful scene
in the last instalment of the Alien saga,
Alien Resurrection, when Ripley,
the cloned Ripley, enters a mysterious room,
she encounters
the previous failed version of herself,
of cloning herself.
Just a horrified creature,
a small foetus-like entity,
then more developed forms.
Finally, a creature which almost looks like her,
but her limbs are like that of the monster.
Kill me.
This means that all the time
our previous alternate embodiments,
what we might have been but are not,
that these alternate versions of ourselves
are haunting us.
That's the ontological view of reality
that we get here,
as if it's an unfinished universe.
This is, I think, a very modern feeling.
It is through such ontology of unfinished reality
that cinema became a truly modern art.
All modern films are ultimately films about

the possibility or impossibility to make a film.
This is the sad tale
of the township of Dogville.
Dogville was in the Rocky Mountains
in the US of A,
up here where the road came to its definitive end
near the entrance to the old,
abandoned silver mine.
The residents of Dogville were good,
honest folks and they liked their township.
With Von Trier, it's not only the problem of belief
in the sense of,
do people generally still believe today
the place of religion today, and so on.
It's also reflectively or allegorically
the question of believing in cinema itself.
How to make today people still believe
in the magic of cinema?
In Dogville, all of it is staged on a set.
Okay, this is often the case in cinema,
but here the set is seen as the set.
The action takes place in Dogville, a small town,
but there are no houses.
There are just lines on the floor,
signalling that this is the house,
this is the street.
The mysterious thing is
that this does not prevent our identification.
If anything, it makes us even more thrown
into the tensions of the inner life.
Have you seen Grace?
She's at my place.
- Is she busy?
- Not any more. Go right in.
It's not that naive belief is undermined,
deconstructed through irony.
Von Trier wants to be serious with the magic.
Irony is put into service to make us believe.
Yet again, Grace had made
a miraculous escape from her pursuers
with the aid of the people of Dogville.
Everyone had covered up for her,
including Chuck, who had to admit
that it was probably Tom's hat

he'd mistakenly considered so suspicious.
The mystery is that even if we know
that it's only staged, that it's a fiction,
it still fascinates us.
That's the fundamental magic of it.
You witness a certain seductive scene,
then you are shown that it's just a fake,
stage machinery behind,
but you are still fascinated by it. Illusion persists.
There is something real in the illusion,
more real than in the reality behind it.
Do not arouse the wrath
of the great and powerful Oz!
I said come back tomorrow!
If you were really great and powerful,
you'd keep your promises.
Do you presume to criticise the great Oz?
You ungrateful creatures!
Think yourselves lucky
that I'm giving you audience tomorrow
instead of 20 years from now!
The great Oz has spoken.
Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.
The great and... Oz has spoken.
- Who are you?
- Well, I...
I am the great and powerful Wizard of Oz.
What we can learn from a film like Wizard of Oz
is how the logic of de-mystification
is not enough.
It's not enough to say, "Okay, it's just
a big show spectacle to impress the people.
"What is behind is just a modest old guy,"
and so on and so on.
It is that rather, in a way,
there is more truth in this appearance.
Appearance has an effectivity, a truth of its own.
What about the heart that you promised Tin Man?
Well...
And the courage
that you promised Cowardly Lion?
- And Scarecrow's brain?
- And Scarecrow's brain?
Why, anybody can have a brain.

That's a very mediocre commodity.
Every pusillanimous creature
that crawls on the earth
or slinks through slimy seas has a brain.
Back where I come from,
we have universities, seats of great learning
where men go to become great thinkers.
And when they come out,
they think deep thoughts
and with no more brains than you have.
But they have one thing you haven't got.
A diploma!
Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me
by the Universitatus Committeatum
e plurbis unum,
I hereby confer upon you
the honorary degree of Th.D.
- Th.D.?
- That's Doctor of Thinkology.
The sum of the square roots
of any two sides of an isosceles triangle
is equal to the square root of the remaining side.
Oh, joy, rapture! I've got a brain!
And that's the paradox of cinema,
the paradox of belief.
We don't simply believe or do not believe.
We always believe
in a kind of a conditional mode.
I know very well it's a fake but, nonetheless,
I let myself be emotionally affected.
How do you do?
Mr Carl Laemmle feels it would be
a little unkind to present this picture
without just a word of friendly warning.
We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein,
a man of science, who sought to create
a man after his own image
without reckoning upon God.
Somebody tells us
you have to experience horror, we do it.
So if any of you feel that you do not care
to subject your nerves to such a strain,
now is your chance to... Well, we've warned you.
Ladies and gentlemen, young and old,

