Well-Placed Reflections: (Post)modern Woman as Symptom of (Post)modern Man

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"Zanetto, lascia le Donne, e studia la matematica"

("Johnny, leave women alone and go study mathematics")

--Zulietta [in Rousseau (1782) 1959, 322)]

Whatever they may signify (and this is precisely the question: whether, how, and to whom they signify anything), the terms woman and the feminine figure prominently in contemporary Anglo-American and French poststructuralist theories of literature and culture.[1] This concern with woman and the feminine is implicitly linked to ideas of change and liberation: to a desire to be freed from traditional gender roles and representations in the case of feminist thinkers, and from traditional forms of thought, experience, and expression in the case of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theorists. For better and/or for worse, woman and the feminine are being associated with the current sense of cultural crisis and innovation that has been dubbed postmodernity. What is in crisis, we are told, is the so-called Master Narratives of universal reason, truth, progress, and the universal subject that were first conceptualized by Enlightenment philosophers.[2] Historical consciousness, psychoanalysis, and structuralism have helped to discredit these Master Narratives, which have been shown to presume falsely that reality can be objectively known and transparently expressed in language and that man as knower can know himself as object of knowledge. This knowable knower, the Enlightenment humanist subject who is necessarily masculine, has been mortified, and

his discourse has ostensibly died of shame along with him. Philosophy can no longer see itself as a universal theory of existence.

Both man and philosophy, then, must be replaced; the new object of affection for many theorists of postmodernity is woman. Such contemporary French philosophers of postmodernity as Jean Baudrillard, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Jean-François Lyotard have placed woman or the feminine at the center of their stylistically decentered theories of epistemological decenterment. Indeed, as one feminist theorist who has analyzed such theories, Alice Jardine, puts it, "the putting into discourse of 'woman' " seems to be "intrinsic to the condition of modernity" (1985, 25). Or, in the words of Rosi Braidotti, "The problematization of woman, women, and the feminine in contemporary French philosophy is a major factor in the critique and deconstruction of the rational subject" (1991, 8). In the Anglo-American feminist tradition, meanwhile, women play an equally central role in theories of the new, although here the emphasis has usually been on women as historical subjects rather than on woman or the feminine as concepts.

The questions to be asked are whether, in attempting to shift both the trajectory and the style of cultural inquiry, poststructuralists and postmodernists are really seeking to avoid the fetishizing or circumscribing of women that is characteristic of the traditions they critique. If so, do they succeed?

It would appear certain at the very least that some things have changed since Kant. As Jardine points out, the centrality of woman to contemporary theories of culture may stem directly from feminism's influence: "The sudden explosion of new theoretical systems [that depend on woman] could be directly linked to the presence of Woman's word" (1985, 97). But "Woman's word" began to make itself heard in Western culture before the twentieth century. Indeed, the theorist of postmodernity whose concept of woman-as-the-postmodern will be the focus of this essay, Slavoj Zizek, argues that Kant was the first to inscribe sexual difference into philosophical discourse (1993, 54).[3] Zizek

also contends that even as he attempted to close it with his theory of transcendental apperception, Kant opened up the gap of impossibility in the subject and in the knowable that constitutes what we now call the postmodern condition (1993, 56, 173). If the discourses of both modernity (that is, the Enlightenment and its aftermath) and postmodernity (our current state of after-modernism) adopt and in some way depend on woman, one might ask, what has changed—if anything—and why and for whom?

For, as several feminist critics who have warily scrutinized the current confabulation of woman and the postmodern have already observed, this synthesis could be used to reinforce the conceptual and material oppression of women inherent in Enlightenment humanism that it claims to undo.[4] Indeed, as Jennifer Wicke and Margaret Ferguson put it, "Feminist postmodernism once read as an oxymoron, and postmodern feminism still has an uncertain valence" (1992, 3). The tension between feminism and postmodernism derives from what would seem to be their antithetical aims: whereas Anglo-American feminism has concerned itself with women's experience of social oppression and often assumed that all women share a common interest and essence (that is, it has assumed a humanist but feminine subject), the philosophical project of postmodernism is to deconstruct all broad humanist categories, including "women," as falsely totalizing (Fraser and Nicholson 1988, 83–85; Wicke 1992). Postmodernism has been described as the attempt to rehistoricize poststructuralism and to compel cultural theory to account for historical and material differences (Ross 1988, xv; Wicke 1992, 18), and postmodernists have charged essentialist or cultural feminism with philosophical simplemindedness because it ignores the complex social construction of subjects and the conventionality of language (Fraser and Nicholson 1988, 84, 91; Butler 1993, 30). On the other hand, it could be argued that feminism as a social practice remains more faithful to the material diversity of individuals and social conditions than postmodernist theory, which like any theory (and perhaps more than some) necessarily essentializes in its formulation of general propositions, no matter how localizing and heterogeneous it tries

to make them.[5] Thus Antiessentialist, historicized feminism has also been criticized for too readily surrendering the need for women to organize collectively; that is, for surrendering the need to essentialize (Modleski 1991, 17–18, 22, 163; Kipnis 1988, 155; de Lauretis 1987, 23–24). Postmodernism has also been criticized for being too apolitical in its failure to articulate the need for organized movement for change (Fraser and Nicholson 1988, 88; Rose 1988, 243; Wicke 1992, 17–18). More specifically, Jacqueline Rose has criticized formulations of the postmodern such as Jameson's and Lyotard's for eliding the question of sexual difference (1988, 240–42).

It would seem, then, that the concatenation of feminist and postmodern theory could produce a range of effects—one of which would be to sever the term woman from any reference to actual women (de Lauretis 1987, 23; Jardine 1985, 35) and to permit it to stand for anything and everything. Even worse, an ostensibly feminist postmodernism could co-opt feminist perspectives and resubordinate them to traditional male-dominated interests (de Lauretis 1987, 21). As Tania Modleski puts it, feminists "need to consider the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men ultimately deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it" (1991, 7). In contrast, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson suggest that combining postmodernist and feminist theories could capitalize on the strengths of both and redress the weaknesses of each (1988, 84). Postmodernism could help feminists uncover what is theoretically problematic in Western literary humanism and Marxism and also address excessive generalization within feminism (Nicholson 1992, 60).

Because this rapprochement of feminism and postmodernism looks both promising and dangerous, feminists need to look carefully at specific examples of such theories. We need to distinguish, on the one hand, between responses to feminism that attend to the costs of suppressing women's perspectives and of representing them tendentiously and that allow women themselves to change and control tradition; and, on the other hand, reactions to feminism that merely attempt to resuscitate critically ill,

traditionally male-dominated discursive traditions by drawing in and sacrificing to them the vitality of feminine differences. As Modleski has expressed this necessity, "We need to remain aware of how frequently male subjectivity works to appropriate 'femininity' while oppressing women,

. . . [and we need to] recogniz[e] and challeng[e] the dubious sexual analogies that pervade a wide variety of discourses, however seductive they may at first appear. And this is especially important when . . . such discourses masquerade as theories of liberation" (1991, 34).

In this light, I propose to scrutinize the theory of woman-as-the-postmodern that the influential cultural theorist Slavoj Zizek has recently propounded. A self-designated champion of both postmodernism and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Zizek has shaped postmodernist philosophy in such works as <u>The Sublime Object of Ideology</u> (1989) and more recently, <u>Tarrying with the Negative</u> (1993). Zizek superimposes Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic model of individual development onto Hegelian models of historical and epistemological change and Althusserian concepts of ideology in order to schematize how the individual subject is produced in history, how historical change is possible, and what role art plays in forming both the subject and history. Zizek emphasizes the gap between the symbolic realm of language and socially constituted reality and the Lacanian concept of the real.[6] He combines Lacan's idea that the subject is split by language into a being that can have access to itself and the world only through the medium of words with Louis Althusser's idea that individuals' identities are produced by their societies' ideological fictions. Although it is impossible to avoid misrecognizing oneself as the originator rather than the vehicle of such linguistic fictions, Zizek posits, we can at least rearticulate our identities through constitutive antagonisms of linguistic and social difference, upon which self-knowledge and democracy depend (1989, 5–6).

But what Zizek is more interested in than how one can understand oneself or redefine oneself politically, or how the self or political conditions might be changed, is

how one can achieve the state of "separation" or "subjective destitution"—a distance from all symbols and ideas (1990, 32, 43). While it is impossible to escape being influenced or defined by ideological terms, through experiencing what Zizek calls "abstract negativity," one can come close to occupying the nonideological void that lies at the center of both individual and collective existence. It is this void that Zizek calls the real, after Lacan. The void of the real is apparently created by language,[7] which intercedes between the name and the thing named, thereby creating an unbridgeable separation between the speaker and the thing spoken of (including the speaker himself). The real itself, however, is not linguistic. It is "the duty of the critical intellectual," Zizek writes, "to occupy all the time . . . the place of this hole, i.e., to maintain a distance toward every reigning Master-Signifier" (1993, 2). For Zizek (as for Kant), the aesthetic realm is the place where the symbolic network of ideological fictions is somehow suspended; it is this space that he seeks to occupy and to defend as the last refuge of the real from ideology. Although the real can never be articulated and exists only as an absence or a void, it is nonetheless a singular object of enjoyment and fascination. And for Zizek it is feminine. It is also postmodernity's fixation.

