Contents

Introduction 1

Part I: The Comfort of Fantasies 15
1 Sublime Objects: the Antinomies of Masculine Sexuality from Fellini to Truffaut 17
2 Ethics of Drive: Beauty and its Enjoyment from Rohmer to Pasolini 57
3 Unbearable Freedoms: the Real of Sexual Difference from Rossellini to Fassbinder 96

Part II: Variations on Feminine Enjoyment 147
4 In the Beginning was Enjoyment: the Emergence of Feminine Desire in Bergman and Antonioni 149
5 About Nothing, with Precision: Femininity Unbound from Ophuls to Antonioni 176
6 In Film Beyond Film: the Ontological Primacy of Woman 203

Conclusion 237

Notes 242

Bibliography 250

Index 254
Introduction

Until now, psychoanalytic film theory has privileged the Lacanian category of the Imaginary and its corollary question of audience identification. It seems to me that despite their pioneering role in generating the right conditions for a long-term joint effort between psychoanalysis and cinema, the 1970s and 1980s appropriations of Lacan by film studies were (and still are) intrinsically reductive, as they resulted in the promotion of a discursive practice that concerned itself almost exclusively with the effects of cinematic production on the viewer (spectatorship theory). In so doing, these studies glaringly overlooked the order of the Real, especially in its symbiotic relationship with the symbolic texture of film. This means that the latter part of Lacan’s teachings was practically ignored. Recently, it would appear that the potential for a fertile crossbreeding between psychoanalysis and cinema has either been absorbed by the depoliticised appeal of Cultural Studies, or reconsidered and eventually discarded by both cognitive-historicist approaches and conventional film theory. To my mind, Slavoj Žižek is the only theorist today who – despite being regularly criticised for not adhering to the standards of scholarship that define film studies as an academic discipline (see Bordwell 2005; Stamp 2007; Lebeau 2001) – advocates the convergence of psychoanalysis and film as part of a project for the radical re-politicisation of culture. It is within such a project that my work finds its scope. More precisely, I do not merely argue for the employment of psychoanalytic theory as yet another theoretical framework for the discussion of film narratives. Rather, by unravelling the Real of film – film’s unconscious presuppositions – I aim to bring the political potential of Lacanian theory to full fruition.

The main criticism levelled against Žižek’s use of film is that it ignores the specificity of the filmic medium and instead borrows from it to argue abstract theoretical points. While this is not entirely true (his book on Kieślowski engages directly and in a sustained manner with form, elaborating original readings of key concepts such as suture and gaze), perhaps we should approach this question from the opposite angle: what if it is precisely Žižek’s seemingly “irresponsible” method that opens up the possibility of thinking cinema in a thoroughly alternative way, one that may challenge the depoliticised status of today’s film studies? Žižek does not look at film as an end in itself, but as a means to unravel wider
theoretical problems that he considers to be central to our socio-political reality. Perhaps, then, if we feel offended by the way he plunders world cinema to discuss psychoanalytic, philosophical and political points, we should take his unorthodox method as a provocation aimed at shaking the film studies community out of the insularity and politico-theoretical cul-de-sac in which it currently finds itself, especially with regard to the use of Lacanian theory.

As anticipated, one of the most prolific ways in which Lacan has been appropriated by film theory is through the notion of spectatorship, which first appeared within the “structuralist Marxism” of the 1970s and 1980s. I want to make it clear that with this book I do not intend to add another interpretative layer to the spectatorship or apparatus theories that have appeared in rapid succession since such essays as Christian Metz’s ‘The Imaginary Signifier’ (Metz 1975) and Laura Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (Mulvey 1975). The problem with these theories is that they place excessive emphasis on the audience’s imaginary identification, thus neglecting what from a Lacanian perspective is the key issue, i.e. the analysis of how film masters its own symbolic efficacy. Furthermore, it is not merely that audiences do not lend themselves to be categorised around normative lines of class, gender, ethnicity, etc., but rather that film itself is constantly “at war” with the Real surplus it produces. The use that spectatorship theories make of Lacan is flawed, for, to put it bluntly, they fail to realise that, around the mid-1960s, Lacan moved beyond structuralism. If it is plausible that the “cinematic apparatus” (the darkness of the theatre, the position of the projector behind the spectators’ heads, etc.) contributes to creating the effect that what is being watched is a sealed reality; and if it is indisputable that such structural constraints are often strengthened by the formulaic and effectively static character of dominant film industries such as Hollywood, what is nevertheless missing is the simplest and yet most vital question: how does film construct its (ambiguous) meaning? I therefore agree with Žižek when he claims that

authors usually referred to as Lacanians (from Laura Mulvey to Kaja Silverman) as a rule “engage with” Lacan: they appropriate some Lacanian concepts as the best description of the universe of patriarchal domination, while emphasising that Lacan remained a phallocentrist who uncritically accepted this universe as the only imaginable framework for our socio-symbolic existence. […] My response to this is, of course: what if one should finally give Lacan himself a chance? (Žižek 2001c: 2)
And, precisely to give Lacan a chance, it seems to me that the most important issue to address is not (the difficulty of) defining who a spectator is and how he or she makes sense of film (including unconscious identificatory processes), but actually to examine how film makes sense of itself: how it emerges by way of negotiating its symbolic consistency with its excessive and excluded surplus.