this may seem an unusual procedure,
speaking to you before the picture begins.
But we have an unusual subject.
Behind, not red, this is Hollywood,
but black curtain,
Cecil DeMille himself appears,
giving us a lesson of how
the story of ten commandments and Moses
has great relevance today where we are fighting
communist, totalitarian danger
and so on, giving us all the clues.
Are men the property of the state?
Or are they free souls under God?
This same battle continues
throughout the world today.
This hidden master who controls the events
can also be defined as ideology embodied,
in the sense of the space
which organises our desires.
And your name? What the fuck is your name?
In David Lynch's Lost Highway,
we have the Mystery Man,
who stands for the very cinematographer,
even director.
Imagine somebody who has
a direct access to your inner life,
to your innermost fantasies,
to what even you don't want to know
about yourself.
We've met before, haven't we?
I don't think so.
Where was it that you think we met?
At your house, don't you remember?
The best way to imagine what Mystery Man is,
is to imagine somebody
who doesn't want anything from us.
What do you mean? You're where right now?
At your house.
That's fucking crazy, man.
Call me.
That's the true horror of this Mystery Man.
Not any evil, demoniac intentions and so on.
Just the fact that when he is in front of you,
he, as it were, sees through you.

I told you I was here.

How'd you do that?

Ask me.

- How'd you get inside my house?

- You invited me.

It is not my custom to go where I'm not wanted.

It's like the court in Kafka's novels,

where the court, or the Law,

only comes when you ask for it.

Oh! Now, why would he do that?

Most peculiar. What on Earth?

Hitchcock was obsessed

with this topic of manipulating emotions.

His dream was even that once in the future,

we would no longer have to shoot narratives,

our brains will be directly connected

to some machine

and the director would only have to press

different buttons there

and the appropriate emotions

will be awakened in our mind.

They're coming. They're coming!

What do directors like Hitchcock,

Tarkovsky, Kieslowski, Lynch

have in common?

A certain autonomy of cinematic form.

Form is not here simply

to express, articulate content.

It has a message of its own.

In Hitchcock, we have

the motif of a person hanging from an abyss

by the hand of another person.

The first example, Saboteur.

Rear Window.

Then we have in To Catch a Thief.

You've got a full house down there.

Begin the performance.

Then in North by Northwest.

Then, of course, in Vertigo.

So we see here

the same visual motif repeating itself.

I think it's wrong to look

for a common, deeper meaning.

Some French theorists claimed that

what we are dealing here with
is the motif of fall and redemption.
I think this is already saying too much.
I think that what we are dealing with
is with a kind of a cinematic materialism,
that beneath the level of meaning,
spiritual meaning
but also simple narrative meaning,
we get a more elementary level
of forms themselves,
communicating with each other,
interacting, reverberating, echoing,
morphing, transforming one into the other.
And it is this background,
this background of proto-reality,
a real which is more dense,
more fundamental than the narrative reality,
the story that we observe.
It is this that provides the proper density
of the cinematic experience.
It's the gigantic tree where, in Vertigo,
Madeleine and Scottie get together,
almost embrace, where their erotic tension
becomes unbearable.
What is this tree?
I think it's another
in the series of "Hitchcockian Big Things,"
like the Mount Rushmore statues,
or take another example, like Moby-Dick.
This tree is not simply a natural object.
It is, within our mental space,
what in psychoanalysis is called "the Thing".
It's effectively as if this tree,
in its very extra-large distortion,
embodies something
that comes out of our inner space,
libido, the excessive energy of our mind.
So here I think
we can see how films and philosophy
are coming together.
How great cinematographers really
enable us to think in visual terms.
After the birds attack the city,
there is a fire which breaks out

at a gasoline station,
where a guy throws a match on the gasoline.
Hey, you! Look out! Don't drop that match!
Look out! Get out of there!
- Mister, run!
- Watch out!
The first part of this short scene
is the standard one.
We get the standard exchange of shots of the fire
and shots of the person,
Melanie in this case, who looks at it.
Then something strange happens.
We cut to way above the city.
We see the entire town.
We automatically take this shot
as a standard establishing shot.
Like after details which perplex you,
which prevent you
from getting a clear orientation,
you need a shot which enables you
some kind of a cognitive mapping,
that you know what's going on.
But then, precisely following that logic
of the Thing from inner space
which emerges from within you,
first we hear these ominous sounds,
which are sounds of the birds,
then one bird enters, another bird enters...
The shot which was taken as a neutral,
God's view shot,
all of a sudden changes into an evil gaze.
The gaze of the very birds attacking.
And we are thrown into that position.
And again, we can use here
The Birds as the final instalment
and read backwards other classical
Hitchcock scenes in the same way.
Isn't exactly the same thing happening
in what I consider the ultimate scene in Psycho,
the second murder,
the murder of the detective Arbogast?
Hitchcock manipulates here in a very refined way
the logic of so-called fetishist disavowal.
The logic of, "I know very well, but..."

