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# Strange Contracts: Elfriede Jelinek and Michael Haneke

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the representation of sexuality and vision in Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* [*The Piano Teacher*] (1983) and Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* (2001). In its focus on the relation between Mother and Erika, *Die Klavierspielerin* brings right to the fore the grounding of both sexuality and visibility in the ongoing ties between mother and child. Displacing that novel onto the screen, Haneke redoubles its focus on vision. It is in the convergence between the two that we can begin to explore what may be described as the maternal dimension of the various technologies of vision that have come to pervade the everyday experience of looking—their effect on our ways of understanding the relations between visibility and selfhood, visibility and mind.

**Keywords:** feminism, Michael Haneke, Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher*, pornography, psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic film theory, sadomasochism, *The Seventh Continent*, sexuality, spectatorship, vision, visual culture, voyeurism, D. W. Winnicott

Why would a woman welcome her own murder? Not her own death, simply, not even her suicide, but her murder, the loss of her life at the hands of another? To read Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* [*The Piano Teacher*], first published in 1983, is to be caught up in that question, its wayward implication in a woman's pursuit of pleasure, of a "life of her own," which for much of the book, appears to be possible only in, and through, her eyes. "All Erika wants to do is watch"; "[S] he simply wants to sit there and look. Look on"; "Erika looks on"; "Erika looks on very closely. . . . She must and must look." The refrain is emphatic throughout *Die Klavierspielerin*, as compulsive as the looking it ascribes to Erika as she moves from peep-show to porn film, from the couple having sex in the meadows of the Vienna Prater to the fantasy

of looking at her own death *in death*: “Like a house looking up from a homeland, the couple is fucking itself out of the beautiful meadow and into Erika’s eyeballs.” “Erika seeks a pain that will end in death. . . . Erika, with breaking eyes, would like to look at how he squeezes her throat shut. Her eyes will hold on to his image even as she rots” (Jelinek 1988b: 51, 52, 54, 141, 247; translation modified).<sup>1a</sup> At this moment in the novel, the idea of persistence of vision—the retention of an image on the retina, one of the founding myths of looking in cinema—carries over into death, a consolation for loneliness, perhaps, as well as support for this sexual fantasy in its submission to the lethal potential of a man (the lure of being accompanied into death by the image of the murderous lover).

“I seek to cast an incorruptible gaze on women,” Jelinek has insisted, “especially where they are the accomplices of men” (Jelinek 2001). Responding to discussion generated by Michael Haneke’s acclaimed, but controversial, filming of *Die Klavierspielerin* (*La Pianiste*, 2001), Jelinek situates her fiction as a pure and critical gaze at the woman, as well as an exploration of what she describes as the “unlived sexuality expressed in voyeurism,” as a woman’s appropriation of the “male right to watch.” “The woman is always the one who is watched,” Jelinek contends, “never the one who watches” (Jelinek 2001). The construction of the woman as pornographic object of the male gaze has been one of Jelinek’s persistent themes, her prose bearing the weight of feminist and psychoanalytic critique of sexuality and spectatorship. That she is issuing a challenge to the classical choreography of the look that tends, still, to structure that critique is part of the interest of Jelinek’s writing.<sup>1b</sup> But if *Die Klavierspielerin* responds to a question that has haunted feminist theories of looking—“What about the female spectator?”—it does so by binding the domains of sexuality and vision to the woman’s desire for her own destruction. Toward the end of the first half of *Die Klavierspielerin*, in fact, Jelinek writes her way into the conflict between sexuality and self-preservation, sexuality and self, which has been so much at issue in recent feminist and psychoanalytic discussions of masochism: “Pain itself is only a continuation of the will to pleasure, to destruction, to ruin, and, in its highest form, a type of pleasure. Erika would gladly cross the border to her own murder” (Jelinek 1988b: 107 trans. mod.).<sup>1c</sup>

Masochism, one of the first dangers of pleasure: pleasure in pain, or pain tolerated, possibly enjoyed, as an effect of the quest for pleasure (Jelinek’s description encompasses both). “Even the subject’s destruction of himself,” as Freud makes the point at the very end of “The Economic Problem of Masochism” in 1924, “cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction” (Freud 1924: 170). Freud’s claim has been at the forefront of various attempts, from within psychoanalysis as well as the humanities, to reread his theory of sexuality and, in particular, the concept of masochism as one through which

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psychoanalysis can sustain its emphasis on the indissoluble bond, as Jean Laplanche has described it, among sexuality, fantasy, and the unconscious. Not only the paradox of pleasure in pain—"the subject," Laplanche insists, "is masochistic only insofar as he derives enjoyment *precisely there where he suffers*"—but a generalization of masochism as the primary, and traumatic, experience of the emergence of human sexuality has been essential to such "returns" to Freud—to which *Die Klavierspielerin* can make a unique contribution (Laplanche 1976: 104). More specifically, in Laplanche's writings, that reinterpretation of masochism has been taking place alongside a radical revisioning of the figure of the mother for psychoanalysis, the pressure of unconscious sexuality on her relation with her child—a revisioning that suggests a potential zone of exchange between this "return" to Freud and Jelinek's representation of female sexuality. As Jacqueline Rose recalls, Laplanche's suggestion that there might be something sexual passing from mother to child "caused something of an outrage" when he spoke to the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London in the late 1980s; crucially, Jelinek's portrayal of the catastrophic attachment between Erika Kohut and her mother is at the core of the sexual disturbance of this book: "Only death can separate them, and death is marked as the destination on Erika's suitcase"; "Erika would gladly cross the border to her own murder" (Rose 2003: 160; Jelinek 1988b: 31, 197).<sup>2</sup>