Zizek uses two different kinds of language and draws on two different cultural fields to carry out his project of "saving" Hegelian theories of history and epistemology through Lacan's psychoanalytic theories of the subject's relation to language (1989, 7). He uses the traditional abstract language and concepts of philosophy to formulate "the notional content [of his theories] in and for itself" (1992a, xi). But he illustrates those theories by drawing on the popular-culture genre of film. Zizek hierarchizes this bifurcation of ends and means: for example, he authorizes his reading of "the most sublime theoretical motifs of Jacques Lacan together with and through exemplary cases of contemporary mass culture" by referring to Walter Benjamin's program of "reading the highest spiritual products of a culture alongside its common, prosaic, worldly products" (1992c, vii). These so-called high and low genres and the two modes of Zizek's

own rhetorical strategy are also sexualized. In reading Lacan through popular culture, Zizek implicitly adopts what he calls the feminine role of "smearing" the masculine discourse of the Master (philosophy, psychoanalysis) with the "stain" of the feminine real as embodied in film (1992b, 235–40). In so doing, he implicitly claims to be subverting the elevated, male-centered theories of the Master in a feminine mode: "Smeared by an obscene vitality, the law itself—traditionally, a pure, neutral universality—assumes the features of a heterogeneous, inconsistent bricolage [hodgepodge] penetrated with enjoyment" (1992c, 149).

But Zizek's feminine messiness has a serious purpose: to restore honor to the Master by educating the (feminized) masses in His wisdom. Movies play the role in Zizek's project of what he calls (after Lacan) a sinthome (symptom), an ex post facto manifestation of the Master's theories in the lower realm of popular entertainment: "To put it in Hegelese: Hollywood is conceived as a 'phenomenology' of the Lacanian Spirit, its appearing for the common consciousness" (1992a, xi). The masses-as-women, that is, are to be educated at their level through Zizek's ostensibly feminine practice of filling in the holes in Lacan's cryptic utterances with his reading of the so-called feminine artifacts of popular culture.[8] Zizek proposes to "mercilessly exploit popular culture, using it as convenient material to explain not only the vague outline of the Lacanian theoretical edifice but sometimes also the finer details missed by the predominantly academic reception of Lacan" (1992c, vii). The Master's edifice apparently needs shoring up by the very elements to which it remains unutterably superior.

Yet even as he fortifies that edifice by mercilessly exploiting popular culture, Zizek can also play the role of the enfant terrible who makes a big mess in his father's house and sullies his name until the moment and in the name of an ultimate Restoration. "Indulging in the idiotic enjoyment of popular culture" (1992c, viii) affords temporary relief from the oppression of the Master's patriarchal legacy. Because movies represent a pleasurable vestige of the feminine real in a void at the center of the intimidating

masculine symbolic, they constitute a breathing space that enables the subject (always grammatically masculine for Zizek) “to avoid the total alienation in the signifier”—that is, in ideology or the symbolic (1989, 122). Enjoying oneself idiotically at the movies provides a temporary escape from the mortifying domination of theory—to which, however, enjoyment must always, finally, be surrendered.

Zizek’s merciless exploitation of popular culture in order to make the Master’s law of psychoanalysis work as a theory of history not only ravishes films: Zizek also draws on the work of feminist theorists of film and psychoanalysis without acknowledging that he is doing so. Jane Gallop, Teresa de Lauretis, Juliet Mitchell, Laura Mulvey, Jacqueline Rose, Kaja Silverman, and others have been exploring the relationship between feminism, psychoanalysis, and film since the mid-seventies. Many of Zizek’s central theses, such as his contention that woman represents both a gap in and a challenge to the integrity of the male subject, were first articulated by these critics. In an essay first published in Screen in 1975, for example, Mulvey argued that a psychoanalytic analysis of film could be used for the political (and specifically feminist) purpose of “demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (1989, 17). Mulvey suggested that female film characters often represent the threat of castration for the male viewer, a central lack that both allures and terrifies and that must be covered over by the fetishistic fantasy of cinematic plenitude (14–16). In another essay published ten years later (before any of Zizek’s writings on Lacan and film had been published), Mulvey observed that “Lacan mapped the concept of the symbolic onto Freud’s concept of the Oedipal trajectory: access to the symbolic order is achieved by crossing the frontier, out of the imaginary, the dyadic world of mother and child, into the Father’s name and his Law. That is, out of a body-based, maternal relationship into one created by social exchange, culture and legal taboos” (1989, 165). Mulvey’s analysis of what happens to the heroines of Hitchcock films in relation to this Lacanian theory of the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic anticipated Zizek’s theory of the male

viewer's traumatic subversion in the real prior to his return to the symbolic. Mulvey writes, "Hitchcock's heroes are plunged into a world turned upside-down, in which identity and even name become uncertain, in which the logical relations of everyday life are reversed in a nightmare universe that also celebrates the pleasure and excitement of liminality. . . . But journeys end with safe returns . . . " (1989, 171). It is precisely the nature and consequences of this safe return that I will explore.

In order to scrutinize more closely Zizek's theory of woman-as-the-postmodern and its implications for women, I propose to focus on an essay originally published in the journal October titled "Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man" (1990). I have chosen to focus on this essay, in which Zizek discusses the roles played by Ingrid Bergman in several Roberto Rossellini films, for two reasons: first, because it encapsulates Zizek's reading of woman-as-the-postmodern, and second, because it can be strikingly juxtaposed with another reading of (a) woman as emblematic of an analogous psychological, historical, and epistemological crisis roughly contemporaneous with Kant—that is, with the supposed onset of modernity. This strategy will allow me to investigate whether the impulse to impose the crisis of modernity on (a) woman in the late eighteenth century differs from the impulse to impose the crisis of postmodernity on woman in the twentieth, and also to examine the implications of this imposition for women.

Because the scope of Zizek's essay and of his general theoretical enterprise is nothing if not all-encompassing (he outlines theories of Fascism, Christianity, Communism, the ethics of action, woman, ideology, anti-Semitism, the subject, language, and reality), the stakes of his project are high. This is particularly true for women, since Zizek propounds a theory of woman as such; implicitly, he tells women what they are, can be, and ought to do. Men, on the other hand, are generally exempted from these imperatives on the grounds that they are incapable of carrying them out.

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The objective and methods of Zizek's "Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man" are ambiguous. First, Zizek wants to exonerate Lacan of the charge of antifeminism by offering a revisionist reading of what seems to be Lacan's "notoriously antifeminist thes[is]" that "woman is a symptom of man " (1990, 20). Zizek argues that Lacan's later theory of the symptom as a psychoanalytic phenomenon reverses the original implications of his thesis: rather than merely being a coded sign that signifies back to man what he truly desires (which man has hidden from himself) and thereby robs him of his identity and self-possession by compelling him to "cede his desire" to her, woman as symptom of man is rather the guarantor of man's being and existence, precisely because "there is something in her that escapes the relation to man" (21). That is, woman does not come after but rather before man; she is not produced by but rather produces him. She is ontologically independent of him, while he is dependent on her.

Zizek wants to redeem Lacan, but he also ventriloquizes him in order to combine Lacanian psychoanalytic theory with Althusserian social theory and Hegelian theories of history. Bergman serves as the medium for this master-theory: by surrendering herself to Hegelian abstract negativity, the Bergman heroine refuses to sacrifice herself to the Lacanian "big Other" of Althusserian ideology by plunging into the traumatic abyss of the Lacanian real. She thereby performs an act of "symbolic suicide," which, according to Lacan, is "the only act which is not a failure, the only act stricto sensu" (1990, 22). Woman both is and represents the real, against whose terrifying power to annihilate self and meaning the male conventions of language, identity, and community have been fabricated. Rather than seeking to eliminate her as a sign of his incompleteness, Zizek argues, postmodern man should celebrate woman's absolute priority. While he himself cannot escape from the realm of symbolic ideology, he can at least admire from afar woman's innate proximity to the negative void of the real. For in this void is found jouissance, the blissful enjoyment of the thing-in-itself unencumbered by language, which man can only experience vicariously through woman-as-the-real.

We will look at this argument in detail in a moment, but first I want to point out a symptomatic slippage in the structure of Zizek's argument. In the first place, Rossellini's films cannot prove that Lacan meant what Zizek says he meant, because if anyone could answer this question it would only be Lacan. Although a Lacanian analysis can be applied to them, Rossellini's films have no inherent relation to Lacanian theory. Second, the films also cannot prove that Lacan was right about what woman is or means. They are not truth documents capable of bearing the kind of evidentiary weight that Zizek wants them to carry in relation to what are ostensibly universal truths of human existence. Indeed, this is precisely why Zizek claims to celebrate the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere: because it is not subject to legal universalization.

The biggest problem with Zizek's attempt to prove Lacan's theory through Rossellini's films, however, is that the logic of his argument is circular. Zizek treats Rossellini's films as mere symptoms of Lacan's theory—as material evidence of a theory that has already anticipated them—while at the same time they serve as founding evidence for the theory's validity. It is finally uncertain whether Lacan is a symptom of Rossellini or vice versa. In any case, both become mere symptoms of Zizek's own massive theory of culture: Rossellini proves Lacan, who proves Althusser and Hegel, who prove Zizek. Zizek's project thus reveals itself to be not empirical but ideological—or rather, romantic. As we shall see, a psychodrama concerning priority, autonomy, and totalization is central to Zizek's essay. At its core lie questions concerning relations between the principals (Zizek, Rossellini, Lacan, Althusser, Bergman, and Hegel) that have to do with ambivalence toward membership in and exclusion from a sexualized and hierarchized symbolic order.

