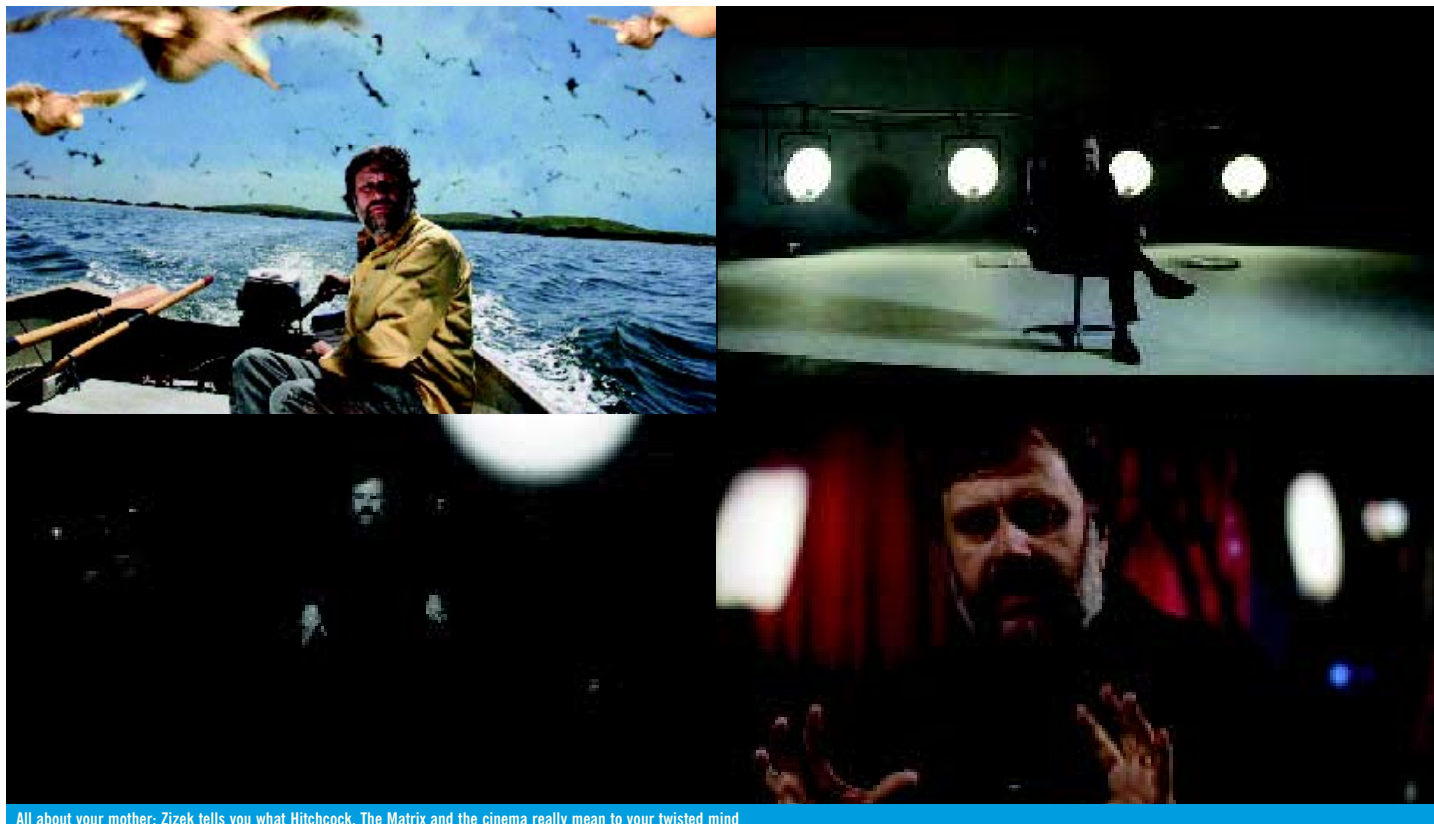


Popcorn psychoanalysis: THE PERVERT'S GUIDE TO THE CINEMA



All about your mother: Žižek tells you what Hitchcock, *The Matrix* and the cinema really mean to your twisted mind

Acclaimed polyglot philosopher Slavoj Žižek talks about why he decided to put himself in front of the camera, the audience on the couch and to tell us about his relationship with cinema.

Cinema has touched on psychoanalysis many times – Hitchcock's *Spellbound* is one famous example – but now it's time for psychoanalysis to return the favour. In his three-part *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema*, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek runs a Freudian eye over some modern classics, decoding Lynch's paternal super-ego and the *Psycho* house as a three-storey psychic structure among other things, before moving on to the blockbuster questions: why we need cinema. Directed by Sophie Fiennes, Žižek runs amok with analytic glee, like a renegade uni lecturer.

Dazed & Confused: Are there similarities between dreams and films as ways of processing fantasy?

Slavoj Žižek: Dreams, like films, are never simple escapism for me. The mystery is precisely that in a fantasy, there can be more truth than reality. What you encounter in fantasy is something that you can't confront in reality. Let's take *Tom & Jerry*. Don't they have a much more traumatic, violent image of social reality? People plotting against each other, destroying, struggling... Imagine a half-hour movie with real actors, enacting the same plot – it would be the most violent, horrific view of our reality. But you can do it in a cartoon, in the guise of it being fiction.

D&C: Does Hollywood display particular tendencies?

SZ: The underlying idea is this typically American redeeming notion of subjectivity: an honest individual struggling can bring it to the public – like *All The President's Men*. (Ironically) What a wonderful country where two honest guys can overthrow the government!

D&C: What other benefits does analysis bring?

SZ: I find the different modalities in the theory of cinema really interesting – tension between the official narrative line and the emotional texture of the film. For example, Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*. The official line is that Michael Douglas is the bad guy, but he's the absolute emotional focus, the only true charismatic figure. Or Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*: many leftists read it as a desperate image of the hopeless, stupid existence of the American suburban middle class. But aren't there at the same time in the texture of the film these relaxed parallel stories interacting with each other – a much more happy, contingent, social ontology? An almost mystical synchronicity.

D&C: Are there any movies that you wanted to include, but couldn't?

SZ: Many which are ridiculous half-failures, exaggerated movies, but which I love. Soviet Stalinist musicals – *Volga – Volga*, *Kubanskiye Kazaki*. They're

wonderful – total obscenities. On the other hand, there are some Nazi melodramas like *Opfergang*, which I listed as one of the best films of all time. Or, did you see that one with Antonio Banderas, *The 13th Warrior*? It's based on the Michael Crichton book. He plays an Arab prince sent as an ambassador to Scandinavia in the 10th century who gets involved with helping the Vikings find some strange, Neanderthal, matriarchal people. It's such a weird fantasy – it's interesting because of how it sticks out of the formula.

D&C: Isn't demystifying cinema a dangerous game?

SZ: This is what fascinates me – the enigma remains. When I was young, I remember a magician visited our class, and he did something very nice, pedagogically. He performed the trick and we all said, 'Wow!' Then he explained to us how to do the trick and then he did it again, and though we knew how it was done, the magic effect was still there. And that's my naive belief: good theory doesn't vulgarise the object. As a good Deleuze-ian [postmodern philosopher] would put it: surplus of the effect over the cause. PHIL HOAD

[The Pervert's Guide To The Cinema](#) is screening at the ICA on October 6, with Slavoj Žižek in discussion; the DVD is out in November