Here I shall add that it is not simply a matter of studying the relationship between the historical context and the textual inscription of specific meanings, gender roles, and so on (say, how feminine sexual identity is connotated in 1940s melodramas), for such an approach is based on the idea that film is a mere reflection of contingent historical determinants. Faced by the prospect of historicising film, a Lacanian theory of cinema should point out that history itself is the product of the dialectical rapport between the represented and what exceeds representation, and that therefore the only way film could reflect a given socio-historical context would be by reflecting the ahistorical split (the Real) that cuts across history and sustains its representability. An example of this paradoxical logic can be found in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s over-identification with the Roman sub-proletariat in a film like Accattone (1961), where the excluded sub-proletariat is uncovered as the remainder/excess of Italy’s post-war economic miracle. What we need to highlight here is not just that Pasolini’s film reflects an important aspect of Italian history in the 1960s, but that through its obsessive attachment to the sub-proletariat the whole film effectively turns into a strange remainder of narrative symbolisation, something akin to a continuous deflagration of libido which disrupts narrative continuity. The paradox is that to historicise Accattone adequately, one is forced to explore the very nature of cinematic perception, i.e. cinema’s ability to construct narrative meaning by disavowing its self-generated excess. Today’s fashionable strategy of using cinema to outline or critically explore the development of socio-historical contexts is therefore deeply limited, for it ignores the dialectical complexity of both history and cinematic representation. The historicist relativism typical of Cultural Studies, for example, happily avoids the ontological and epistemological presuppositions through which the space for historical representation emerges. Rather than endorsing such an approach, I vindicate the thoroughly self-reflexive character of the filmic text, claiming that only by shifting the emphasis on the dialectics of cinematic representation can Lacan be saved from being ‘a comically simplified caricature’ (Žižek 2001c: 4), and cinema given a decisive political twist. To substantiate this claim, my Lacanian investigation deploys two concomitant strategies, looking
Sexual Difference in European Cinema

at (1) the role of enjoyment in film, and (2) the representation of sexual difference.

(1) In approaching film from a psychoanalytic angle, I make use of the main critical implications of Lacanian theory, referring specifically to the key notion of enjoyment (jouissance, I use the two terms interchangeably). It is precisely with regard to enjoyment, however, that we encounter the first and crucial difference between my position and the film studies appropriations of Lacan: what if the term in question does not simply refer to the spectators’ libidinal affects (visual pleasure), but, most importantly, to the ways in which the filmic text organises its own enjoyment? My central claim in this book is that before it can be used to describe the complex interrelation between film and audience, enjoyment ought to be seen as a self-reflexive cinematic category insofar as it is embedded in film and determines its conditions of possibility. Film theorists who draw on psychoanalysis have regularly overlooked how film itself is a split unit, divided between its explicit narrative level and a foreclosed kernel of libidinal pressure which constantly resurfaces in symptomatic mode. It is this elementary Lacanian point that forms the basis of my analysis. In order to draw out its consequences let us move to the actual definition of enjoyment.

Lacan conceives of enjoyment as an excessive, inherently disturbing dimension which, as such, is Real. We need to be precise when defining the status of the Real of enjoyment in Lacan. As Žižek has repeatedly argued, in its deepest configuration it is not a domain beyond the remit of language and signification (as the early, “structuralist” Lacan implied); it is not ‘the terrifying primordial abyss that swallows everything’. Instead, it emerges as a traumatic formation produced by language itself, a troubling surplus of sense which distorts our perception of reality the very moment a perception begins to form. The Real is ‘that invisible obstacle, that distorting screen, which always “falsifies” our access to external reality, that “bone in the throat” which gives a pathological twist to every symbolisation, that is to say, on account of which every symbolisation misses its object’ (Žižek 2003: 67). From this perspective, the notion of cinematic enjoyment carries the decisive implication that the ultimate aim of the moving image is not the purposeful development of a given message towards an end. Film, in other words, is a-teleological, its aim as a linguistic act residing in the displaced and often imperceptible materialisations of jouissance that stain its text.

This emphasis on the presence of blots of enjoyment which skew cinematic communication does not, however, lead me to embrace a sceptical
position towards the authority of fictions, and even less to reject fixed referential meanings. What qualifies my methodology is not a relativistic approach to film language but a reflection on its fundamental dislocation. I see filmmaking as the effect of its liaison with the Real that filmmaking itself produces whilst it struggles to attain a degree of symbolic consistency. Cinematic representation therefore emerges as a dialectical, mutually transformative rapport between its fictional domain (with all its complexities and ambiguities) and its negative/foreclosed underside, which from a Lacanian standpoint amounts to the invisible “pull” of the Real.

With respect to film studies, then, the proper wager of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that we have a chance to identify the Real of filmic representation, which is also the Real of representation as such. If there is a Lacanian lesson to apply to film, it concerns Lacan’s key insight (articulated from the mid-1960s) that the Symbolic and the Real are consubstantial, fused into one another. As any other linguistic act, film produces a non-symbolisable libidinal remainder, or surplus, with which it enters into a symbiotic relationship. My specific Lacanian claim here is that this surplus works as the crucial anchoring point of filmic representation. Precisely because there is no film without the Real excess it generates, this very excess is film at its purest, the disavowed matrix of the moving image. Needless to say, only certain films will demonstrate the potential to express the deep-seated logic that governs their own representational status. The aim of film criticism, I argue, is to locate this potential.