We know very well some things,
but we don't really believe in them,
so although we know they will happen,
we are no less surprised when they happen.
In this case,
everything points towards the murder
and, nonetheless, when it happens,
the surprise is, if anything, stronger.
It begins in a standard Hitchcockian way.
He looks up the stairs.
This exchange creates the Hitchcockian tension
between the subject's look
and the stairs themselves,
or rather the void on the top of the stairs
returning the gaze,
emanating some kind of
a weird unfathomable threat.
The camera then provides
a kind of a geometrically clear
God's point of view shot image
of the entire scene.
It is as if here we pass
from God as neutral creator,
to God in his unbearable divine rage.
This murderer is for us an unfathomable monster.
We don't know who he is,
but because we are forced
to assume the murderer's position,
in a way we don't know who we are.
As if we discover
a terrifying dimension in ourselves.
As if we are forced to act as a doll,
as a tool of another evil divinity's will.
It's not as classical metaphysics thinks,
"We are too terrified to accept
the fact that we are mortal beings,
"we would like to be immortal." No.
The truly horrible thing is to be immortal.
Immortality is the true nightmare, not death.
Lord Vader,
can you hear me?
We should remember the exact moment
when the normal, everyday person,
okay not quite everyday,

but ordinary person of Anakin Skywalker changes into Darth Vader.

This scene when the Emperor's doctors are reconstituting him after heavy wounds into Darth Vader, that these scenes are inter-cut with the scenes of Princess Padm, Anakin's wife, giving birth.

Luke.

So it is as if we are witnessing the transformation of Anakin into father. But what kind of father?

A monster of a father who doesn't want to be dead.

His deep breathing is the sound of the father, the Freudian, primordial father, this obscene over-potent father, the father who doesn't want to die.

This, I think, is for all of us the most obscene threat that we witness.

We don't want our fathers alive.

We want them dead.

The ultimate object of anxiety is a living father.

This brings us to what we should really be attentive about in David Lynch's film.

Namely, what is to be taken seriously and not seriously in his films.

- We love Ben.

- We love Ben.

- Here's to Ben.

- Here's to Ben.

Here's to Ben.

- Here's to Ben.

- Be polite!

Here's to Ben.

Frank is one of these terrifying, ridiculously obscene paternal figures.

Apart from Frank in Blue Velvet, we have Baron Harkonnen in Dune, we have Willem Dafoe in Wild at Heart, we have Mr Eddy in Lost Highway.

Don't you ever fucking tailgate! Ever!

- Tell him you won't tailgate.

- Ever!

I won't ever tailgate...
Do you know how many fucking car lengths
it takes to stop a car at 35 miles an hour?
Six fucking car lengths!
That's 106 fucking feet, mister!
If I had to stop suddenly, you would have hit me!
I want you to get a fucking driver's manual
and I want you to study that motherfucker!
I want to spit once on your head.
Just some spittle in your face.
What a luxury.
But I think that this very appearance
of ridiculously violent comedy is deceiving.
I think that these ridiculous paternal figures
are the ethical focus,
the topic of practically all David Lynch's films.
Let's fuck!
I'll fuck anything that moves!
A normal, paternal authority is an ordinary man
who, as it were, wears phallus as an insignia.
He has something
which provides his symbolic authority.
This is, in psychoanalytic theory, phallus.
You are not phallus. You possess phallus.
Phallus is something attached to you,
like the King's crown is his phallus.
Something you put on
and this gives you authority.
So that when you talk it's not simply
you as a common person who is talking,
it's symbolic authority itself,
the Law, the state, talking through you.
So these excessively ridiculous paternal figures,
it's not simply that they possess phallus,
that they have phallus
as the insignia of their authority,
in a way, they immediately are phallus.
This is for, if they still exist,
a normal male subject...
This is the most terrorising experience
you can imagine,
to directly being the thing itself,
to assume that I am a phallus.
And the provocative greatness