That *Die Klavierspielerin* finds itself on that border between life and death, sexuality and self-destruction, in response to Erika's look at a pornographic image on screen is, I want to suggest, essential to the wager of Jelinek's writing, its significance to studies in visibility and visual culture. It's a strange scene, this: paratactic, at once frenzied and estranged, Jelinek's prose locates, or dislocates, Erika and her readers in at least two places at once: at the Vienna Conservatory, at the Cinema Metro (even more nebulously, in the white winter landscape that comes with the imaginary strains of Schubert's *Winterreise*, a musical theme for both book and film). At the Conservatory, correcting one of her students, "Erika feels the prickling between her legs, that is only felt by the one chosen by art and for art, when he speaks about art" (Jelinek 1988b: 101; trans. mod.).<sup>3</sup> This is

one of many moments in which Jelinek brings together the domains of sexuality and aesthetics in *Die Klavierspielerin*, the propping of one on the other in their shared commitment to the discipline and demands of another. The student, staring down at his hands, is chastised for his mangling of Bach. In this instance, Erika feels the need to

smash her pupil's head against the inside of the Bösendorfer until the piano is destroyed, silenced. The wish flits through her, disappearing without conse-

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quence. Meanwhile, at the Cinema Metro, rosy flesh runs rampant, as a sadomasochistic scene unfolds on screen.<sup>4</sup> Marked by its perceptual, even hallucinatory, quality, Jelinek's prose does not differentiate at this point among omniscient narrative description, subjectivized memory, or anticipatory train of thought as Erika revisits the sexual life she has saved in and through the pornographic image:

*Extra-long blood-red fingernails bore into one woman, a sharp object bores into another, it's a riding whip. It makes a dent in flesh and shows the spectator who is master and who not; and the spectator, too, feels like a master. Erika can feel the whip boring. It banishes her, forcibly, to her seat on the audience side. (Jelinek 1998b: 105–6; trans. mod.)<sup>5</sup>*

What vision of vision is this? Watching the actors working hard on screen, Erika is absorbed into the pleasures and pains of the image: she looks, becoming *Herr*, becoming master, as if miming the sadistic activity that places her with the man wielding the whip. But then something—"it," the whip—comes to stall, or to split, her alliance with that mastery, pushing Erika back into her place as a woman in the audience—as if, in this classic iconography of heterosexual sadomasochism, the whip exceeds the domain of the visual, reaching out into the public space of the cinema, to forcefully rearticulate Erika with her sex.<sup>6</sup>

Can an image *touch* you? At this point, *Die Klavierspielerin* draws its readers toward that possibility, as Erika's looking gives way to the force exerted against her by the image—even as she continues to watch this woman "so absorbed in her pleasure that she doesn't see the man" (Jelinek 1988b: 106). Staging a woman's masochistic withdrawal into herself—let's note that withdrawal blocks seeing: masochism can be a release from looking, from seeing oneself seen—something in the image compels Erika to obey. Voyeurism, the familiar pleasures of distance between spectator and screen, is no defense here. Erika *feels* what she *sees*: "Erika can feel the whip boring. It banishes her, forcibly, to her seat on the audience side." From looking to touching, or being touched; "touch," writes psychoanalyst Kenneth Wright, reflecting on the foundations of vision in infantile life, "is the primary modality—what *touches* is real; what is *only seen* might be real or might not be real" (K. Wright 1991: 57). In the course of Erika's reverie, the certainty of any such distinction begins to give way, as the sensation of the whip boring into flesh turns the image into an object—a bizarre object, certainly: what's only seen is felt as real, in Wright's terms—that, in its very failure to present the pain of the sexual makes way for one of the fundamental wishes of the book:

*She won't go again, for she prefers a stronger diet when it comes to pornos. These gracefully formed exemplars of the human species in this inner-city cinema act without pain and without any possibility of pain. Solid rubber. Pain it-*

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*self is only a continuation of the will to pleasure, to destruction, to ruin, and, in its highest form, a type of pleasure. Erika would gladly cross the border to her own murder. (Jelinek 1988b: 107; trans.)*<sup>7</sup>

It is, at this point, the fading of the image—the fading of its affect, its reality, of the capacity of the image to deliver the real—that drives Jelinek’s writing toward that fantasy, its commitment to discover the truth of sexuality in pain, in death. The sights and sounds of an aestheticized pornography are not, it seems, enough for her; not enough because Erika “would like to get at the bottom of this business, which is supposed to be so hard on the senses that everyone wants to do it, or at least watch it. . . . In a cheap film, you look deeper, so far as the woman is concerned.” (Jelinek 1988b: 107 trans. mod.)<sup>8</sup>

This is, among other things, an exemplary statement of the connivance between the drive to look and the drive to know, one that begins to run the institutionalization of (female) sexuality in cinema—its “desire to see and know more of the human body,” as Linda Williams has suggested—into Erika’s less visible, less manageable, practice of self-cutting: “Even if you cut the woman open, you see only bowels and innards”; “Her body has never, not even in Erika’s standard pose spread wide in front of the shaving mirror, surrendered its silent secrets, not once even to its owner!” (Williams 1990: 35; Jelinek 1988b: 107–8 trans. mod.)<sup>9</sup> Looking at the body, cutting at the body, converge in this attempt—and, too, its inevitable failure—to discover whatever it is about the sexual, about the *woman*, that refuses to emerge into the field of vision: “The man must often have the feeling, Erika thinks, that the woman is hiding something crucial from him in the disorder of her organs. It is these concealments that incite Erika to want to look at ever newer, ever deeper, ever more forbidden things” (Jelinek 1988b: 107–108; trans. mod.)<sup>10</sup>