But why, exactly, does this aim matter? First and foremost because it opens up a dimension which is profoundly political. The significance of unearthing the dynamics through which film and enjoyment interact has to do with what should be at the heart of every political discourse: the analysis of the rapport between the represented and what is excluded from, or simply exceeds, representation. It is not the narrative treatment of political themes that I am interested in, but the way in which the analysis of filmic representation may lead us to grasp the inner logic sustaining our socio-political space. What a Lacanian reading effectively tells us is that the field occupied by cinema is formally equivalent to any other representational field, insofar as its structural dynamics obey an embedded mechanism of displacement which is also what determines the emergence of social reality. My claim is therefore that through film we understand how reality as such is constructed around an excess of enjoyment, produced and simultaneously foreclosed in the very effort of generating meaning and communication. The political consequences
of this analogy are immense, as well as self-evident, since the focus falls directly on the disavowal that opens up the space for representation, and by the same token allows us to conceptualise the formal outline of an intervention that may determine the collapse and subsequent redefinition of that space. The distinctiveness of a Lacanian politics of enjoyment is that it is able to delve into the ontological core of symbolisation, into what Žižek (2006a: 298) aptly terms ‘the constitutive excess of representation over the represented’. What we see, hear, and make sense of never amounts to “the whole story”, but relies on an invisible surplus (the Real of jouissance) which structures what we see, hear, and make sense of. There is no formal difference between cinema and reality, for both involve a series of representations articulated around the repression of their own inherent excess.

At the heart of this argument there is the assumption that, as Jacques Rancière (2004: 38) succinctly put it, ‘the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought’. Thinking cinema, just as much as thinking social reality, is not a spontaneous activity. Rather, thinking as such is an epiphenomenon, a reflexive, secondary occurrence, for it is preceded by the unconscious act of foreclosure that sets up the fictional framework where thought intervenes. To be able to think something we must first exclude a part of it, relegating it into the reservoir of the Real. My Lacanian method targets this Real, in as much as its presence is detectable through the interpretation of the enjoyment that seeps through the filmic text. It follows that what matters politically is to locate those excluded, largely unacknowledged remainders of symbolisation whose function is both to cement and, once identified, undermine, the consistency of representation. And, again, let us remind ourselves that the intention is not to lament the spurious nature of representation (this is, rather, the postmodern/deconstructionist task), but to attempt to identify the disavowed truth of the field(s) of representation itself, without which there would be no reality.

Key to my approach is the recognition that the strictly speaking unattainable cause of cinematic fiction (jouissance) is locatable through the traces it leaves at the symbolic level, for these traces function as the exact equivalent of Lacanian symptoms. Here we should recall that from the start of the 1960s Lacan progressively moves away from his early idea that the symptom, like the unconscious, is structured like a language (see Lacan 1989: 65). From its status as a linguistic or ciphered message, “symptom” slowly evolves into sinthome, an opaque residue of jouissance, the trace of its pure, non-analysable presence through which the subject enjoys the unconscious insofar as the unconscious determines
the subject. My aim is to identify the *sinthomes* that are sutured in the symbolic space of film so as to sustain the effect of self-enclosure. The main question, then, is not a hermeneutical one (concerning the interpretation of hidden meanings), but both epistemological (about the dynamics that determine the emergence of meaning) and ontological (since this radical epistemological perspective allows us to isolate the core of reality).

This point is worth expanding. The theoretical and practical goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to uncover the mechanism through which reality emerges for us, in as much as reality itself always coincides with an act of representation. Lacanian theory tells us why there is *something* instead of *nothing*, why and how we are able to represent the world to ourselves; ultimately, it tells us how representation materialises into a specific content. The fundamental question in Lacan is not “what does this mean?”, but rather “through which mechanism of displacement did this signifying framework emerge?” Even in clinical terms, what matters is not simply to restore the patient’s wellbeing, but to confront the patient with the impasse through which he or she emerges as a (disturbed) individual, i.e. a desiring human being. The self, Lacan claims, must come to be where the unconscious is, it must attempt to disturb the fantasmatic core of foreclosed enjoyment that an unconscious drive always is, for that is the only way to access the truth of the subject. This is why, in Lacan’s reading, Freud’s famous formula *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* (the Ego should conquer the Id) is significantly changed into “I must approach that foreclosed site where the unbearable truth about me is located”. My argument is that film analysis fulfils itself in the application of this injunction to locate film’s own unconscious, excessive (and therefore traumatic) enjoyment. It is because of this radical epistemology encouraging us to probe the structuring causes of a given conceptual framework that Lacan’s system of thought ought not be regarded as postmodern or deconstructionist (as in today’s “cultural studies” appropriations) but rather as political in a way that we should not be afraid to link with the Marxist legacy.

After all, it was Lacan who claimed that Marx (and not Freud) invented the symptom (see Lacan 1975). He did so by highlighting how in the passage from feudalism to capitalism and the establishment of bourgeois society, the explicit character of social domination and servitude between human beings was suddenly repressed, only however to re-emerge in commodity fetishism. With the advent of capitalism human beings started perceiving themselves as free and independent subjects, emancipated from the fetishistic type of inter-subjective relations
characteristic of feudalism (master and servant, etc.). However, Marx noticed that class domination does not simply disappear but rather returns in the shape of fetishistic relations between things: ‘It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves that assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things [. . .] I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities’ (Marx 1990: 165). This means that to understand capitalism and the social reality it creates and purports we need to look for its symptomatic and disavowed truth, which Marx caught more than a glimpse of when he realised that, once produced, commodities acquire a magical aura through which they control us: ‘Their own [human beings as ‘exchangers’ of commodities] movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them’ (Marx 1990: 167–8). It is insofar as he sees the commodity-form (its ‘mystical character’, 164) as a disavowed symptom of capitalism that Marx understands how commodities materialise the repressed truth of human relations under capitalism itself. What matters is that the truth of a given representational domain is embodied by its symptom, or rather sinthome: the jouissance of the commodities as they engage in their “mad dance”.