Zizek's interpretation of Rossellini's films as a symptom of Lacan's theories makes Bergman (as a series of characters in her husband's films) exemplify what Zizek elsewhere calls the pure nonpathological subject who constitutes herself as a pure subject by assuming her nonexistence (1992c, 65–66). As Irene in Europa '51 or Karin in

Stromboli, Bergman undergoes symbolic suicide: she radically separates herself from the ideology of her family and community, thereby achieving what Zizek calls a state of "separation" through an experience of "abstract" or "radical negativity" (1990, 37–8). In terms of the central Lacanian distinction between the symbolic and the real (figured here as masculine and feminine, respectively), Bergman-as-woman heroically leaps into "the abyss of the real, out of which our symbolic reality emerges" (40). In Europa '51, for example, Bergman plays a frivolous, wealthy Roman mother, Irene, whose neglect of her young son causes him to commit suicide. Plagued by guilt, Irene becomes a saintlike character who performs many acts of charity, including one that puts her on the wrong side of the law. She is found by a court to be mentally unfit as a result of the shock of her son's death and sent to a psychiatric ward, where she is pronounced insane. "At the end of the film," writes Zizek, "we see her alone in a sterile cell while, in front of the hospital, the poor whom she tried to help gather and hail her as a saint" (29). In Zizek's view the film is not "a commonplace critique of the so-called 'alienation of contemporary society,' where the noise of our bustling social life renders us deaf to the desperate cry of our neighbor and so forth" (29). Rather, her son's suicide constitutes for Irene a traumatic encounter with the real: with an emptiness that lies at the center of ordinary life but remains uncontaminated by language, morality, or politics. Irene performs charitable acts not in order to alleviate her guilt but in order to take refuge in guilt as an escape from this traumatic encounter with the nonsignifying void of the real. When Irene assumes what Zizek calls "the subjective position of the saint" at the end of the film, Rossellini is celebrating her humble submission not to a transcendent faith but to the absence of faith (32). Irene "falls away from the symbolic network and assumes distance toward the symbolic universe" (32).

The result of this symbolic suicide is "a kind of temporary eclipse, aphanisis, of the subject" (1990, 34). Paradoxically, this disappearance constitutes Bergman as subject: by refusing to sacrifice herself to the fictitious big Other of Christian guilt and

redemption, Irene resists the temptation to sacrifice herself in order to conceal the big Other's lack. (The big Other in Lacanian terms is "the subject supposed to know"—God, ideology, the psychoanalyst, language—the being or system that seems to guarantee meaning and identity.) Irene and the other Bergman characters are heroic precisely because they refuse to be heroic in ordinary terms: they reject those terms, according to Zizek, without preferring any other set of values. This defiance of the symbolic "is always negative, that is, an act of annihilation. It is not simply that we do not know what will come of it; rather it is that its final outcome is ultimately insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the 'No!' of the pure act" (35).

Zizek argues that besides acting out this role in Rossellini's films, Bergman played a similar part in relation to Hollywood's film industry. After she happened to see two of the unknown Rossellini's "neorealistic masterpieces" in a small New York theater, Zizek writes, Bergman "wrote a letter to Rossellini in which, placing her own stardom at his disposal, she offered to help him obtain his well-deserved international fame" (1990, 19). Bergman was so impressed by Rossellini's art that she threw over her successful commercial career in Hollywood and offered "to play any role that might be appropriate for a Swedish actress who spoke fluent English, some German, and only two words of Italian: 'Ti amo!' " (I love you!) (19). Just as Irene in Europa '51 had the courage to sacrifice her place in society to her recognition of the void of the real, Bergman had the courage to rebel against a limited ideological universe, Hollywood, even at the expense of her career. Despite Hollywood's monopoly over the film industry, she refused to yield to the ideological hegemony of that symbolic community and staked herself instead on an unknown outsider's genius.

For Zizek, Bergman both as an actress and as a set of fictional characters thus embodies what lies at fascinating and seductive center of postmodernism. She corresponds to what Zizek defines in Looking Awry as "the postmodernist break" in representation: the rendering visible of the "real, traumatic kernel whose status remains

deeply ambiguous," the real that "resists symbolization" (1992c, 142–3). Bergman embodies "the real Thing," the object displayed directly, visibly indifferent and arbitrary, at the center of some symbolic construction, which can "function successively as a disgusting reject and as a sublime, charismatic apparition" (144). This object is "incarnated, materialized emptiness," a "terrifying . . . everyday object that has started to function, by chance, as that which fills in the hole in the Other (the symbolic order)" (145). Bergman embodies pure enjoyment (the Lacanian jouissance) because she cannot be successfully—that is, stably—ideologized.

This abyss of nonsignificance is figured as a vagina: it is "an incision," a "vertiginous abyss," a volcanic crater, into which the viewing subject momentarily disappears while watching Bergman in the Rossellini films (1990, 36, 28, 32). For the viewer, Bergman-as-woman thus represents the death drive and the psychotic: the terrifying but courageous confrontation with the nullity at the center of human existence around and against which all culture is constructed as a "reaction formation" (1989, 5). She is a symptom of man in the sense that she embodies and enacts the fearsome self-immolation in the real that man desires to emulate but cannot bear to perform, and against which all his "frenetic activity" is only a failed attempt "to balance the dignity of her act, to recompense for it" (1990, 44).

In Bergman-as-woman, then, Zizek sees the culmination of a series of epistemological, psychoanalytic, and historical crises that are all versions of the same crisis. Communism, Fascism, biblical history, literary and psychoanalytic theory, the subject as defined by Lacan, philosophy, and Rossellini's films all pass through this crisis—and apparently must continue to do so. What makes this glimpse into the abyss of the nonsignifying real possible for the viewer of Rossellini's films is the Bergman character's ability "to perceive this fissure of the symbolic 'substance' insofar as she occupies the position of a stranger, i.e., insofar as her gaze is external; those who find themselves within the symbolic order are necessarily blinded" (1990, 41). The viewer

sees Bergman as an outsider perceiving and leaping into the abyss of the real (into the the inside of the outside) and so has his own vicarious or symbolic experience of nonexperience (which is the only real experience). While the men involved in this process of history or vision or theory are thus generally portrayed as active and sane system-makers, woman is a passive and mad system-breaker: she " 'undergoes' the act ('passes through' it) rather than 'accomplishes' it . . . the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not) . . . which is why every act worthy of the name is 'mad' in its radical unaccountability" (34).

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Before we look more closely at Zizek's theory of woman-as-the-postmodern, I would like to turn to another text written by a man during a period of acute personal, social, and epistemological change—a text in which the sense of crisis is also both represented and located in a woman. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote his autobiography, The Confessions, between 1765 and 1770, at a critical stage in the long transition from a land-based, largely rural, theocentric, Eurocentric, monarchic, collective, and prehistoricizing social structure and world view to a democratic, individualist, urban, industrialized, capitalist, secular, less Eurocentric, and more historicizing culture. This transition into what we could call modernity was as profound—and unfixable—as the transition from the modern to the postmodern eras, however we might define the latter.[9]

Rousseau's writings were at once generated by and generators of this transition into modernity, and they also both embraced and rejected it. When he encountered a courtesan named Zulietta in Venice in 1743 or 1744, at the age of 31 or 32, Rousseau was struggling with his conflicting desires to attain power in the hierarchical and patriarchal world and to rebel against that world and bring into being by linguistic fiat some alternative world. In his political writings such as The Social Contract (1762), Rousseau would argue that popes and monarchs should be replaced with citizen bodies empowered to draw up social contracts uniting free individuals. In his more explicitly imaginative

and fictional writings, Rousseau would imagine for himself a private sphere of absolute aesthetic freedom. Both utopias are presided over by the figure of Nature, a feminine deity who combines both neoclassical and primitivist features. They are thus is some sense feminine; yet Rousseau's Nature is decidedly mannish, especially in the political writings, where women are confined to a domestic sphere of silence even as they are acknowledged to be both crucial and potentially fatal to the well-being of the ideal state.[10] The generic/gender opposition and tension between Rousseau's two types of writing resembles the same tension and opposition in Zizek's writing between serious philosophy and popular culture. In both cases, the feminized aesthetic realm is imagined as a private, playful, androgynous alternative to the serious, masculine, social realm.

Even as he imagined a revolutionary society and a state of aesthetic bliss that were ambiguously feminine, however, Rousseau remained sentimentally and ideologically attached to the old patriarchal structures of preferment that promised him the public recognition he craved. Furthermore, many aspects of the new social world that was actually coming into being (as opposed to the worlds he imagined) were not at all consonant with either of his natural utopias. Industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, changing class structures, individualism, decentralization of power, privatization, and changes in gender relations threatened Rousseau's fragile sense of identity and authority even as they stimulated his thoughts and ambition. Like Zizek (or the postmodern man), that is, Rousseau felt caught in an interstice between the patriarchal order that was both recognizable and promised recognition and yet was oppressive in its dominance over all aspects of life and the new world that was imminent. This new world presented possibilities for both individual and collective liberation but also threatened established modes of knowledge and self-knowledge and structures of power. Partly because he saw that gender roles were changing, and partly because of cultural precedent, Rousseau imagined this world as feminine. Depending on whether he has feeling more excited or

alarmed by its possibilities, Rousseau responded to the specter of the future by alternately exalting and demonizing it as a fascinating or repugnant feminine other.