In the closed, and often ruthless, world of *Die Klavierspielerin*, that commonplace association between vagina and wound, or cut, has been worked over to generate its diversions of sexuality and sexual difference. Looking, cutting, penetrating: the displacement among them recurs throughout the book, sustaining Jelinek’s honest, if rhetorical, questions to heterosexuality—as both act and image: how *do* you tell the difference between a penis and a blade? Between a penis and “the dreadful weapon of his genital”—Jelinek’s description of Walter Klemmer, masturbating during Erika’s music recital—or between the penis and the blade that “smiles like a bridegroom at a bride” (this is the first description of Erika’s self-cutting) (Jelinek 1988a: 65; 45; Jelinek 1988b: 63; 43). If the penis cuts the woman like a knife, then what is it that men and women desire in the act of penetration? In the act of looking at, of *knowing*, the sexual image?

Such questions carry *Die Klavierspielerin* toward the formidable sexual encounter between Erika and her student, Walter Klemmer, merging penetra-

tion into the evisceration of the woman's body—as if heterosexuality is not easy to survive for the woman.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, the idea of the man smashing into the woman, driving nails into the woman, as something like the truth of the heterosexual couple, emerges through the book. A continuing theme in feminist responses to heterosexuality and, in particular, to representations of heterosexual sadomasochistic sexuality in *Die Klavierspielerin*, Erika's fantasy of submission and rape is met by Klemmer with a repugnance, and then a violence, that tends to occlude the staging of Erika's sadistic desires toward him. In this sense, *Die Klavierspielerin*—and, now, *La Pianiste*—stages the pervasive anxiety that, so far as the heterosexual woman is concerned, her wish to explore her powerlessness in relation to a man, comes too close to the real world, too close to the real thing; female masochism in its heterosexual form, that is, is only too possible, even too probable, to be played with (“performative masochism,” as Lynda Hart has summarized this point, “is theoretically impossible for women”) (Hart 1998: 105, 107). The very model of sexual violence, its moment of unbearable exposure, this is a masochism beyond reserve, beyond the defences, and protections, of fantasy *as* reserve—as if the pressure of the real world interrupts the possibility of fantasy (or, more precisely, a redemptive view of fantasy as cultural transgression).<sup>12</sup>

“Where's your letter now?” Following her attempt to contract the terms of her own torture, Klemmer's taunt to Erika is a cruel reminder of the fact that a woman who attempts to lay claim to submission may get what she asks for without getting what she wants (Jelinek 1988b: 270). But, in routing the sadomasochistic dynamic between Erika and Klemmer through its representation of Erika's voyeurism and, decisively, through the dynamic between Erika and her mother, *Die Klavierspielerin* also refuses to give way on the proximity it uncovers between looking and an urge toward destruction, even death: the fatality of the image, certainly, but, too, the aggression carried to, and from, the eye as such. Writing with, and against, the terms of a feminist analysis of visual culture, Jelinek can locate the threat to a woman's pleasure, to her life, in the melodrama of sexuality and spectacle that, in the relation with Klemmer, in Erika's voyeurism, plays throughout *Die Klavierspielerin*. “Few women ever wander this way,” Jelinek persists, in the course of her relentless description of Erika's visit to a peepshow (Jelinek 1988b: 49). That Erika *does* make her way here marks her difference from the men and the working women around her, a difference not easily contained, however, by the terms—castration, fetishism, voyeurism—that have come to dominate studies in psychoanalysis and visual culture. Certainly, those terms are there, and agitating, throughout *Die Klavierspielerin* in its intricate staging of the variousness of sexual life. Erika is, at least in part, the “phallic woman” (Jelinek's term), appropriating and embodying the penis, the rights to sexuality and looking it is so often presumed to guarantee: “[I]t's the law. A man looks at nothing,

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he looks at pure lack. First he looks at this nothing, then at the rest of the little mummy” (Jelinek 1988b: 52; trans. mod.).<sup>13</sup>

Nowhere is Jelinek’s engagement with a psychoanalysis of sexuality in the field of vision more explicit. The scene of traumatized looking that supports the discovery of sexual difference in Freud’s essays on sexuality in the 1920s is here recast in terms of the drastic sexing of spectatorship discovered in the pornographic display of the woman’s body.<sup>14</sup> A type of body to which Erika simply does not conform. “Nature seems to have left no apertures in her,” Jelinek continues. “Erika feels solid wood in the place where the carpenter made a hole in any genuine female” (Jelinek 1988b: 51).<sup>15</sup> Erika’s “wood” is decaying, lonesome, the very corruption of the feminine body in which she invests her gaze. If “nothing fits” Erika, she can still look, she can become nothing and, as she does so, she can “fit into”—at once penetrate and be contained by—the space of vision itself: the easy-clean, plywood-walled booths that house this carefully regulated act of looking at female flesh: “The coin goes in, the window goes up, and rosy flesh comes out—a miracle of technology” (Jelinek 1988b: 48).<sup>16</sup>

But Erika’s participation in this miracle is also scrupulously curtailed. Jelinek’s description of the men—Turks, Yugoslavs, a few Austrians—who surround Erika is brute: “Ten little pumps are churning away at top capacity”; “In the neighboring cells, the thrusting, jerking pumps discharge their precious freight” (Jelinek 1988b: 53–4).<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Erika looks, she looks hard—as if eyes can strike—but she does not feel and she does not touch, herself or anyone else:

*Erika lifts up a sperm-encrusted tissue from the floor and holds it to her nose. She inhales deeply, the product of another’s hard work. She breathes and looks and uses up a little bit of her life thereby. There are clubs where you can shoot photographs. . . . But Erika does not want to carry out any action, she only wants to look. She simply wants to sit there and look. Look hard. Erika feels nothing, and has no chance to caress herself. Her mother sleeps next to her and guards Erika’s hands. These hands are supposed to practice, not scoot under the blanket like ants and scurry over to the jam jar. Even when Erika cuts or pricks herself, she feels almost nothing. But when it comes to her eyes, she has reached an acme of sensitivity. (Jelinek 1988b: 52; trans. mod.).<sup>18</sup>*

What is Erika looking for? The passing reference to her self-cutting in this passage underlines the destitution of a body that comes to life only in the eyes: a feminine body deformed by lack of a lack, but also by its dissociation from the pleasures, and reassurance, of erotic self-touch.<sup>19</sup> Instead, there is Mother, *die Mutter*, Mother Kohut, who sleeps in the bed next to Erika and guards her hands: Erika’s hands belong to Mother, who knows what hands are for, who lays claims to Erika’s hands as if they are her own, and turns

them over to the discipline of the piano. “Erika goes to the root of universal artistic and individual human considerations,” Jelinek proclaims toward the beginning of *Die Klavierspielerin*: “never could she submit to a man after having submitted to her mother for so many years” (Jelinek 1988b: 13; trans. mod.).<sup>20</sup> Again, at the very heart of what it means to be human, the idea of submission drives the representation of both sexuality and aesthetics throughout *Die Klavierspielerin*; more strongly, submission—again, its commitment to the discipline and demands of another—brings together the domains of sexuality and aesthetics, refracting a woman’s sexuality—her sadomasochism, her self-cutting, her voyeurism—through her ties to *Mutter* and *Kunst*, Mother and art. From the opening lines of the book, Mother looms, blocking Erika’s field of vision: “But her mother looms before her, confronts her. She puts Erika against the wall, under interrogation—inquisitor and executioner in one, unanimously recognized as Mother by the State and by the Family” (Jelinek 1988b: 3).<sup>21</sup> Mother is an absolute ruler, a firing squad; she dictates—and she is there whenever and wherever Erika looks. Even, perhaps especially, in Erika’s compulsive attempts to evade Mother *by* looking, to identify what she screams for as the “life of her own” beyond Mother.

*Erika watches very closely. Not in order to learn. Nothing stirs or moves within her. But she has to watch all the same. For her own pleasure. Whenever she feels like leaving, something above her energetically presses her well-groomed head back to the pane, and she must keep looking. The turntable on which the beautiful woman is perched keeps revolving. Erika can’t help it. She must and must look. For herself, she is taboo. (Jelinek 1988b: 54; trans. mod.)<sup>22</sup>*

It can seem as if there is only one way into—and possibly no way out of—Jelinek’s prose, the threads of association that, proliferating significance across the book, bring us suffocatingly close to the catastrophic dynamic at work between Erika and Mutter Kohut: “Only death can separate them, and death is marked as the destination on Erika’s suitcase” (Jelinek 1988b: 31).<sup>23</sup> Nothing if not passionate in its depiction of the destructiveness pervading Erika’s life, *Die Klavierspielerin* derives its force from an implacable maternal imperative: something like a “do this” that is unjustifiable, nonmetabolizable.<sup>24</sup> Nothing stirs or moves in the woman, who is bound by her *own* pleasure—but is this a note of protest—to the *must* that, in this instance, comes in the form of a pressure, an energy, experienced on the body. There is barely a pause between the claim to Erika’s pleasure and Jelinek’s description of a not “something above her” that *presses* her to do what she wants—as if pleasure is a pressure exerted on the body, pleasure is an identification with, or an overwhelming by, the imperative that comes from elsewhere. An elsewhere marked by the Mother, her wishes, and prerogatives: “The child is the idol of

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her mother, which demands only a tiny tribute from the child: her life" (Jelinek 1988b: 26 trans.).<sup>25</sup>

That what the mother is demanding from her daughter is submission—to Mother, to the discipline of the piano: one description of Erika's students as fat islands floating in the amniotic fluid of musical notes suggests the identification between the two—is central to the exploration of sexuality and vision in *Die Klavierspielerin*, its grounding of both in the ongoing ties between mother and child. "Like a blind mole, the daughter reaches toward Mother's body," Jelinek writes, in one of the climactic scenes of the book, in which Erika attempts to make a form of love to her mother, "but Mother shovels Erika's hands away. For a brief moment, Erika managed to see her mother's sparse pubic hair . . . Erika cunningly uncovered her mother so she could see everything, simply everything" (Jelinek 1988b: 234).<sup>26</sup> The aim, Jelinek insists, is cryptosexual; not orgasm, but Mother, the person known as Mother: the sight, we might add, of Mother. Erika's wish to see everything is, at this point, brought home to the maternal body, to whatever it is that that body does not want to be seen: "The daughter now hurls what she has seen into her mother's face. Mother is silent, as if to undo what has been done" (Jelinek 1988b: 235; trans. mod.).<sup>27</sup>

Is this the primal scene of feminine fetishism? The dreadful acknowledgment of the mother's castration? Perhaps, but, again, *Die Klavierspielerin* is difficult to contain in such terms. Embedding her reflections on the turmoil of heterosexual sadomasochism in the modern discourses of sexuality—psychoanalysis, pornography, cinema—Jelinek has also brought the figure of the Mother, the pressure of maternal desire, to bear on the scene of looking; in so doing, she has written what could be described as a "life" of the eye, its destitutions as well as its drive to preserve the possibility of psychic and symbolic survival against the odds. In this sense, it is part of the challenge of both *Die Klavierspielerin* and, now, Haneke's *La Pianiste* to run the representation of sexuality and vision into a question of life and death: the life that persists in the eyes against the nothingness, the rottenness of the body; the death that can belong to the life of the image.