As for the specificity of cinematic communication, Freud’s rejection of the moving image is well known. The quandary that convinced him of the impossibility of any productive interconnection between psychoanalysis and cinema is the thorny issue of the figurative/non-figurative nature of the unconscious (see Heath 1999: 30–1). To Freud, the obstacle between the two disciplines is insurmountable because of the plastic dimension of cinema, which relies too heavily on the assertiveness of images and is thus ill equipped to render the “invisible presence” of the unconscious. It is here, however, that we should look to Lacan, for he allows us to solve the problem by turning around its presuppositions, that is to say, by claiming that what we see is always-already impregnated with the Real of enjoyment. Shifting the emphasis on the interpenetrations of the Symbolic and the Real, Lacanian theory bridges the gap between the non-figurative and the figurative, suggesting that cinema’s unacknowledged structuring kernel belongs in the “too-visual” of cinema, in the redundancy of the image.

As will be clear by now, my approach rejects the standard critical assumption of the autonomy of film as a self-entrenched, specialised academic discipline. The object of my investigation is not the history of cinema but the cinematic field insofar as it embodies a dimension that,
in Žižek's words, is ‘more Real than reality itself’. In The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema (Žižek 2006b), for instance, he claims:

In order to understand today’s world, we need cinema, literally. It is only in cinema that we get that crucial dimension which we are not yet ready to confront in our reality. If you are looking for what is, in reality, more real than reality itself, look into cinematic fiction. [...] If you take away from our reality the fictions that regulate it, you lose reality itself. We need to perceive not the reality behind the illusion, but the reality in illusion itself.

What is at stake in this position is the persuasion that cinematic fiction has the potential to evoke or even embody the disavowed core that structures our perception of reality (the “reality in illusion”, which is “more real than reality itself”). This question is crucial for Žižek’s aspiration to popularise Lacanian theory and, simultaneously, politicise film. Along these lines, what interests me is the radical self-reflexivity at work in cinema: the fact that cinematic representation is sustained by the desire to exceed itself. Again, it is here that Lacan, film and politics meet, for in Lacanian terms the political emerges when we are able to identify that limit dimension where the symbolic field collapses into the Real, thus encouraging us to imagine the reconfiguration of the field itself. It is in relation to this limit dimension, and the way it undermines the traditional belief in representation, that sexual difference can be introduced. . .

(2) By conflating sexual difference and European cinema, my intention is to identify a specific cinematic context where the excess of representation becomes visible. At the beginning of Carl Theodor Dreyer’s Gertrud (1964), the Danish director’s last film, there is a long take where the eponymous heroine (played by Nina Pens Rode) confronts her husband Gustav (Bendt Rothe) about her decision to leave him. She articulates her argument in a memorable monologue, only occasionally broken by the husband’s timid and dumbfounded replies:

Gertrud: I no longer wish to be your wife. . . you love power and knowledge. You love your wisdom, your books, your cigars, and I don’t doubt that you’ve loved me, occasionally. . . You think of your work only . . . it is worse than indifference, it is lack of feeling. . . a woman loves her husband above all else, but for him work comes first. . .
Gustav: Isn’t this a law of nature?
Gertrud: Naturally, it is in the nature of man to work, to create, but work mustn’t expel woman from his thoughts. I often feel as if I haven’t really got a husband, as if I’m meaningless to you... in a very humiliating way, you show me how little you care about me. Do I exist at all for you? You never guess my wishes or my thoughts, whether I am happy or sad makes no difference at all to you... the man I am to be with must be mine entirely. I must have precedence. I won’t just be a toy to be played with now and again.

Gustav: But dear, love cannot fill a man’s life, it would be ridiculous for a man.

What emerges with Gertrud’s rebellion is the impossibility of the sexual relationship insofar as it is based on the incompatible modalities in which each sex structures its relation to the other by way of fantasy. Later, Gertrud’s attempt to establish a viable relationship with Gabriel Lidman (Ebbe Rode), her lover, proves equally unsatisfactory, for she realises that he is just “another man”, a younger version of her husband. Deeply frustrated, the heroine eventually decides to move to Paris with her friend Axel (Axel Strøbye) in order to study psychoanalysis. It is precisely in Paris, more or less around 1964, that my book begins – at the time, that is, when Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories were entering their last, crucial stage of development.