When he describes meeting Zulietta in The Confessions, Rousseau reveals a dramatic and confusing confrontation between the two fantasms of male premodernity and female modernity. The crisis embodied in Zulietta was a crisis of categories. Coming as it does about halfway through the autobiography, the Zulietta episode describes a point of transition between Rousseau's old world and self and his new ones. (In this sense, it resembles Zizek's treatment of Bergman as embodying the theoretical and historical passage from the modern symbolic to the postmodern real.) The first six books of The Confessions depict Rousseau's youth up to the age of thirty, which he describes as having been spent nestled in the literal and figurative natural enclosure provided by "Mama," a charming divorcée who took Rousseau in as a sixteen-year-old runaway. In a series of country dwellings in the French-Swiss Alps, "Mama" and her "little one" (as they called each other) lived in what Rousseau describes as a prolonged period of perfect bucolic bliss. When after several years Mama suddenly takes up with a younger man, Rousseau is expelled from Eden: his forced departure destroys the premodern, preadult, and pastoral rapture in which he claims to have lived up to this point.[11] The expulsion from the bower is rhetoricized in the terms of a spiritual epic as regressive progress: as he passes from country to city, from youth to adulthood, from private inexperience to public experience, from supposedly nonsexual sexuality with Mama to the world of real sexuality, Rousseau also claims to proceed from a condition of innocence and freedom to one of guilt and constraint.[12]

When Rousseau arrives in Venice, he imagines he is beginning the second, public phase of his life. He has obtained a post as secretary to the French ambassador to the Venetian state; it is his first opportunity to launch what he envisions as a brilliant diplomatic career. Although his position is somewhat prestigious, however, Rousseau lacks the aristocratic lineage and wealth needed to gain entrance to Venetian society,

where public and private affairs mingle, reputations are made, and preferment is secured. As a low-paid secretary, Rousseau writes, he cannot play the galant and pay court to noblemen's daughters: "Entry into the good houses of that city was forbidden to me due to my position (à cause de ma place). . . . I knew that . . . especially in Venice, with a purse as thin [as mine], one should not get mixed up in trying to play the man about town" (Rousseau [1782] 1959, 316).[13] Not only is Rousseau's favorite route to social advancement through refined female society unavailable to him; even worse, he is forced to prove his manhood and thereby his social and professional status to the other members of his diplomatic corps by going with them to a brothel.

This is not an attractive prospect. Whereas Rousseau is attracted to demoiselles—pretty, refined, and clean aristocratic women who wear ribbons, lace, and tiny shoes (134)—he dislikes and fears prostitutes (filles publiques). He writes: "I have always had a distaste for prostitutes" (316). In an earlier version of The Confessions he makes a stronger statement: "I could only look upon prostitutes with horror" (1156). Prostitutes represent modernity: the loss of connection with maternal nature, the alienation of the self in a debased, dirty, commercial, urban society, and the destabilization of both material and metaphysical value (36–37). Prostitutes are mere objects of exchange who cannot mirror back to Rousseau any version of himself that flatters or reassures him: in relation to a prostitute he can see himself neither as a solitary pastoral dreamer (because the prostitute cannot represent Nature) nor as an esteemed public figure (because she cannot represent aristocratic society). The fille publique and the demoiselle incarnate both historical and metaphysical oppositions: whereas the young lady belongs to the old order of landed, patriarchal aristocracy and a unified pyramid of social and metaphysical value, with God and king at the top, the girl of streets belongs to the new world of urban, bourgeois capitalism, in which value is self-created and not dependent on a monolithic social and metaphysical scheme.[14] And yet, this new, contemporary world is inseparable from some of Rousseau's most important social and aesthetic ideals. It is also the world

of novelty that stimulates him to write, both in emulation of it and as a defense against it. And it is this world that enables him to "authorize" himself as a middle- or even working-class fashioner of words and ideas.

This perplexity plays itself out in Venice. Rousseau's peers in the diplomatic corps evidently doubt his manhood: they reproach him at dinner for being indifferent to the most piquant of Venetian amusements, the courtesans. Domenico Vitali, one of the ambassador's gentlemen-in-waiting with whom Rousseau constantly competes for attention and favors, publicly offers to take Rousseau to meet one of the most famous courtesans, La Padoana. Rousseau avers that he did not want to meet La Padoana but felt he could not decline the challenge without shaming himself before the other men in the company: "I felt neither the inclination nor the temptation to go, and yet nevertheless, by one of those illogicalities that I myself have difficulty understanding, I ended by letting myself be dragged thither against my tastes, my heart, my reason, my will even—solely out of weakness, out of shameful reluctance to show defiance, and, as one says in that country, per non parer troppo coglione" [so as not to appear too much of a testicle, or fool] ([1782] 1959, 317). In order not to seem shamefully absurd (that is, look like a testicle), Rousseau must prove his testicular potency.[15]

But Rousseau shrinks from this forced self-expenditure. He does his best to avoid actually having sex with La Padoana by ordering sorbet, asking her to sing, and leaving a ducat on her table. But La Padoana "had the singular scruple of refusing to accept money she had not earned, and I had the singular stupidity to relieve her of her scruple" (317). After yielding to the temptation Rousseau at once regrets it: as soon as he gets home, he summons the surgeon to administer remedies. Nonetheless, "nothing can equal the anxiety I suffered for three weeks. . . . I could not imagine that one could emerge from the arms of La Padoana with impunity" (317). La Padoana represents an alluring and terrifying experience of sexual, social, national, and epistemological otherness that threatens to rob Rousseau of the physical and metaphysical integrity he wants so

desperately to believe he possesses—and yet which he is sometimes ready to risk losing for the sake of venturing into an unknown future.

Like his interlude with La Padoana, Rousseau's encounter with Zulietta also comes about between men. In the course of performing his secretarial duties, Rousseau has helped a French boat captain in trouble with the Venetian Senate. The captain, Olivet, responds by treating Rousseau to an honorary dinner on board the vessel, to which Rousseau invites his friend and peer Carrio, secretary to the Spanish ambassador. Rousseau is quite put out when his arrival on the ship is not greeted by a cannon salute, but Captain Olivet expresses his gratitude in a different way: halfway through the meal, a gondola pulls up alongside the ship and a beautiful courtesan steps aboard. Zulietta is a gift for the evening: she is conferred/imposed upon Rousseau, just as La Padoana was, as a symbol of his rank in the masculine hierarchy of the diplomatic service.

From the first moment of their encounter, Zulietta at once fascinates and terrifies Rousseau because she destabilizes the oppositions that govern his thoughts. She is strikingly beautiful and feminine and yet also as agile and brave as a soldier. She leaps from her gondola onto Olivet's ship with three bounds, she spends money wildly, and she keeps two pistols on her dresser. Also, like the foreign-but-familiar Bergman, Zulietta is at once strange and recognizable: when she arrives, she is hailed by Olivet as "the enemy"; she has "big black Oriental eyes"; and she speaks only Italian—"her accent alone," Rousseau exclaims, "would have been enough to turn my head" ([1782] 1959, 318).[16] On the other hand, Zulietta pretends to recognize Rousseau: she leaps into his arms and kisses him, crying, "Ah, my dear Brémond—how long it's been since I've seen you!" She explains that Rousseau looks exactly like a former lover—and she announces that she will install Rousseau in Brémond's place (<u>elle me prenoit à sa place</u>, 319). Just as the Rossellini movies invite the male viewer to imagine himself as Bergman's lover for the duration of the film (and just as Zizek seems to imagine himself in Rossellini's shoes, receiving the unsolicited attention of the beautiful, famous actress), so Zulietta invites

Rousseau to be Brémond for a while, until she tires of him. She will love him for free, she says, as long as it pleases her—but when she's through with him, he'll have to accept being dumped just as Brémond did. Like the film, this proposition is inherently limited in duration and, presumably, in consequences. For as long as the affair lasts, however, Zulietta will be Rousseau's obsession and he will be hers. Like the moviegoer, Rousseau becomes a privileged voyeur into the beautiful stranger's existence: he follows her around town, to her house, and into her boudoir, listening to her chatter all the while in her exotic tongue.

Like Zizek's Bergman, Zulietta also represents both vitality and death. She is vivacious, petulant, and excites a frenzy of desire, and yet her brilliance and bravery are also shocking and threatening. She appears at Rousseau's side suddenly, "before I had even seen them set another place," and he is at first so startled by her that he is afraid of her ([1782] 1959, 318). Zulietta warns Rousseau that she doesn't want to be loved halfway, "à la françoise" (319). She tells him, " 'At the first moment of boredom, go; don't stay halfway, I warn you' " (319). And she backs up her warning by explaining why she keeps the pistols atop her bureau: " 'When I am generous with men I do not love, I make them pay for the trouble they put me to—nothing could be more fair. But although I submit to their embraces, I will not endure their insults—and I will not miss my mark with the first man who misses his mark with me' " (319). Zulietta's words could imply that any man who fails to perform sexually to the satisfaction of what Rousseau calls her "ardent temperament" (318) risks death at her hands.[17] This resonates with Zizek's description of Bergman as posing the challenge of the death drive, the radical negation of vital instinct, to the male subject/viewer .

In addition to confounding Rousseau's conceptual and experiential categories of male/female, familiar/strange, and vital/fatal, Zulietta also represents both premodern, patriarchal, and virginal purity and the antipatriarchal, urban corruption of the modern prostitute. On one hand, Zulietta is more pure and fresh than "young virgins in cloisters":

her skin is so fresh, her teeth so white, and "the air of propriety [so] covered her entire person" that Rousseau is afraid he might contaminate her with the pox he still fears he contracted from La Padoana ([1782] 1959, 321).[18] On the other hand, Rousseau asserts that Zulietta is only pretending to be pure. He writes of his arrival at her house: "I entered the bedchamber of a courtesan as if it were the sanctuary of love and beauty. I thought I saw the divinity of these things in her person. I would never have believed that in the absence of either respect and esteem one could feel anything like what she made me feel" (320, emphasis mine). Rousseau's ambivalence toward Zulietta's social autonomy can be compared to the slippage in Zizek's essay between seeing Bergman as a bold artist in her own right and as a passive instrument in her husband's aesthetic creation.