**"She is not even able to commit suicide properly."<sup>28</sup>**

Haneke's reworking of *Die Klavierspielerin* as cinema redoubles its focus on seeing, its exploration of the domain of the visual, in a woman's struggles between psychic life and death. The act of looking at a woman, of looking at a woman looking, is one of the conditions of watching *La Pianiste* as such. In fact, with his *oeuvre* described, variously, as unendurable, sadistic, brutal, and, of course, as "about seeing," the force of what is taking place *between* *Die Klavierspielerin* and *La Pianiste* is considerable.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 1. A classic choreography of the look.

Two sequences, in particular, stand out for how they displace *Die Klavierspielerin* onto the cinema screen, binding Erika's voyeurism to the technologies of sound and vision with which the novel is so deeply engaged. In the first, Erika is visiting a sex shop, located in the busy, public space of a Viennese shopping arcade. Two long takes deliver the scene, the camera remaining on Erika—her face, her walk, her livid stare at the man who pushes past her, her repeated brushing at her coat where he touched it, her exit through the industrial doors that bar entry to the sex shop—as, arguably, Haneke invites his audience to mime the modes of looking in question throughout the film. Beginning on the other side of the doors, a second long take tracks Erika's progress to the video booths at the back of the shop, behind the racks of pornographic magazines. Mobile until this point, the camera slows now—finding the booths occupied, Erika stands to one side—and then holds, static, as Erika waits it out, her gaze fixed ahead, eyes open, but apparently unseeing (Figure 1).

Again, this is a classic choreography of the look. The appraising and collective stare turned on Erika by a huddle of three or four men works to align her with the women displayed across the lurid magazines to the right of the frame. That Erika glares back at one of the men who loom close to her does nothing to deflect the force of that consensual stare (no look, it seems, can push him out of the way).<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Erika cuts a solitary figure, not like the men, coded as immigrant, perhaps Turkish, and the younger women who can be glimpsed in the shop—and from whom the privacy of the video booth offers a form of refuge. "Bitte wählen Sie einen Film aus": enclosed within

that privacy, Erika puts her coins in the slot and makes her choice of film, a practiced hand. Cutting back to Erika's face, Haneke dwells on the image of the woman who looks, before cutting back to the scene that holds her gaze: heterosexual fellatio, or what Williams has described as the "most photogenic of all sexual practices," one that allows, that is, for a view of the erect penis. That the sequence watched by Erika and Haneke's audience cuts in to get a closer look at the penis entering the woman's mouth helps to make the point (Williams 1990: 111) (Figures 2 and 3).

In other words, to watch *La Pianiste* is, for a brief moment, to consume the form of visual pornography from which Haneke is keen to take his distance. That Haneke embeds that display in *La Pianiste*, that he *shows* what Erika looks at—a showing that, in Haneke's terms, is fundamental to cinema as a visual form—has been at the heart of the more or less routinized controversy surrounding the film. "I would like to be recognized for making in *La Pianiste* an obscenity," Haneke has commented in interview, "but not a pornographic film" (Haneke 2004). Certainly, to be placed, with Erika, before a screen quartered by the options on display, her gloved finger selecting (on our behalf?) one of the red buttons glowing to the left, is to be reminded of Haneke's commitment to an aesthetic that places his audience in front of what he has described as a "double screen": the screen that, in the image, reveals another screen (Haneke 1994). Here, refusing to give way on the status of the image as artifact, Haneke stages Erika's consumption of the pornographic scene through that doubling. Like *La Pianiste*, film "C," Erika's choice, is an image—more precisely, a sound-image—as manipulating as it is manipulated (that the sex looks and sounds "real" is no contradiction here). Her gaze still fixed on the screen—our gaze now fixed, once again, on her—Erika retrieves a tissue from a wastebasket and holds it to her nose, her face virtually immobile. In other words, in place of the "money shot"—typically, the man ejaculating into the woman's mouth or onto her face—there is the image of a woman sniffing at a tissue, presumably encrusted with sperm. Haneke's intervention into the genre of pornography, this is a gesture that may well bring to mind the scene that does not take place—Erika's masturbation, her self-touch—at the same time as it brings the audience up against what may be



Figure 2. A female spectator.



Figure 3. The limits of visual pleasure.

described as the limits of the visual: it is as if Erika's libidinal looking exhausts the image, the pleasures of visual perception, driving her toward touch, toward smell (the senses excluded from the perception of the film, if not from the domain of cinema as public space).

For an audience familiar with Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin*, what is perhaps most striking in this scene is its displacement of the "live" peepshow onto a video screen and, too, its reversal of the movement in Jelinek's text from olfactory to visual pleasure (or, more precisely, from a visual pleasure that incorporates the senses of smell and touch to one that emphasizes the reduction of a woman's sensation—more strongly, her life—to the stimulation of the eye). As if the gaze can exhaust the image? That reworking is apparent, too, in the second sequence of *La Pianiste* in which Erika's voyeurism comes right to the fore: her sexual looking at the couple takes place not in the meadows of the Vienna Prater, but at a drive-in movie theatre, the couple now having sex in the back of a car, against the gigantic flicker of the multiple cinema screens. And Erika, too, is looking through a "screen": the back and side windows of the car frame the couple as objects of her gaze. Not on the screen this time, then, but in front of it, the sight and sound of the couple's sexual pleasure drive Erika to urinate, uncontrollably, beside the car—tears, too, falling silently from her eyes. Both—urine, tears—appear to mime the pleasures she sees and hears, an act of illicit participation that, it seems, takes her beyond the more conventional risks of voyeurism. It is in squatting on the ground to release her urine that Erika's line of sight comes to match that of the man in the car, the eye contact between them generating his challenge to her.