The central question I investigate is the deadlock of sexual difference as conceptualised in Lacanian theory and represented in post-war European cinema. First and foremost, it concerns what Žižek has labelled the consubstantiality of sexual difference and universality:

sexual difference is co-substantial with universal humanity. There is no neutral definition of the human being without a reference to sexual difference. What defines humanity is this difference as such. In this sense, sexual difference is a kind of zero-level definition of what a human being is. [...] to be human means precisely to be differentiated along the lines of sexual difference. In Lacan’s theory, sexual difference is inscribed into the very structure of the symbolic order. It is not a difference between two modes of symbolization, but the difference that pertains to a certain fundamental deadlock of the symbolic order. This is more subtle than it may at first appear, because again the point is that difference as such is universal. (Žižek and Daly 2004: 81)

Sexual difference is therefore a universal antagonism that cuts across the socio-symbolic field, constantly threatening to throw it off balance. Because it is an ontological category, it is also a political one.
An investigation into the deadlock of sexual difference is simultaneously an investigation into the symbolic order (the invisible system of signs and conventions that determines our perception of reality) insofar as it is inseparable from the Real as voiding effect, failure of symbolisation, the point where the big Other as universe of sense disintegrates. The European cinema I invoke in this book can be thought of as the gaze of the camera fascinated by the non-existence of the sexual relationship and yet compulsively obliged to record it, as in the famous 30-minute domestic sequence in Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (Le Mépris, 1963), which strives to capture the sudden, inexplicable deterioration of the rapport between Paul (Michel Piccoli) and Camille (Brigitte Bardot). My aim is to look at film as the place where ‘the sexual relationship doesn’t stop not being written’ (Lacan 1998b: 94) – where we discover that it *can only be written as the impossibility of being written*, as a series of failures to inscribe it in the communicative domain.

In respect of the ambiguity of film as it endeavours to write the sexual relationship, I explore two main perspectives: firstly, in Part I, the ideological process of concealing the wound of sexual difference by displacing it onto woman *qua* sublime and forbidden cause (the logic of courtly love); secondly, in Part II, the uncovering of feminine enjoyment as correlative to the Real of sexual difference itself, and therefore to *difference* as such.

It will be immediately apparent that I do not wish to engage in a debate on the legitimacy of the various approaches to gender representation in cinema. My work does not fall into the category of gender studies as its purpose is not to examine cultural representations of gender. Rather, I explore Lacan’s theory of sexuality by showing how European cinema offers itself as an ideal means through which that theory can be elucidated. Ultimately, my fascination with sexual difference in European cinema finds its *raison d’être* in the analysis of how Lacanian theory conceptualises the interrelation between the Symbolic and the Real, for the dynamics involved in this interrelation lead us to identify political strategies relative to our socio-symbolic sphere. This is why it is worth exploring what Lacan actually means by sexual difference.

“There is no such thing as a sexual relationship”, Lacan’s bombshell motto of the late 1960s, indicates that what we call “masculine” and “feminine” are each ‘a specific modality of how the subject failed in his or her bid for identity which would constitute him or her as an object within phenomenal reality’ (Žižek 1994: 159). Or, more precisely:

Sexual difference is the Real of an antagonism, not the Symbolic of a differential opposition: sexual difference is not the opposition
allocating to each of the two sexes its positive identity defined in opposition to the other sex (so that woman is what man is not, and vice versa), but a common Loss on account of which woman is never fully a woman and man is never fully a man – ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ positions are merely two modes of coping with this inherent obstacle/loss. (Žižek 2000a, 272)

As a sexed being, the Lacanian subject designates an impasse in relation to its attempt to achieve a stable identity; ultimately, the Lacanian subject is this very impasse. In fact, it is only against the background of the universal deadlock of sexuality as such – the ‘Real of the human animal’ (Žižek 2003: 74) – that we are entitled to distinguish between masculinity and femininity. Apropos this distinction, the point to note is that man and woman, in Lacan, are split (inconsistent, “lacking”) in radically incompatible ways. How? First of all, we should acknowledge that the obstacle to our reaching full sexual identity is none other than the other sex: “man” is that on account of which woman can never fully realize herself as woman, achieve her feminine self-identity; and, vice versa, “woman” materializes the obstacle which prevents man’s self-fulfilment (Žižek 2000a: 72–3). The Real of sexual difference, then, is predicated upon the assumption that the partner is, in its deepest configuration, a sexed other with whom all symbolic/communicative negotiations take place against a condition of fundamental impracticality, which might be concealed but not eliminated. The reason for this can be found in Lacan’s formulas of sexuation (see Lacan 1998b: 78), which suggest that man relates to woman as objet a, the ever-elusive object-cause of desire, and woman to man as Phi, the fundamentally delusive image of a full phallic presence.

However, once we grant the radical incompatibility of these mutual constructions of the other sex, how do we account for the actual configurations of the two fields themselves? That is to say: are we authorised to surmise that, feminine fantasy aside, the masculine field is actually characterised by the phallic function; and that the feminine field, irrespective of the masculine fantasy, truly relies on radical elusiveness? The problem is that this is the wrong question, for the simple reason that the two fields are not autonomous and self-sufficient. Rather, as anticipated, they forge themselves around each other, coming into being through the sexed other. The upshot is that masculinity and femininity can only be defined as (incompatible) failures to come to terms with the gap separating subjectivity from subject, i.e. the fictional yet fully-constituted self (subjectivity) from its empty frame (subject). While man can only define
himself by positing a fantasised about and libidinally-invested point of exclusion (woman *qua objet a*), woman constructs her own identity by submitting it to the phallic order. It is precisely apropos the definition of femininity, however, that we encounter the key problem, for, according to Lacan, woman (unlike man) has a chance to connect with the Symbolic also by “dissolving” her link with the other sex. I am referring to the crucial Lacanian theme of feminine enjoyment, which is fully unravelled in Part II of this book. Let us summarise the argument.