When he tries to make love to her, Rousseau is at once intoxicated and disturbed by Zulietta's confusing liminality. But when the moment comes when he has to prove himself to her, Rousseau is nonplussed: "Suddenly, instead of the flames that were devouring me, I felt mortal cold flow through my veins; my legs trembled, and on the verge of fainting, I sat down and cried like a baby" (321). Rousseau continues:

> Who could guess the cause of my tears, and what was going through my mind at this moment? I said to myself, "This thing I can do as I like with is the masterpiece of nature and of love; mind, body—everything is perfect; she is as good and generous as she is lovable and beautiful. Nobles, princes should be her slaves; scepters should lie at her feet. As it is, look at her—a miserable streetwalker, available to the public. The captain of a merchant vessel disposes of her; she has just thrown herself at me, whose fortune she knows amounts to nothing, at me, whose worth she cannot know and which must be nothing in her eyes. There is something inconceivable in this. Either my heart is deceiving me, mesmerizing my senses and making me the dupe of a worthless slut, or some secret defect I do not know about ruins the effect of her charms and makes her

odious to those who ought to be fighting over her. [(1782) 1959, 321]

We can infer that Rousseau keeps his assignation with Zulietta for two very different reasons. First, he wants to establish in her eyes and thereby in his own what he refers to as his prix, or mérite: his worth, within the context of the ancien régime and all that it stands for. Within this ostensibly monolithic social-moral-ontological hierarchy, publicly acknowledged sexual congress with a highly valued courtesan is an initiation rite and a symbol of membership and rank. Rousseau desperately wants to "gather the fruit" of Zulietta's charms before it is too late (320); by enjoying the prix (value) of her charms, he hopes to acquire social value in the old sense. Second, Rousseau is also clearly attracted to Zulietta for the opposite reason: because she makes subversive use of patriarchal social and political convention to declare and enjoy her own freedom. In this sense, she represents the part of Rousseau that wants to flout the limits of the patriarchal system. Ideally, Rousseau would be able to both preserve his status and still venture his freedom; this is precisely what the interlude with Zulietta promises. But it also presents the risk of losing both options by being caught between them. If Zulietta is only a worthless slut who sells sex for a prix (price), sex with her will annihilate Rousseau's tenuous value in the patriarchal scheme even and expose that scheme as invalid.[19] It will push Rousseau into the chasm between the old and the new worlds, where all may be lost and nothing gained.

This double-bind makes Rousseau an imperious theoretician of woman. Either Zulietta must be "the masterpiece of nature and of love" that she seems to be or she is a worthless slut, whose aura of divinity is really a blinding miasma. The possibility that Zulietta can be physically perfect and a worthless slut is literally unthinkable (il y a là quelque chose d'inconcevable): if it were true, it would destroy Rousseau's cherished—but already crumbling—illusion that physical and moral beauty and social status perfectly correspond, are perfectly readable, and will inevitably become apparent in time.

Rousseau tries to extract himself from this double-bind by concluding that Zulietta must not be as flawless as she seems. Some "secret defect" must account for the incongruity between her person and her position that will rescue Rousseau's fragile world view and sense of himself. Accordingly, Rousseau begins to "search for this defect with a singular intensity of mind" (321).[20] At first, however, the search turns up nothing; Rousseau concludes that it was he who is _extravagant_ (322) in examining her body frantically for a symptom of her insignificance in the signifying world. But "just at the moment when I was ready to swoon on a bosom that seemed to feel the lips and fingers of a man for the first time," he writes, "I saw that she had a misshapen breast (_un téton borgne_). I am amazed, I examine it, I think I see that one breast is not shaped like the other. There I was, trying to figure out how it was possible to have a misshapen breast, and convinced that it was connected to some remarkable natural imperfection, when _by dint of turning this idea over and over in my mind,_ I saw as clear as day that in the form of the most charming person I could imagine I held in my arms only some kind of monster, the reject of nature, men, and love" (321–22, emphasis mine).[21] Rousseau has just (re)constituted Zulietta in his mind as a pure, virginal beauty ("a bosom that seemed to feel the lips and fingers of a man for the first time")—although he knows she is a courtesan—when his eye suddenly lights on her misshapen breast (literally, a breast blind in one eye). The defect he has been hunting for so avidly in order to explain Zulietta's incoherence magically appears. This defect immediately and neatly places Zulietta in relation to the old imaginary social-metaphysical world, Rousseau in relation to Zulietta, and therefore, Rousseau in relation to the world. Because of her deformed breast, as it were, Zulietta has narrowly missed her chance to be a virgin princess. _Borgne_ means not only "blind in one eye" but also "low" in both a moral and a social sense (_un café borgne_ means "a low dive"); the misshapen breast thus securely identifies Zulietta as a low-class, reprehensible slut who can only pretend to be beautiful, noble, and pure. She plummets instantly from the apex of the social pyramid to its lowest stratum. She becomes "some

kind of monster, the reject of nature, men and love." More important, the misshapen breast allows Rousseau to reconstruct the social pyramid over her imperfect body, and he can once again locate himself in the past, present, and future.

But this obliging "response of the real" (to use Zizek's terms) to Rousseau's epistemological and sexual desperation remains mysterious. By the next day, Rousseau has completely forgotten about the defect. He cannot wait to get back to Zulietta to make up for his poor showing the first time around; he is lost in visions of "her charms and graces, aware of my extravagance, reproaching myself for it, regretting moments so badly spent which it had depended on me only to make the sweetest of my life, waiting with the most lively impatience for the moment when I could make up the loss—and nevertheless disturbed still in spite of myself about how to reconcile the perfections of this adorable girl with the indignity of her state (322, emphasis mine).The téton borgne has disappeared or been forgotten: Zulietta has been removed to the realm of fiction as the "masterpiece of nature and of love," and Rousseau is once again the extravagant who has missed his chance to figure in the ultimate boudoir scene.

As readers, we do not know what we are supposed to conclude about the misshapen breast. Is Rousseau acknowledging that he made it up? Does he think he saw it and later decide he was mistaken? He admits that the connection between the blemish and its metaphysical significance had to be produced through an act of reflection: "By dint of turning this idea over and over in my mind, I saw that . . . ." Rousseau seems to admit that both at the narrative time of writing The Confessions and when he was with Zulietta the misshapen breast is a symptom, an imaginary figment whose function is precisely to remain unfixable. For this unfixability allows Rousseau to flirt with the various reflective possibilities he can project onto the figure of Zulietta at the same time that it signifies his loss of epistemological certainty. Although the acute anxiety provoked by this crisis of self-reflection is doubtless real, the scenario also enables Rousseau to toy with, and fantasmatically to control categorical possibilities. Opposite Zulietta as virgin, courtesan,

or prostitute, Rousseau can play prince, rising diplomatic star, self-made man, or low-down wastrel, in at least two very different worlds. He can hesitate on the brink of the abyss that separates the premodern from the modern world—the abyss which sex with Zulietta would irretrievably have pushed him into.

Rousseau makes his inability or refusal to respond to Zulietta only too clear—or rather, he reveals how clearly Zulietta herself makes it clear to him. When Rousseau has the temerity to mention her misshapen breast, Zulietta first tries to make light of the situation.[22] "In her playful way she said and did things that would make me die of love" (322). But when Rousseau "retained a depth of disquiet that I could not hide from her," she blushes, adjusts her apparel, rises, circles the room, and fans herself, responding, " 'Johnny, leave women alone and go study mathematics' " (322).

* * *

Zulietta's response to Rousseau's absurd, pathetic, and perhaps understandable attempt to "fix" his sense of himself could be appropriated by the woman reader of Zizek's essay on—or perhaps we should say through—Ingrid Bergman. Although Zizek seems to celebrate woman as the incarnation of the postmodern "fault" (the "break with nature," the nonsignifying gap of the real) rather than to reject and evade her as Rousseau did with Zulietta, Zizek subjects woman (Bergman) to a similar symbolic objectification. A crisis in self-recognition resulting from complex cultural changes (including but certainly not limited to the self-enfranchisement of women) provokes Zizek to try to reinstate the male-dominated philosophical and psychoanalytic hierarchy of Hegel and Lacan and the aesthetic hierarchy of male-as-viewing-subject-and-woman-as-viewed-object around woman, in order to assert and maintain an ambiguous position within those reconstituted hierarchies. Woman serves as symbol and cause of a "crisis" that women have certainly helped to bring about but whose dimensions are infinite.

Moreover, woman serves as the medium for resolving the crisis. The experience of being faced with a powerful sensual experience of a particular woman who may not be

only an element in a patriarchal scheme but who may also be a powerful social or aesthetic agent in her own right and so constitute a challenge to that scheme allures but also threatens to overwhelm the unsteady theoretician. Furthermore, Bergman/Zulietta is alluring and threatening not only because she is beautiful, powerful, and desired by many (that is, she represents what the theorist would himself like to be but does not feel that he is), but also because she is a vulnerable outsider subject to social vilification. Zulietta is vulnerable because she was a prostitute, while Bergman is both a foreigner who left her husband for another (foreign) man and a movie actress. Confronted by this enormously tempting but also threateningly unsteady mirror image of the self, Zizek and Rousseau both hesitate. Both are tempted to take the plunge, to abandon patriarchal power structures and protective and distancing interpretive modes and to submit to the aesthetic and erotic power and political independence of a charismatic woman. At the same time, they are tempted to identify with the powerful woman's shadow side, her powerlessness, and to acknowledge their own feelings of powerlessness and even victimization—or, alternatively, to play the role of her protector as a way of defending against these feelings. But they are also terrified of this confusing specter and of what she represents for the old order—of politics, philosophy, economic structure, aesthetic practice. Ultimately, neither man can carry out this leap into the unknown feminine (post)modern, where their own shadow sides lie in wait.