No surprise that the medium of film—video, cinema, television—should be at issue for Haneke throughout *La Pianiste*: to watch his films is to encounter a body of work preoccupied by voyeurism, its pleasures and defences, its role in the technologies of vision that have come to dominate the experience of seeing through the twentieth century, and beyond. In particular, if, as Otto Fenichel suggests, libidinal looking often takes the form of the fixed gaze, then Haneke has given us the very image of that looking: the compelling—even, perhaps, compulsive—use of a sustained, frequently static, coincidence between scene and shot has been fundamental to the development of his cinema, its imprint on the language of contemporary European film<sup>31</sup> (Fenichel [1935] 1999: 331). The effect of that looking in *La Pianiste* can be forceful. Go back for a moment to Erika's wait for a vacant video booth, the image that carries her loneliness, her *difference*, so powerfully toward the film's audience. Crucially, however, Haneke's camera waits with her, the stillness of the shot belonging, at least in part, to Erika—not, in conventional terms, to her point of view (no diegetic character motivates this shot) but to the paralysis at work in Haneke's staging of the visual field in this scene, its commonplace

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commodification of the visceral—one of the social functions of pornography in Haneke's view—riven by the anguish of a woman who, at this moment, is stalled as both subject and object of the look (Haneke 2004).

What Haneke appears to solicit at this point in *La Pianiste* is a spectator who makes time for looking, who makes time for time *through* looking. Deeply engaged by what it means to look in a world accelerated (Haneke's word) by modern technologies of vision—notably, television, mainstream film—Haneke has also suggested in interview that cinema retains the capacity to “let us experience the world anew,” to interrupt, as it were, the contemporary regimes of visual flow: “[T]he long take,” he suggests, “is an aesthetic means to accomplish this” (Haneke 2004). In fact, that Haneke should associate, so keenly, the static, or near static, take with the support of the spectator's capacity for experience, for thought, suggests the ongoing influence of the idea of cinema as a type of mime of both mind and world, the naturalism, the “from life” for which the moving pictures were so immediately acclaimed at the end of the nineteenth century, depending on the “life”—the associations, the imagination, the capacity for thought—of the human mind as such.<sup>32</sup> Slowing down the montage of images on screen, slowing down the movement of the camera, it is as if Haneke works to limit the distraction of the mind for which cinema has been so loudly and so frequently condemned. By contrast, *La Pianiste* works to attach the mind to and in the shot—to stay there, with us, while we look.<sup>33</sup> Asked to consider, to contemplate, the image on screen—Haneke's example, at this point, is the image of the Vienna Conservatory that brings *La Pianiste* to a close—the audience for Haneke's cinema is asked to get to know the object of vision again, to *think about* what is being seen: not least, of course, the act of *seeing and being seen* as such, the composition of the visual field through the exchange of looks and assemblage of bodies and objects on screen.

Like the image of the double screen—which will, of course, immediately follow the shot of Erika's wait—the long take has the potential to provoke the audience into consciousness of the fact of vision, the activity of looking, as a series of questions: how, and why, and what for? One response is that image of a woman, looking avidly toward the off-screen space from which the flickers of light that play across her face and the sounds of murmured sexual pleasure emerge. As the strains of Schubert's *Winterreise*—“Bark me away, you waking dogs/Don't let me rest in the sleeping hours” [it matters that this song cycle can be described, routinely, as the archetypal expression of (European) alienation]—segue the sequence back to the Vienna Conservatory, the juxtaposition of image and sound acts as a type of nodal point for the film. Giving voice to Erika, ventriloquizing Erika through the sight and

***What Haneke appears to solicit at this point in La Pianiste is a spectator who makes time for looking, who makes time for time through looking.***

sound of the young male singer, *La Pianiste* aggravates the question of her difference from, and belonging to, the different worlds in which she attempts to lay claim to her life. Such a juxtaposition is part of the broader provocation of both *Die Klavierspielerin* and *La Pianiste*: What could be described as the experience of “new objects”—schematically, the woman’s passage into auto-eroticism, into sexuality, into the creation of cultural experience—mimes parodically, or perhaps, perversely, a conventional understanding of the movement of sublimation: the turn, as Laplanche writes in his commentaries on this most elusive of concepts, “towards a new non-sexual aim and socially valorized objects” (Laplanche 1980: 19; my translation). What Erika figures in this sequence is the difficulty of knowing how to tell the difference between the two, the montage of images forging an association between sexuality and culture, perversion and creativity, that unsettles the ground from which the act of looking at Erika might venture toward the more aggressive, more hasty, act of judging her (one of the resources of the frustrated look, you might say).