There are two standard ways to read Lacan’s articulation of femininity within the wider question of sexual difference. The first is best represented by Luce Irigaray, who agrees with Lacan that sexual difference is ontological but claims that his conceptualisation of femininity bears witness to his own chauvinistic phallocentrism (see Irigaray 1985). The second, represented by Jane Gallop (1985), Judith Butler (1989, 1993) and others, holds that, on the one hand, gender difference is culturally/discursively constructed and therefore a performative matter, and on the other hand femininity is capable of reaching “beyond the phallos”, actually embodying an external point of resistance to it. Following Žižek’s critique, I argue that both these positions are misleading.

As for the first approach, it is enough to recall that Lacan’s formulas have nothing to do with biology, but instead refer to sexuality in psychological terms. This also indicates that the passage from the masculine position to the feminine one (and vice versa) hinges merely on a formal shift. Thus every attempt to define sexuality as a context filled with positive/substantial features, whether in relation to man or to woman, misses the point. As for the second, more interesting, option, I argue that it overlooks Lacan’s decisive account of the fact that the Symbolic and the Real over-determine each other totally.

The typical argument concerning Lacan’s theory of feminine enjoyment goes as follows: since the masculine field coincides with the phallus as guarantee of symbolic authority, the feminine one bears witness to a position which, no matter how ambiguously, manages to defy the rule. While no woman is fully exempted from the phallic function, at the same time a part of her eludes it and thus potentially subverts it. Žižek’s argument here is that in Lacan’s formulas no part of woman resists the phallic order, i.e. she is fully submitted to the phallus. Woman is immersed in the symbolic order without exception (see Žižek 1993: 58), in other words she dissolves the exception through which man universalises the symbolic domain. It is from this theoretical perspective that I look at cinematic representations of femininity. Ultimately, if woman is “split” in a different way from man – if her subjective division is incompatible with his – it
is because she embodies the possibility of the dissolution of the “knot” through which man constitutes the symbolic field and totalises its function. If masculinity sets itself up through the exclusion of a surplus object (objet a), in femininity the surplus is brought back where it originally belongs: in the very self-fracture of the symbolic order. Consequently, as we shall see in Part I, the reference to an ever-elusive, mysterious essence of femininity should be unmasked as a deeply delusive masculine strategy through which man seeks to assert his own position of authority. In contrast to this logic, and in a way that challenges it profoundly, woman has the chance to demonstrate to man that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ (Lacan 1998b: 81) – that the symbolic field is always-already inconsistent, traumatically erected upon its own lack (since the phallus in Lacan is the signifier of lack).

Taking seriously Lacan’s stance on the non-biological nature of sexuality, I do not distinguish between male and female directors, but between directors who focus predominantly on the phallic position (such as Truffaut and Fellini) and directors who identify with feminine enjoyment (such as Bergman and Antonioni). Despite acknowledging the imbalance of power relations in the field of European cinema (traditionally, the majority of Europe's most influential directors are males) this book does not address the question of gender-related inequality. In fact, I prefer to argue that many of the male directors I take into consideration often manage to unravel feminine desire in such a way that it challenges the very masculine bias they are supposed to personify. As Lacan (1998b: 76) claims about feminine enjoyment, ‘there are men who are just as good as women’. Ultimately, the selection of films in this book is dictated by my personal taste and not by the directors’ gender, which also implies that this is not an anthological volume in any respect. The choice of post-war European cinema, finally, springs from my conviction that it represents an ideal terrain to examine the sexual relationship, if only because of its genealogical linkage with Europe’s tradition of courtly love. Whatever the case, it is of course not meant to be prescriptive.
Index

Adorno, Theodor 58, 70, 187, 189
Almodovar, Pedro 81, 118–19
Antonioni, Michelangelo
   The Adventure 142–3, 156, 185, 188–91, 193–4, 196–8, 201, 202, 205, 210, 213, 216–17
   Blow-up 26, 93, 152, 185, 190, 199, 203, 206, 210, 247n
   Chronicle of a Love 155, 166–7, 184, 186–7, 208
   The Cry 97, 155, 191
   The Eclipse 156, 189, 193, 200–1, 212, 247n
   formalism 187–8, 248n
   The Girlfriends 185–6
   Identification of a Woman 205
   The Lady without Camélia 168–70, 171, 175, 179, 184
   The Night 83, 152, 156, 189, 193, 199–201, 204, 212, 229
   The Passenger 207–10
   Red Desert 156, 190, 201–2, 205–6, 212
   The Vanquished 204, 247n
   Zabriskie Point 207–8, 211–12, 247n, 248n, 249n

Barthes, Roland 194
Bataille, Georges 222, 223, 244n
Bellochio, Marco
   The Conviction 83, 85
   Good Morning, Night 90–5
   My Mother’s Smile 248n
   Slap the Monster on Page One 125
Benjamin, Walter 92, 95, 135–6, 199, 209, 212
Bergman, Ingmar
   Autumn Sonata 119, 224–5
   Crisis 158–61, 162, 164–6, 170, 246n
   The Devil’s Eye 172

From the Life of the Marionettes 126–8
The Hour of the Wolf 228
humanism 228–9, 249n
The Magician 179–80
Persona 230–6, 249n
Port of Call 161–2
Prison 171–2
The Serpent’s Egg 228
The Shame 228
The Silence 102, 218, 220–3, 225–30
Summer Interlude 176, 179
Summer with Monika 139, 225
Three Strange Loves 213
Through a Glass Darkly 216–19
on women 249n
The Virgin Spring 155
Wild Strawberries 102
Winter Lights 218