The theorist resolves this crisis by means of what Rousseau ironically refers to as "well-placed reflections": thoughts that arrive just in time to rescue the voyeur who feels himself in danger of losing himself in a woman ([1782] 1959, 321). At the crucial moment of consummation, Rousseau suddenly thinks—about the incongruity between Zulietta's social status and her body and what this might mean about him. "These reflections—so perfectly placed—distressed me so much that they made me cry" (Ces reflexions si bien placées m'agitèrent au point d'en pleurer, 321, emphasis mine). The ironic interjection of si bien placées indicates that Rousseau recognizes that he has willed

theory to intervene between himself and Zulietta. Zizek, too, implies that he is dimly conscious that his theorizing about the history of metaphysics and the metaphysics of history as Lacanian phenomena constitutes a buffer against the "kernel of the real" and the jouissance that his theory claims to celebrate—namely, in this case, that which is produced by watching Bergman on film. The threat of symbolic castration, of losing his primacy as "that animal whose life is governed by [and, we might add, who governs] symbolic fictions" (Zizek 1990, 39), is averted by designating woman as the abyss in the symbolic and thereby enclosing it/her rather than falling into it/her. By theorizing woman as the fall, man remains upright and his crisis becomes manageable.

I am not suggesting that Zizek, like Rousseau searches for a flaw in or on Bergman in order to evade the crisis of postmodernity. For Zizek, Bergman does not have a flaw; she is a flaw in the symbolic order. She introduces the fall of time and accident into unbroken, static continuity. As Zizek himself puts it, the act that woman does or is "introduces a cut separating 'after' from 'before,' a discontinuity which cannot be accounted for by a spatial disposition of elements. . . . the irreducible temporality of the act presupposes a space where there is always, constitutively, something 'amiss,' 'out of joint.' Time as such implies spatial imbalance, a universe where the thing is always 'missing from its place' " (1990, 35 n. 18).[23] For both Zizek and Rousseau, woman is (in) the gap in thinking, between (for example) the old (Lacan) and the new (Lacan). She is the sublime and the monstrous crux between what was and what will be. Just as Zulietta is unstably both "the most charming person I could imagine" and "some kind of monster, the reject of nature, men, and love," so Zizek's postmodern real thing, symbolized by woman, "function[s] successively as a disgusting reject and as a sublime, charismatic apparition: the difference, strictly structural, does not pertain to the 'effective properties' of the object, but only to its place in the symbolic order" (1992c, 143). Rousseau recognizes that if Zulietta can at once be a "miserable streetwalker, available to the public" and have a perfect body and elegant appearance, she represents a material threat

to his conservative illusions about moral and political order. Similarly, Zizek recognizes that Bergman's being, her unique having-been-there-ness as captured on film, represents an ephemeral form of vitality and creative power that no ostensibly timeless theory can ever master. Bergman thus embodies the “particular contents” escaping from the “fissure” in “universal reason” that Zizek himself identifies as the postmodern trend immanent to philosophical modernism (1992c, 141–42).

Although the strange new world ambiguously embodied in Zulietta tempts Rousseau because it suggests he can reinvent himself with complete freedom and enjoy himself infinitely, it frightens him for the same reasons. Rousseau responds by retreating into patriarchal fictions regarding the inseparability of material and metaphysical meaning and value and their fixability according to an unchanging, transcendental scheme. In contrast, Zizek wants to push Bergman into the abyss of the postmodern that she supposedly incarnates—and the (male) subject/viewer will watch her take the plunge. Postmodernity is to be an aesthetic queendom of the real Thing; its subjects are to be suspended in silent contemplation of the “traumatic kernel” of experience, the “object” in all its “indifferent and arbitrary character” (1992, 142–43). Despite the brilliance of this cataclysmic spectacle, however, Zizek’s projections and objectifications of fear and desire onto woman/Bergman make her a Zulietta-like fantasy of life-giving/death-dealing affirmation/negation of man. And although Zizek professes to be the champion of the particular materiality of the feminine real Thing, the hard kernel of the real that permits enjoyment and resists all attempts to integrate it into the symbolic network of ideology, he ultimately cannot bear to allow being simply to be. He cannot surrender himself to the immersion in the real that he celebrates without recovering himself by returning to a theory of the-real-as-feminine that subordinates it to a master narrative. Women, movies, aesthetic creation, and simply being are inevitably demoted to the status of symptoms of a (man’s) theory.

Thus, although he concludes his essay by arguing that all of Rossellini's films were only a belated attempt to catch up with Bergman's creativity and daring, Zizek begins by asserting that before he had ever met her, Rossellini "had effectively already dreamed of Ingrid Bergman"; he had made a film in which the two villains, a lesbian Nazi and a Gestapo torturer, were named Ingrid and Bergmann (1990, 19). Bergman "entered [Rossellini's] life as symptom: although her letter appeared as a shock, a place within Rossellini's symbolic space had already been carved out for her in advance" (20). Furthermore, Zizek does not substantiate Bergman's aesthetic originality by writing as if the roles she played were not roles created for her by Rossellini. And no distinction is made between Bergman and the characters she played. Because he fails to make such distinctions, Zizek ends up celebrating an artifact of Rossellini's creative direction rather than Bergman herself. Tellingly, Zizek titles the essay not "Bergman: Woman as Symptom of Man" but "Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man."

Bergman, then, is not the real subject of the essay; she is a slit or a small black hole around and through which (photographs of her are interspersed across the pages of the essay) Zizek unites Lacan's theories of the act, the real, and the disappearance of the subject, Hegel's theory of abstract negativity, and his own theories about post-Communist Eastern Europe and Fascism. Finally, as noted earlier, Rossellini's films themselves are only a feminized manifestation of Zizek's theory of Lacan's and Hegel's theories. Bergman, her characters, and the films stand for Zizek's own symbolization of her/them as the "postmodern break." They stand in the place Zizek has already prepared for them. They are only symptoms of a theory that denies that it depends on them for its origins and that trivializes them even as it claims to celebrate them. While claiming to represent her, Zizek thus preempts Bergman by putting her in the place he has prepared for her—even though according to his own analysis, she already occupies it. Historical development is irrelevant: Lacan's theories, Zizek's readings, and Bergman's acting (on- and off-screen) seem coeval and indistinguishable. What the films supposedly prove, in

short, is that man's theory of woman as symptom of man came before woman as symptom of man. This is especially ironic given that while Zizek declares his desire to throw over various oppressive male regimes—the antifeminist in Lacan, the reign of the symbolic (ideology) over the real (art)—he only repeats and compounds the very subjugation of life to lifelessness and of women to men that he decries.

Zizek's uncertainty, anxiety, and ambivalence about what relations of power, priority, and dependence obtain between woman and man, between popular culture and philosophy, between psychoanalytic theory and feminism, also play themselves out in inconsistencies in his theory. He describes the feminine real on the one hand as prior to the masculine symbolic and as positive and vital but, on the other hand, as a secondary product of the symbolic and as negative and mortifying. One version of the real antedates the symbolic and serves as the ground for its emergence: it is "out of the abyss of the real that our symbolic reality emerges" (1990, 40). In this vein, the masculine power of language and understanding is mythologized as mutilating the maternal body of nature/being: the signifier is "the power that mortifies—disembodies—the life-substance, 'dissects' the body and subordinates it to the constraints of the signifying network. The word murders the thing, not only by implying its absence . . . but above all by <u>dissecting</u> it" (38). But Zizek's theory of woman-as-the-postmodern-real-thing rests on woman, not man, representing the negative (this is what "tarrying with the negative" means): woman is supposed to represent not nature but anti-nature, not life but death, not everything but nothing, not the ground for the emergence of the symbolic but rather an illusion produced by it retroactively. In this other vein, Zizek writes that "the act as real . . . does <u>not</u> enable us to (re)establish a kind of immediate contact with some presymbolic life-substance" (40). In <u>Tarrying with the Negative</u>, Zizek elaborates: it is thinking that produces the illusion of a real unthought object. That object is only mythical, and it is "retroactively produced by the very process of symbolization" (37). By initiating a gap between word and thing, language creates a longing for the thing-in-itself (1993, 36–9).

Zizek thus oscillates between declaring that the pleasures of the feminine aesthetic (the real) are more real, vital, and important than the unpleasurable, abstract, and masculine theoretical (the symbolic) and arguing that the feminine real is only an illusion, and furthermore, that it is a castrating and negative impulse toward the death drive. The consequence of this incoherence is that Zizek seems to have things both ways at women's expense. Zizek celebrates Bergman for heroically refusing to dedicate herself to something greater than herself, a big Other of ideology, and he claims not to be interested in her willingness to stake her personal and professional life on the search for something to replace or displace outmoded personal or ideological contracts. Thus, woman's act is "always negative, that is, an act of annihilation. It is not simply that we do now know what will come of it, rather, it is that its final outcome is ultimately insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the 'No' of the pure act" (35).[24] Zizek writes as if Bergman's "No!" to Hollywood and her "Yes!" to Rossellini were a single "negative" act, when the subject of his essay (Rossellini's films) depends precisely on Bergman's second, affirmative gesture. In exonerating Bergman and the characters she plays of the charge of making themselves sacrificial victims to patriarchal ideology, he only succeeds in depriving them of their heroism, making their actions seem senseless, and destroying the basis of his own argument.[25]

What is cruel and exploitative about this reading of woman is that it deprives her of the grounds and motives for action in order to make her serve its own ideological end—to show that women are excluded from both language and ideology. Zizek speaks for women in order to show that women do not need to speak. This exclusion from language is ostensibly a privilege, a special exemption from the ineluctable submission to the symbolic law of the father to which men are unfortunately subject. But as Judith Butler observes in a trenchant critique of Zizek's theory of the relation between the feminine, the real, and the symbolic, the "conflation of women with . . . that lost referent [of the real] . . . is surely as pernicious as any form of ontological essentialism" (1993,

218–19). Butler argues that Zizek's theory of woman as the real is a defense against feminism's challenge to the centrality of the theory of the castration complex and law of the father's phallus in Lacanian theory of subjectivity, and that Zizek's theory also attempts to evade history. In seeking to place the real outside discourse (that is, outside the symbolic and ideology), Zizek is trying at once to escape the limits of history in order to sanctify Lacan's phallocentric theories of subjectivity as true beyond dispute for everyone and to remove both women and homosexuals to the realm of the abject and unspeakable. Butler suggests that Zizek's contradictory insistence that the real is unsymbolizable at the same time that it represents the ineluctable truth of the Lacanian/Freudian theory of castration as the founding principle of all subjectivity "unwittingly installs a heterosexual matrix as a permanent and incontestable structure of culture in which women operate as a 'stain' in discourse" (Butler 1993, 20). In sexualizing and dehistoricizing the distinction between the symbolic and the real, Zizek seeks at once "to keep the sexual differential in place" (206) and to exclude women from the symbolic in order to silence their challenge to Lacanian theory (196–97).