of these Lynchian, obscene, paternal figures,
is that not only they don't have any anxiety,
not only they are not afraid of it,
they fully enjoy being it.
They are truly fearless entities
beyond life and death,
gladly assuming, as it were, their immortality,
their non-castrated life energy.
Okay.
This is indicated in a very nice way
in the scene towards the end of Wild at Heart
where Bobby Peru is killed.
Stop, you sons of bitches!
This is the police!
He accepts the mortal danger he is in
with, kind of, exuberant vitality,
and it's truly that when his head explodes,
it's as if we see the head of the penis
being torn apart.
Oh, for Christ sakes.
That poor bastard.
And then at the end, these figures are sacrificed.
Oh, Jeffrey.
It's all over, Jeffrey.
Joseph Stalin's favourite cinematic genre
were musicals.
Not only Hollywood musicals,
but also Soviet musicals.
There was a whole series
of so-called kolkhoz musicals.
Why? We should find this strange,
Stalin who personifies communist austerity,
terror and musicals.
The answer again is
the psychoanalytic notion of superego.
Superego is not only excessive terror,
unconditional injunction,
demand of utter sacrifice,
but at the same time, obscenity, laughter.
And it is Sergei Eisenstein's genius
to guess at this link.
In his last film,
which is a coded portrait of the Stalin era,
Ivan the Terrible: Part 2,

which because of all this
was immediately prohibited.
In the unique scene towards the end of the film,
we see the Czar, Ivan,
throwing a party, amusing himself,
with his so-called Oprichniki,
his private guards, who were used
to torture and kill his enemies,
his, if you want, KGB, secret police,
are seen performing a musical.
An obscene musical,
which tells precisely the story
about killing the rich boyars,
Ivan's main enemies.
Let the axes drop!
So terror itself is staged as a musical.
And the gates fell to the ground
Now, what has all this
to do with the reality of political terror?
Isn't this just art, imagination? No.
Not only were the political show trials
in Moscow in the mid- and late-1930s
theatrical performances,
we should not forget this,
they were well staged, rehearsed and so on.
Even more, there is, horrible as it may sound,
something comical about them.
The horror was so ruthless that the victims,
those who had to confess and demand
death penalty for themselves and so on,
were deprived of the minimum of their dignity,
so that they behaved as puppets,
they engaged in dialogues
which really sound like
out of Alice in Wonderland.
They behaved as persons from a cartoon.
Public enemy number one.
You're on trial today
for the crimes that you've committed.
We're gonna prove you're guilty.
Just try and get acquitted.
In the mid-'30s,
Walt Disney Studios produced
an unbelievable cartoon

called Pluto's Judgement Day...

Shut up!

...in which the dog, well-known Pluto,
falls asleep, and in his sleep
is persecuted by, haunted by the dream
of cats who were all in the past
his victims, molested by him,
dragging him to the court,
where a proper, truly Stalinist political trial
is in process against him.

We've seen and heard enough.

Jury, do your duty.

Just watch us do our stuff

We find the defendant guilty

He's guilty, he's guilty

Hooray!

The Law is not only severe, ruthless, blind,
at the same time, it mocks us.

There is an obscene pleasure
in practising the Law.

Our fundamental delusion today is not to believe
in what is only a fiction,
to take fictions too seriously.

It's, on the contrary,
not to take fictions seriously enough.

You think it's just a game? It's reality.

It's more real than it appears to you.

For example, people who play video games,
they adopt a screen persona
of a sadist, rapist, whatever.

The idea is, in reality I'm a weak person,
so in order to

supplement my real life weakness,

I adopt the false image

of a strong, sexually promiscuous person,
and so on and so on.

So this would be the naive reading.

I want to appear stronger, more active,
because in real life, I'm a weak person.

But what if we read it in the opposite way?

That this strong, brutal rapist,
whatever, identity is my true self.

In the sense that this is
the psychic truth of myself

and that in real life,
because of social constraints and so on,
I'm not able to enact it.
So that, precisely because I think
it's only a game,
it's only a persona,
a self-image I adopt in virtual space,
I can be there much more truthful.
I can enact there an identity
which is much closer to my true self.
We need the excuse of a fiction
to stage what we truly are.
Stalker is a film about a zone,
a prohibited space where there are debris,
remainders of aliens visiting us.
And stalkers are people
who specialised in smuggling foreigners
who want to visit into this space
where you get many magical objects.
But the main among them
is the room in the middle of this space,
where it is claimed your desires will be realised.
I know you're going to get mad.
Anyway, I must tell you...
We are now... on the threshold...
This is the most important moment in your life.
You must know that.
Your innermost wishes will be made real here.
Your most sincere wish. Born of suffering.
The contrast between Solaris and Stalker is clear.
In Solaris, we get id-machine
as an object which realises
your nightmares, desires, fears,
even before you ask for it, as it were.
In Stalker it's the opposite,
a zone where your desires,
deepest wishes get realised
on condition that you are able to formulate them.
Which, of course, you are never able,
which is why everybody fails
once you get there in the centre of the zone.
You just make money, using our... anguish!
It's not even the money.
You're enjoying yourself here.