In its demands on the spectator to wait, to slow down, before the image, *La Pianiste* can be said to *work through* Jelinek’s writing, so often brutally significant in its interruption of the prosaic continuity of time and space. But, too, in his use of montage and rhythm, at once visual and aural, Haneke engages with the grounding—the *why?*—of Erika’s voyeurism. Moments into the film, for example, the audience is confronted by Haneke’s first use of that “double screen”: as the camera, in medium close-up, tracks Erika’s (provoked) attack on her mother, grabbing her hair and pushing her across the room toward the left of the frame, so it—the camera—appears to veer into the close-up image of a man’s head and shoulders, turned away from the front of the frame. Momentarily, it is as if Erika has pushed her mother into whatever it is that she has been watching while she waits for her daughter to return. From the few seconds screened in *La Pianiste*, it appears to be a hospital melodrama, that version of television that enables the viewer to pass the time, to get through time, as opposed to “live” it (or so the argument tends to go) (Figures 4 and 5).

What marks Haneke’s camera at this point, in other words, is its reticence, its withdrawal at the level of visual perception, from Erika’s yanking and pulling at her mother’s hair, the screech of fury with which Jelinek, by contrast, assails her readers: violence undoing care, as it does throughout the book.<sup>34</sup> Once again, in *La Pianiste*, it is the question of the screen, of the place of the visual, in the relation between mother and daughter that comes to the fore. Later, the image of the screen in the sex shop will echo this earlier moment, refracting Erika’s sexual looking through the attachment to her mother, the mother’s attachment to Erika and television. “Her [Mother’s] greatest anxiety is to keep her property immovable, tie it down so it won’t run away,” writes

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Figure 4. Television melodrama: a way of screening out the violence between Erika and Mother Kohut.

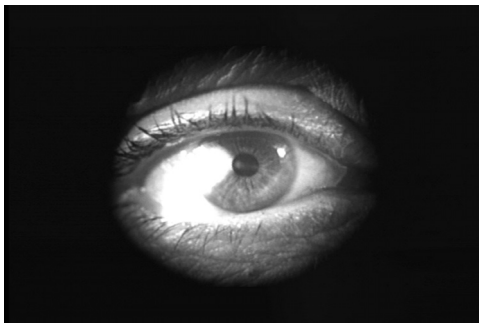
Jelinek, towards the beginning of *Die Klavierspielerin*. "That's why they have the TV set, which prefabricates, packages, and home-delivers lovely images, lovely actions" (Jelinek 1988b: 5).<sup>35</sup> A vital tool in the mother's attempt to have her child to herself, to keep her at home, the television, its unstinting flow of pretty pictures, is, paradoxically, on the side of stillness, of the immobility so characteristic of Erika when she looks (or, indeed, when she listens to music). Similarly, waiting for her daughter to return to her, the proximity between the shots of Mrs Kohut, seated, almost ceremoniously, before the television while the camera pans across the cars ranged before the screens at the drive-in, embeds the figure of the Mother in Erika's looking, the pressures of a mother's demand on a daughter's sexual transgressions, of a mother's demand on, and for, her daughter's life.



Figure 5. In front of the television, Erika's mother waits.

That Erika tries to save her life through looking may be one of the more unmanageable insights generated by both *Die Klavierspielerin* and *La Pianiste*. Erika's voyeurism, like her sadomasochism, like her self-cutting, can be thought as the symptomatic traces of a life unlived; let's recall Jelinek's emphasis on the "unlived sexuality expressed in voyeurism": voyeurism as an attempt to save the life of the sexual, but, too, voyeurism as a means to express the loss of whatever it is that makes life "life": "But when it comes to her eyes, she has reached an acme of sensitivity." Or, as Freud might put it, voyeurism—sadomasochism, self-cutting—belong to the "techniques of living" that, on this reading, can drive us to destruction. So often said to have been normalized by the advent of photography and cinema, it's a voyeurism that far exceeds the domains of the relation between Erika and Mother Kohut. The destination of *The Piano Teacher*—novel and film—casts Mother, and the maternal domain, as sources of Erika's self-destruction, the masochism that is so much a part of the disturbance of this book. In fact, the perplexity aroused by both *Die Klavierspielerin*—its vision of a woman, binding her child to her with pictures on television, of the child who will grow up to gaze, without feeling, at the bodies of others—and *La Pianiste*—especially, perhaps, the uncanny immobility of Isabelle Huppert's face—may be said to derive from their sustained troping of a Romantic, and continuing, sensibility that invests the look as a form of unmediated expression, a privileged means to the formation of self and intimacy ("I live in the facial expressions of the others," as Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts the point, reflecting on the primary role of visual perception, the look of the other, in the child's discovery of world and consciousness) (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 132).<sup>36</sup> That the exchange of looks between mother and child, mother and baby, has been crucial to the development of that sensibility, its investment in the play of looks as the very foundation of the visual field, is by now well established.<sup>37</sup> But the significance of that exchange to the aesthetics and cultures of cinema remains underexplored. On the cusp between psychoanalysis and film, for example, we might recall Christian Metz's unelaborated comment on cinema as an

Figure 6. The eye:  
an organ of,  
and for, what?



institution marked by the "subterranean persistence of the exclusive relation to the mother"—persistence that suggests the reach of both *Die Klavierspielerin* and *La Pianiste*. Embedding the Mother in the scene of looking, what is confronted, finally, by both Jelinek and Haneke is the

question of what it means to refract a Romantic sensibility of visuality and selfhood through cinema, through the technologies of sound and vision.