Furthermore, as Butler points out and as I want to emphasize here, despite his insistence on the negative and nonsignifying character of woman's act, Zizek's own approach to ideology is not nonredemptive of the symbolic, as he claims. Having celebrated woman for refusing to redeem ideology by sacrificing herself to an ideology such as Christianity or Fascism, Zizek himself redeems the ideology of Lacan and Hegel—or his version of them. After passing through the feminine abyss of the real, the subject according to Zizek goes back to where he belongs—to the community of law and the word. Hegel, Lacan, and Zizek agree that "man is that animal whose life is governed by symbolic fictions," and "precisely insofar as the other is a 'dead scheme,' we must presuppose it as an ideal point of reference which, in spite of its nonexistence, is perfectly 'valid,' and which dominates and regulates our actual lives" (Zizek 1990, 39). The passage through the feminine real thus proves to be a tourist attraction, an inherently (and

thankfully) momentary expulsion from the more comfortable (if false) realm of ordinary existence. According to Zizek, the male theorizer/viewer cannot perform woman's act of self-immolation; he constitutes himself as subject precisely by not doing so. Rather, he watches woman's act of self-immolation and (it would seem) explicates it to himself and to other men (or women, if they happen to be eavesdropping) while she is and does; her silence is the material for his speech.

Bergman—woman—is thus a pharmakon, an unclean but purifying substance through which the male subject passes in a rite of self-cleansing and self-mediation. She plays what Jardine has identified (following Julia Kristeva) as the standard role of a "filter: a place of passage, where 'nature' confronts 'culture' " (1985, 89). She is a dark tunnel through which male theorists converse across the centuries, constituting themselves as a group by reference to the not-me. As Braidotti puts it, this discourse on the feminine is a "symptom of the crisis and malaise of the masculine subject and of his homosocial bond—the male corpus socians" (1991, 9). And it is the phallus, symbol of the symbolic, that provides "an image of identification that entitles [man] to make differences between the sexes and among the men, in a hierarchical scale which provides the inner structure of the social bond" (Braidotti 1991, 230). But man's self-recognition still depends on abnegation by an unseeing other. As Teresa de Lauretis observes, "Woman is still the ground of representation, even in postmodern times. Paradoxically, for all the efforts spent to re-contain real women in the social, whether by economic or ideological means, by threats or seduction, it is the absent Woman, the one pursued in dreams and found only in memory or fiction, that serves as the guarantee of masculinity, anchoring male identity and supporting man's creativity and self-representation" (1987, 82).

Ironically, then, having praised Bergman and other heroines for renouncing renunciation, Zizek (apparently unwittingly) offers himself up as a self-mesmerized martyr to a patriarchal epistemology whose lack—the tendentious sexualization of

discourse, the denial of materiality, and the silencing of woman—he himself has identified. Just as La Padoana and Zulietta could have served either as points of entry or of resistance to the diplomatic world for the young Rousseau, so Bergman (woman) can serve for Zizek as a strategic point of entry into a prestigious cohort of male theorists, or as a possible escape from it.[26] Ultimately, and perhaps with reluctance, Zizek chooses the first option. Like La Padoana and Zulietta, Bergman serves as a public commodity through and around whom Zizek can reunite a large throng of leading men including himself who are all somehow related. Bergman can serve this function because Zizek treats her gesture of delivering herself up to Rossellini as a public artifact and because he confounds Bergman's life with the roles she played. Just as the Venetian courtesan allows a multinational corps of diplomats to signify their membership and status in a group by engaging in publicly acknowledged sexual intercourse, so Bergman serves as a spectacular sexual and aesthetic conduit for a discussion of her husband's oeuvre, Lacan's theories, Tito's opposition to Stalin, Job's defiance of God, and Hegel's philosophy of history. Although without Bergman the essay would lack its missing center, Zizek directs our attention to her only to stray in more compelling directions.

Ultimately, what Rousseau and Zizek are really interested in is neither woman nor a woman but in how they themselves will survive, or capitalize on, or overcome the (post)modern. Zizek's essay is no less autobiographical than Rousseau's <u>Confessions</u>. When Zulietta leaves Venice without warning the day after the contretemps[27] in the boudoir, Rousseau makes it clear that he is relieved. He is spared the test of proving his contrition and making up for his deficiencies, and he evades the challenge Zulietta might have posed to his idealized self and polity. What he regrets is not his missed opportunity to know a beautiful, charming, courageous, and witty woman, nor the sensual delights he might have experienced in her company but, rather, the fact that he has left her with a bad impression of himself: "As delightful, as charming as she was in my eyes, I could console myself for losing her; but I confess, what I could not console myself for was the fact that

she took only a scornful memory of me away with her" ([1782] 1959, 322). Once she is gone and the terrible instability of their mutual reflection is averted, Zulietta again becomes simply the beautiful courtesan who might have been able to reflect back to her lover a flattering, reassuring, and promising portrait of himself. And yet, beneath the beautiful, aristocratic courtesan still lurks the far more ambiguous and threatening androgynous entrepreneur who has seen Rousseau in all his physical and metaphysical nakedness—and has seen him refuse his opportunity to abandon the patriarchal fictions that both clothe and constrain him. Although Rousseau flees from Zulietta in her boudoir, he allows her to obtrude from his text. This is the homage—feminage—he pays her courage to be.

The issue of mediated self-reflection is also relevant to Zizek. Zizek tries to establish his place in the cohort of postmodernist male theorists by defying that cohort and identifying himself with woman as the abyss of the real within the symbolic: he would occupy the place of the hole. But Zizek's theorizing of woman in relation to a patriarchal concept and tradition of culture, language, and the symbolic makes it impossible for him to occupy this (non)position—which, in any case, he is clearly reluctant to do, because in his terms that would mean forsaking language, tradition, and patriarchal hegemony over culture and cultural theory in favor of some unknown, suicidal, psychotic state of silence and negativity. Instead, Zizek makes Bergman occupy the position he both fears and wants to take. He describes her as the "stranger" who can perceive the fissure of the real because her "gaze is <u>external</u>: those who find themselves <u>within</u> the symbolic order are necessarily blinded" (1990, 41). Zizek thus projects onto Bergman his desired image of himself as the outsider-to-theory who can perceive the aesthetic real thing at the center of theory, around which all theory revolves and which all (other) theory can ultimately only evade or falsify.[28]

Like Rousseau, Zizek imagines seeing and being seen by this Bergman—the nonpatriarchal one—as deadly. For recognizing and being seen by or with Bergman as

the stranger, the outsider, means sacrificing the other self/Bergman, who "at the height of her stardom" was admired by everyone and with whom everyone wanted to be seen (1990, 44). The gaze of the stranger, the femme fatale, is mortifying, and it would make of Zizek the inverse of what he makes of Bergman. Whereas her simulacrum appears in the small black photos that dot his essay, in his fantasy of the stranger Bergman seeing him, he appears as a small, white corpse covered by a sheet.[29]

In Tarrying with the Negative, Zizek himself describes this desire to be seen by the Lacanian petit objet a, the small-o other, as the suicidal "scopic drive": the psychoanalytic subject moves from the realm of desire to the more radical realm of the drive when he yields to the urge to se faire voir, to make himself seen, not to the big Other of ideology but to "the radical heterogeneity of the object qua gaze to which I expose myself" (1993, 196). But exposing oneself to the gaze of this other makes one into the other: one becomes the stain on discourse or visibility that woman embodies. The redemption of the patriarchal scheme of Hegel and Lacan, in short, is a defense against this deeper desire/fear to immolate the self by becoming visible to the "traumatic heterogeneity and nontransparency" of woman's gaze (1993, 197). But in refusing to sacrifice the patriarchal, modern self to the matriarchal, postmodern self, Zizek paradoxically liberates the same powerful feminine figure he has sacrificed and repressed, much as Rousseau liberated Zulietta in/from his text.

Jane Gallop observes that interpretation is "always motivated by desire and aggression, by the desire to have and to kill, which is to say, interpretation always takes place within a transferential situation" (1985, 27). Zizek's theory of woman presents itself as an uncanny self-mirroring: in woman, Zizek always figures his own desire and, in this case, his failure to yield to it—and yet his liberation of it, nonetheless, in the form of another. He maintains that:

> Rossellini's greatness lies in the fact that he intentionally included in his films traces of his own failure. . . . Each of his films is ultimately a failed attempt to

> come to terms with the real of some traumatic encounter. What are Stromboli, Europa '51, and Voyage to Italy if not attempts to integrate, to master the traumatic encounter with Ingrid Bergman, her act of saying "No!" to Hollywood and joining Rossellini at the height of her stardom? This was a tremendous decision, an effective "act of madness" that nothing in Rossellini's own life, full of opportunistic maneuvering, can match. True, all of his films in which she stars display a frenetic activity, an attempt to balance the dignity of her act, to recompense for it. But the act remains hers. (1990, 44)

Intentional and unintentional failure here become indistinguishable: Rossellini "intentionally" left traces of his own inability "to bring under control the excess of the real" (44), and yet Zizek still pronounces his films failures to do just that. Zizek's theory of woman as the real can also be read as an ambiguously intentional/unintentional failure to become what woman ostensibly is. Although Zizek's reading of woman is not only as self-interested as Rousseau's but also more totalizing, and therefore more exploitative,[30] what lingers at the end of both texts is a trace of failure and regret for a lost opportunity to enfranchise the self fully and to yield to the experience of another. But here, man's loss is woman's gain: it is she who emerges as powerful, beautiful, and threatening.