You're like God Almighty here.
You, a hypocritical louse, decide
who is to live and who is to die
He deliberates!
Now I see why you stalkers
never enter the room yourselves.
You revel in all that power,
that mystery, your authority!
What else is there to wish for?
It's not true! You... you're mistaken.
Tarkovsky's solution to this tension
is that of religious obscurantism.
The way out of this deadlock
is a gesture of self-sacrifice.
His last two films, Nostalghia and Sacrifice,
both end up with some suicidal gesture of the hero.
...for the great day of His wrath has come,
and who is able to stand?
But I don't think this is
what makes Tarkovsky interesting.
What makes him interesting
is the very form of his films.
Tarkovsky uses as this material element
of pre-narrative density, time itself.
All of a sudden we are made to feel
this inertia, drabness of time.
Time is not just a neutral, light medium
within which things happen.
We feel the density of time itself.
Things that we see are more markers of time.
He treats even humans in this way.
If we look at the unique face of Stalker himself,
it's a face of somebody
exposed to too much radiation
and, as it were, rotting, falling apart alive.
It is this disintegration
of the very material texture of reality
which provides the spiritual depth.
Tarkovskian subjects, when they pray,
they don't look up, they look down.
They even sometimes, as in Stalker,
put their head directly onto the earth.
Here, I think, Tarkovsky affects us at a level
which is much deeper,

much more crucial for our experience
than all the standard, spiritual motives
of elevating ourselves
above material reality and so on.
There is nothing specific about the zone.
It's purely a place where a certain limit is set.
You set a limit, you put a certain zone off-limit,
and although things remain
exactly the way they were,
it's perceived as another place.
Precisely as the place onto which you can project
your beliefs, your fears,
things from your inner space.
In other words, the zone is ultimately
the very whiteness of the cinematic screen.
"To the people of this city we donate
this monument; 'Peace and Prosperity'."
Chaplin's City Lights is one of those masterpieces
which are really too sophisticated
for the sophisticated.
It's a deceptively simple movie.
When we are enraptured by it,
we tend to miss
its complexity and extreme finesse.
Already, the first scene of the movie
provides the co-ordinates.
It's kind of a microcosm of Chaplin's entire art.
What's the source of Chaplin's comic genius?
What's the archetypal
comic situation in Chaplin's films?
It's being mistaken for somebody
or functioning as a disturbing spot,
as a disturbing stain.
He distorts the vision.
So he wants to erase himself,
to get out of the picture.
Or people don't even note him, take note of him,
so he wants to be noted.
Or, if they perceive him, he's misperceived,
identified for what he is not.
The tramp is wrongly identified,
by a beautiful blind girl
who is selling flowers on a street corner,
as a millionaire.

He accepts the game, helps her,
even steals money to pay for her operation
to restore her sight,
then after he serves the punishment
and returns, he tries to find her.
And I think that this is the metaphor
of our predicament.
All too often, when we love somebody,
we don't accept him or her
as what the person effectively is.
We accept him or her insofar as this person
fits the co-ordinates of our fantasy.
We misidentify, wrongly identify him or her,
which is why, when we discover
that we were wrong,
love can quickly turn into violence.
There is nothing more dangerous,
more lethal for the loved person
than to be loved, as it were,
for not what he or she is,
but for fitting the ideal.
In this case, love is always mortifying love.
Here it's not only the tramp
as the figure within the film's narrative
exposing himself to his beloved girl,
it's at the same time Chaplin as actor/director
exposing himself to us, the public.
"I am shameless. I am offering myself to you,
"but at the same time, I am afraid."
The true genius of Chaplin
resides in the way he was able to stage
this psychological moment of recognition
at the level of form, music, visual aspect,
and at the same time, at the level of acting.
When the two hands meet,
the girl finally recognises him for what he is.
This moment
is always extremely dangerous, pathetic.
The beloved falls out of the frame
of the idealised co-ordinates,
finally there
exposed in his psychological nakedness.
"Here I am as what I really am."
And I don't think we have to read it

as a happy ending.

We don't know what will happen.

We have the letters, "the end", the black screen,
but the singing goes on.

As if the emotion is now too strong,
it spills over the very frame.

In order to understand today's world,
we need cinema, literally.

It's only in cinema that we get
that crucial dimension which
we are not ready to confront in our reality.

If you are looking for what is in reality
more real than reality itself,
look into the cinematic fiction.

Corrected and additional transcription by Le Chef Gaspard