Bertolucci, Bernardo
   The Conformist 67, 125
   The Dreamers 246
   La lune 223
   Last Tango in Paris 192, 210
   Novecento 67
   The Spider’s Stratagem 219

Bordwell, David 1
Bresson, Robert
   The Devil Probably... 110
   A Gentle Woman 103
   Lancelot du Lac 51
   Mouchette 103, 244n
Buñuel, Luis
   Belle de jour 115–17, 195, 229
   The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz 167
   That Obscure Object of Desire 26, 27, 49, 89
   The Phantom of Liberty 89, 105
   Tristana 80, 118
   Viridiana 80, 86, 107
Butler, Judith 13
Cavani, Liliana  
*The Night Porter*  83, 117

Chabrol, Claude  
*Le beau Serge*  129  
*Les Bonnes Femmes*  129  
*The Butcher*  131–2  
*The Cousins*  129  
*The Unfaithful Wife*  129–30  
*Web of Passions*  129  
*Weddings of Blood*  130

Chiesa, Lorenzo  104, 125, 132

Clouzot, Henri-Georges  
*Les diaboliques*  237

Debord, Guy  169

Deleuze, Gilles  71, 97, 120, 122, 188, 231–2

Demy, Jacques  
*The Girls of Rochefort*  35

Dreyer, Carl Theodor  
*Day of Wrath*  67–9  
*Gertrud*  9–10

Fagioli, Massimo  92–4

Fassbinder, Rainer Werner  
*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*  106–8  
*Chinese Roulette*  119  
*Fox and His Friends*  109–11  
*Gods of the Plague*  106  
*Love is Colder than Death*  245n  
*Martha*  114–15  
*masochism*  105–14  
*The Merchant of Four Seasons*  111–12  
*Querelle de Brest*  107  
*Rio das Mortes*  106  
*Why does Mr R Run Amok?*  132–3

Fellini, Federico  
*8½*  25, 87, 88  
*Amarcord*  23, 29, 53–4, 76–7, 85, 87  
*And the Ship Sails On*  55  
*The City of Women*  25  
*La dolce vita*  19–24, 87, 88  
*Fellini Satyricon*  90  
*Fellini’s Casanova*  51–2, 116  
*Ginger and Fred*  50–1  
*The Nights of Cabiria*  24  
*Roma*  23, 244n  
*I vitelloni*  47  
*The White Sheik*  24, 169

Ferrara, Giuseppe  
*The Moro Affair*  90

Ferreri, Marco  
*Blow-out*  73  
*Dillinger is Dead*  97, 133

Fink, Bruce  238

Fontaine, Anne  
*Nathalie*  234

Frears, Stephen  
*Dangerous Liaisons*  47

Freud, Sigmund  
*beyond the pleasure principle*  71, 123, 133  
counter-transference  234  
drive  55, 123, 206  
*Ego and I*  7, 226  
feminine desire  151, 155, 161  
*Fort Da*  53  
*Irma’s throat*  137, 229  
*libido*  20, 86, 95, 207, 237  
*masochism*  105, 112, 114, 120, 174, 180, 195  
*the moving image*  8, 92  
*return of the repressed*  67, 132, 184  
*theory of dreams*  95

Gallop, Jane  13

Godard, Jean-Luc  
*Breathless*  66  
*Contempt*  11, 242n  
*Numéro deux*  128  
*Pierrot le fou*  129  
*Vivre sa vie*  109

Haneke, Michael  
*The Piano Teacher*  121

Heath, Stephen  8

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich  
*absolute immanence*  128  
aesthetics  97  
*appearance qua appearance*  128, 241  
*lord and bondsman*  121
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Pages/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>negativity 121, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>night of the world 138, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Particular and Universal 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>positing the presuppositions164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reflexivity 134, 185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>woman 138–9, 248n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitchcock, Alfred</td>
<td>Psycho</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rear Window</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Trouble with Harry</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertigo</td>
<td>21, 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoré, Christophe</td>
<td>Ma Mère</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irigaray, Luce</td>
<td>13, 44, 246n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jameson, Fredric</td>
<td>187, 203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce, James</td>
<td>102, 198, 202, 247n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung, Carl Gustav</td>
<td>85, 88–90, 136</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahn, Cédric</td>
<td>Red Lights</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kant, Immanuel</td>
<td>das Ding</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moral law</td>
<td>60–2, 120, 122–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sublime</td>
<td>30, 196–7, 247n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transcendentalism</td>
<td>188, 218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaurismäki, Aki</td>
<td>The Man Without a Past</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean, David</td>
<td>Brief Encounter</td>
<td>144–5, 242n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ryan’s Daughter</td>
<td>183, 242n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebeau, Vicky</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losey, Joseph</td>
<td>The Servant</td>
<td>245n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynch, David</td>
<td>Blue Velvet</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>64, 76, 121, 126–30, 137, 191, 201, 221, 223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aphanisis</td>
<td>84, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between the two deaths</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counter-transference</td>
<td>234</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courtly love</td>
<td>18–20, 30, 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drive</td>
<td>21–2, 25–6, 42–3, 51, 55, 57, 63, 69, 71, 73, 76, 93–4, 97–9, 111–13, 120, 123, 126, 190, 210, 224–5, 229</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusion</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine enjoyment</td>
<td>12–14, 117, 149–51, 155, 202, 238, 246n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formulas of sexuation</td>
<td>12–13, 149–51, 157–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fundamental fantasy</td>
<td>95, 105, 174, 255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaze</td>
<td>26, 35, 93, 95, 173, 181–2, 206, 212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jouissance</td>
<td>4, 60, 97, 125–6, 132, 154, 157, 178, 237–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kant with Sade</td>
<td>66, 120, 122–3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lamella</td>
<td>102, 137, 140, 238</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘les non-dupes errant’</td>
<td>50, 180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>139–41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May ’68</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>misrecognition</td>
<td>172–4, 181</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phallus</td>
<td>13–14, 24–5, 149–50, 156, 166, 202, 216, 219, 221–2, 230, 238, 246n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symptom</td>
<td>6–8, 67, 76, 79, 93, 96, 124, 165, 178, 196, 202, 214, 233, 248n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbolic castration</td>
<td>19, 68, 174, 201, 223</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transference</td>
<td>233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebeau, Vicky</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losey, Joseph</td>
<td>The Servant</td>
<td>245n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynch, David</td>
<td>Blue Velvet</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index 257