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[1]The distinction between women as a (huge) class of historical individuals and woman or the feminine as transhistorical, transindividual categories is central to my essay. Slavoj Zizek uses the term woman, a term I regard as questionable because it can only constitute an empty set. de Lauretis defines woman as "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses), which works as both their vanishing point and their condition of existence." Women, on the other hand, are "the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain" (1984, 5). Women can never be defined outside of discursive formations, but (as de Lauretis points out) they need not be defined in order to exist. What matters is how women are defined, by whom, and for what purpose.

[2]For definitions of postmodernity, see Lyotard 1984; Huyssen 1986; Jameson 1991.

[3]Although Zizek does not mention the influence of women on Enlightenment philosophy, it is evident that the participation of women in philosophical discussion in the eighteenth century and changing gender roles did influence this sexualization of discourse. See, e.g., Landes 1989 and Zerilli 1994.

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[4]See, e.g., Modleski 1991, Braidotti 1991, Jardine 1985, and the Summer 1992 issue of *Boundary 2*, which contains several excellent articles on the relation between feminism and postmodernism, some of which I cite below.

[5]Fraser and Nicholson make this point (1988, 91). They also charge French psychoanalytic theories with falling into the trap of "propositionally decry[ing] essentialism even as they performatively enact it" (100).

[6]For an introduction to Lacan's theories in relation to feminism, see Mitchell and Rose 1985 and Gallop 1985.

[7]Zizek wavers on the issue of whether the real precedes or succeeds the symbolic; see below, pp. 30–31.

[8]Modleski observes, "Not the least of the problems involved in equating the masses and mass culture with the feminine is that it becomes much more difficult for women to interrogate their role within that culture. . . . if women are the question, they cannot ask the questions" (1991, 34).

[9]Technological change is certainly central to the postmodern era, whose cultural artifacts—like Zizek's theory—seem to privilege artificiality and the negation of individual identity, even as they exhibit a nostalgia for the age of so-called stars and individual geniuses.

[10]On the role of women in Rousseau's political theory, see Landes 1989 and Zerilli 1994.

[11]Rousseau's account of his life with Mama makes it clear that their existence was hardly natural, simple, or blissful, but this is how he characterizes it.

[12]In his autobiography Rousseau deliberately reverses the pattern laid out by Augustine's Confessions: while Augustine describes a return from urban corruption, symbolized by prostitution, to religion and his mother, Rousseau chronicles a progressive alienation from nature and the mother into an urban, secular, promiscuous society. Structurally, the division of *The Confessions* and of Rousseau's life into two halves imitates the decline from the premodern to the modern that Rousseau bemoans—even as he helps to create this very decline by writing a nonredemptive text. Zizek follows Rousseau: the (feminine) postmodern represents a greater degree of alienation from familiar structures of meaning and morality. We could say that postmodern man migrates from the "good mother" Nature (the imaginary) toward the castrating and

nonsignifying "bad mother" of the real. (Zizek's ostensible reversal of these values—the good mother is now bad and vice versa—does not change the basic scenario.)

[13]This and subsequent translations are my own.

[14]We might remark a resemblance between this opposition and Zizek's Bergman: as Irene in Europa '51 she is a saintly ingénue, but as Hollywood's bad girl who was blacklisted for abandoning her husband for a dashing foreign lover she is an alluringly independent fallen woman. And whereas the demoiselle Bergman is an aesthetic fiction, the fille publique Bergman is a historical fiction: like Rousseau, Zizek associates the fall of woman with the fall into the historical time of (post)modernity.

[15]Here, the absurd and splendid "sublime object of ideology" (to adopt Zizek's terms) is not a woman's genitals but a man's.The fascination with the mother/female lover in Rousseau and Zizek, as I shall show, is often a screen for fascination with the father/brother/male rival/male lover—and with oneself, as uncertainly caught between father and mother (or male rival and female lover).

[16]Zizek emphasizes that Bergman knew only two words of Italian, Ti amo!, when she wrote to Rossellini. Like Zulietta, that is, she could not easily communicate with her newfound lover and thus presumably seemed exotic. Zizek also describes Bergman as "the stranger" (1990, 41). Bergman was, of course, Swedish, and her English always remained lightly accented; for the moviegoer, she remains titillatingly foreign and yet familiar.

[17]Robert Alter suggested to me this interpretation of Zulietta's words.

[18]Propriété means both "cleanliness" and "ownership," but Zulietta is propre only insofar as she appears to be someone else's property rather than her own.

[19]Prix thus resonates ambiguously between the premodern lexicon of value and the modern lexicon of price. Movies, similarly, are at once sublime art and base commerce: they sell beauty and immortality at a cheap rate.

[20]Rousseau's words, Je me mis à chercher ce défaut avec une contention d'esprit singuliére, strikingly suggest his eagerness to avoid being split by the conflict between what is happening and what he wants to believe. His mind actively contracts itself (contention) as a single entity (singuliére) in order to ward off

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dis-tention, or division. The Lacanian subject, we recall, is also a split subject, divided from itself and from the real by language. Language constitutes the barrier as well as the only possible bridge between the two halves of this split. Like Rousseau, Zizek strives to heal this split by displacing it onto woman.

[21]Rousseau changes from the past to the present tense in the second sentence of this excerpt and then back again in the next sentence. This temporal split, which recurs often in The Confessions, reflects his deliberate complication of narrative technique: he creates and exploits the very fragmentation of the modern that he likes to lament.

[22]In another passage, Rousseau speaks of his dislike of intensely intimate situations in which he has to "pay with his person" (payer de ma personne, 650). In both passages Rousseau reveals that he thinks of risking himself in financial terms, and that the misshapen breast gives him a cover beneath which he can mobilize anxiety as a resource in order to protect himself. He says he "preserved a depth [literally, a fund] of uneasiness that I could not hide from her" (gardant un fond d'inquietude que je ne pus lui cacher, 322)

[23]Cf. Jardine: "It may be that men always feel as if they have 'lost something' whenever they speak of women" (1985, 68). As noted above, Mulvey was one of the earliest film critics to theorize the objectification of woman as lack. But whereas she described this as a construction imposed on women that ought to be contested, Zizek argues that woman is lack. For further citations on woman as lack in cinematic theory, see Silverman 1988, 28.

[24]Zizek maintains this view of Rossellini's films despite the latter's own apparently conventional, redemptive view of his own films. Zizek notes Rossellini's comment on the suicide of the main character in Germany, Year Zero: it is "a true light of hope . . . from there is born a new way of living and of seeing, the accent of hope and faith in the future and in men" (1990, 29, n. 12).

[25]In Tarrying with the Negative, Zizek declares that the next step beyond separation from the Other is yielding to the jouissance of identifying with one's symptom (sinthome), thereby "giving up the false distance which defines our everyday life" (1993, 60). Woman's special role, he implies, is the joyous abandonment of ideas (theory) in favor of pleasure (art, or popular culture). Zizek thus imposes on woman

the privilege/obligation he accedes to/rejects for himself, while depriving woman of the ability to act ethically.

[26]The symbolic temporary eclipse of the viewing subject that Bergman is described as making possible for the (male) viewer of Rossellini's films constitutes the same kind of "gap in knowable world text" that Alice Jardine has identified as the main fascination of the French theorists of the postmodern (1985, 124). For them, she writes, this gap is "the textual body's most erotic zone" (124). Jacques Derrida, for example, calls this gap the space entre, in-between, which "intervenes between all metaphysical oppositions" (132) and presents "the potentialities of a new nonviolent alterity" where "there is no Father-Author to kill and the classical subject is absent" (110–11). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call it "chaosmos," the Real-in-flux, experimentation-life, a feminine excess of objects that "exceed any given system of representation" (137). Woman as the representation of the unrepresentable, Jardine reports, figures in the work of Jean Baudrillard, Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, Joseph Goux, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Serres, and others (38).

[27]When I say "contretemps," I mean it literally. As I have argued, both Zizek and Rousseau are trying to defend against time, even as they try somewhat feebly to defend against their defenses.

[28]Butler points out that Zizek explicitly adopts the stance of a vigilant defender of the integrity and primacy of Lacanian theory against rival critical perspectives on subjectivity such as those of Foucault, feminists, and poststructuralists. Butler also observes that if the law of Lacanian theory is in need of protection from the threat represented by these perspectives, "the force of that law is already in a crisis that no amount of protection can overcome" (1993, 196–97).

[29]Zizek alludes to the image of the dead clown Calvero in Chaplin's Limelight and to the body of James Stewart after he has been thrown through the window by the murderer in Hitchcock's Rear Window.

[30]Cf. Butler: "Any attempt to totalize the social field is to be read as a symptom, the effect and remainder of a trauma that itself cannot be directly symbolized in language. This trauma subsists as the permanent possibility of disrupting and rendering contingent any discursive formation that lays claim to a coherent or seamless account of reality" (1993, 192).