Malle, Louis
Les Amants 131
Murmur of the Heart 222, 248n

Martinelli, Renzo
Five Moons Plaza 90

Marx, Karl
class 28, 106–9, 128, 136, 145, 167, 245n
commodity fetishism 7–8, 182, 186, 211–12
proletarian violence 136

Metz, Christian 2

Mulvey, Laura 2

Ophuls, Max
Letters from an Unknown Woman 172–3, 177, 240–1
Lola Montès 179–82
Madame de... 181–3
Le plaisir 55, 116
The Reckless Moment 223

Pasolini, Pier Paolo
Accattone 3, 110, 181
death 179
Mamma Roma 48–9, 221
Medea 133–8, 245n
Oedipus Rex 134, 136
Pigsty 134, 136
Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom 70–3, 79, 125, 243n
sub-proletariat 3, 48–9
Theorem 191–2, 204, 217, 234, 247n

Petri, Elio
Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion 123–5

Pirandello, Luigi 248n

Polanski, Roman
Bitter Moon 116–17
Knife in the Water 117

Powell, Michael and Pressburger, Emeric
The Red Shoes 243n

Rancière, Jacques 6, 97–8, 100–1

Rohmer, Eric
Chloé in the Afternoon 61–2, 79
Claire's Knee 46, 74–6, 78
La collectionneuse 57–60, 62
The Green Ray 197–8
The Lady and the Duke 240
The Marquise of O... 80–1
moral law 66–7
My Night at Maud's 60–1

Resnais, Alain
Last Year in Marienbad 162–3
Same Old Song 35

Rilke, Rainer Maria 58, 63

Rosi, Francesco
Illustrious Corpses 125

Rossellini, Roberto
Francis, God's Juggler 100
Germany Year Zero 97–100
No Greater Love 100
Rome, Open City 69–72, 243n
Stromboli 216, 219
Voyage to Italy 82, 101–2, 142, 144, 198, 219

Russell, Chuck
The Mask 243n

Saura, Carlos
Raise Ravens 214–15

Sautet, Claude
Un coeur en hiver 246n

Scorsese, Martin
Taxi Driver 98

Soler, Colette 164, 221

Sontag, Susan 109, 249n

Truffaut, François
Anne and Muriel 242n
The Bride Wore Black 41–3, 47
Confidentially Yours 36, 38, 39, 44
Day for Night 39, 171
Fahrenheit 451 36, 242n
Jules et Jim 29–32, 39, 44
The Last Metro 39, 44
The Man Who Loved Women 33, 36, 43, 44, 46, 80, 246n
Mississippi Mermaid 34, 49, 141–2
Les Mistons 29
Pocket Money 34, 246n
Shoot the Piano Player 37–8, 43–4
The Soft Skin 44
### Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truffaut, François – continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Stolen Kisses</em> 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Story of Adèle H</em> 40–1, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Woman Next Door</em> 35, 118, 242–3n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vigo, Jean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>L’atalante</em> 162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visconti, Luchino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bellissima</em> 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Damned</em> 244n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Death in Venice</em> 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ossessione</em> 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>White Nights</em> 159–60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Von Trier, Lars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Breaking the Waves</em> 116–17, 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dogville</em> 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Manderlay</em> 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Medea</em> 245n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weil, Simone 96–7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Immortal Story</em> 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welles, Orson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Beau Geste</em> 76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wenders, Wim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Wings of Desire</em> 64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wertmüller, Lina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Seven Beauties</em> 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Swept Away</em> 84–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Woolf, Virginia</em> 232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zulawski, Andrzej</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Fidelity</em> 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>That Most Important Thing: Love</em> 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Žižek, Slavoj</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anamorphosis 27, 232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-Semitism 68–9, 243n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biogenetics 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity 110, 218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commodity fetishism 182, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courtly love 17–18, 20–1, 26–7, 30, 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drive 98, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excess of representation 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminism 84, 151, 246n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>film theory 1–3, 9, 78, 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Haneke 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Hegel 138, 164, 192, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jouissance 71, 157, 238–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Kieślowski 64–5, 77, 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberation 97–9, 113–14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love 139–43, 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masochism 105, 107, 120–1, 245n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masturbation 32–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>materialism 99, 113, 248n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melancholy 178–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objet a 155–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Pascal 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political correctness 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pornography 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychosis 126, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Rossellini 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacrifice 224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superego 120, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Von Trier 117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>