## Afterword

That this is the terrain so often traversed by Haneke's cinema can be clarified by one of his first contributions to cinema: *Die Siebente Kontinent* (*The Seventh Continent*) in which the image of the eye as an organ—as, precisely, a ball of nerves between socket and lid—comes right to the fore (Figure 6). In one of the opening episodes of the film, Anna—an ophthalmologist, wife of Georg and mother of Evi—is examining the eyes of a female client who, meanwhile, is telling the story of how her childhood friend, cruelly teased for having to wear glasses (“she really looked like a frog”), lays a curse on her classmates: “I hope you all have to wear glasses one day.” “We just laughed at her,” the woman explains, as Haneke's camera looks, unflinchingly, at her eye—distorted by the manipulations of Anna's fingers, the light of the ophthalmologist's machine traveling across its surface. Cut to Anna, looking through her instruments, before drawing back, and then to a hand, grinding and polishing lenses on another machine, as the client continues her story: “she stood there, she didn't know what to do. And then she wet herself. . . . She stood there with a puddle round her feet” (again, agitation of and through the eye appears to be displaced into urination).

Visceral, vulnerable, the eye is, once again, a bizarre object in this scene, used to mediate not only the story of a little girl's shamed revenge—“By the time we graduated, we all wore glasses”—but Haneke's engagement with what the eye, the look, is, or can be, on film. Some ten minutes into *Der Siebente Kontinent*, this is, in fact, one of the first sustained exchanges—of words, of looks—between the characters on screen.<sup>38</sup> At the beginning of *Der Siebente Kontinent*, certainly, the camera, still, looks at someone or something, but it shows them only in bits and pieces: the episodic structure of the film refracts its vision of the routine of daily life in which people tend to be replaced by things, actions, or parts of the body. In particular, the film appears to withhold the image of the face, a withholding that begins in the very first shots as a car is taken slowly, noisily, through an automatic car wash. The opening images—a number plate, jets of water, a wing mirror, a wheel, a windscreen, obscured by water—cue the audience into what follows: as the first credit appears on screen, the camera shoots from inside the car, its point of view just behind a man and a woman seated in the front, their heads silhouetted against the windscreen. Immobile, silent, the figures neither speak, nor look at one another—as static as the camera that records them. As the wash cycle continues, so the screen begins to lighten, and, with the final credits, there is a shift of perspective. A shot of the car, waiting to exit the car wash, offers a brief glimpse through the windscreen to reveal not two but three figures: the silhouette of a small child, sitting in the back seat, framed between her parents. They are still staring straight ahead (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7. A shot of the car, waiting to exit the car wash, reveals the silhouette of a small child, framed between her parents.



An uncanny image, this, underlined by Haneke's first use of the black screen that will punctuate this film throughout (a reminder of stillness, of the black frame, on which the illusion of movement on screen depends). Uncanny, too, because that unexpected sight of the child tends to subjectivize, retrospectively, the "look" of Haneke's long, static take inside the car. Between and behind the man and the woman, the camera was, it seems, in the place of the child between, and behind, her parents; like the camera, like the spectator, she was excluded from the field of vision, looking at the look that does not take place between them. Not looking at one another, not looking at her: the perplexity, and pain, of this moment in *Der Siebente Kontinent* is embroiled, I think, in that investment in the look as a means to selfhood, expression, and intimacy. In other words, breaching one of the fundamental codes of cinema—"characters look at one another," as Metz has put it—*Der Siebente Kontinent* gives powerful visual form to the disintegration of attachment to the world that can be said to drive this film, its scandalous depiction of a collective suicide in which the child—like Erika Kohut?—is on the uneasy cusp between suicide and murder (Metz 1982: 55).

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Figure 8. "...the silhouette of a small child, sitting on the back seat, framed between her parents. They are still staring straight ahead."

Cruz, University of California, in 2005. I would like to thank the organizers, Professor David Marriott and Professor Teresa de Lauretis, and the audience for their thoughtful, and thought-provoking, responses. Particular thanks to Catherine Wheatley for generously making her articles on Haneke available at very short notice, to my colleagues in the Centre for the Study of Sexuality and Sexual Dissidence at Sussex, and the Centre for the Study of Visual Fields who have provided ongoing, and invaluable, intellectual support to this project. Particular thanks also to Vincent Quinn, Alan Sinfield, Amber Jacobs, and Daniel Steuer, and to my postgraduate students on Psychoanalysis, Literature and Cinema who have now lived with *The Piano Teacher* for some time.

## Notes

<sup>1a</sup>“Auch Erika will nichts weiter als zuschauen”; ‘sie will einfach still dasitzen und schauen. Zuschauen”; “Erika schaut an”; “Erika schaut ganz genau zu... Sie muß und muß schauen”; “Wie der Heimat Huas fickt sich das Paar aus dem schönsten Wiesengrunde heraus und in Erikas Augäpfel”; “Erika sucht einem Schmerz, der im Tod mündet... Erika möchte mit brechenden Augen betrachten, wie er ihr die Gurgel zudrückt. Ihre Augen werden sein Bild bis ihre Verwesung hinein festhalten” (Jelinek 1988a: 53; 54; 143; 249).

<sup>1b</sup>In *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*, first published in 1980, for example, Herr Witkowski remains a representative of the National Socialist Party, while forcing his wife to pose for the pornographic photographs that appear to take the place of mass murder – and, in particular, the sensations aroused by the act of looking at murder, looking at death: “Once you have seen mountains of naked corpses, women among them, the charms of your housewife back home offer no more than a paltry temptation” (Jelinek 1980: 98). For further discussion of psychoanalysis, feminism, and visual culture, see Mulvey (1975); Rose (1986); Hansen (1986); Lebeau (1995); Cowie (1997). For a different take on the representation of sexuality in contemporary film, see Wheatley (2007).

<sup>1c</sup>“Der Schmerz ist selbst nur die Folge des Willens zur Lust, zum Zerstören, zum Zugrunderichten, und, in seiner höchsten Form, eine Art von Lust. Erika würde die Grenze zu ihrer eigenen Ermordung gern überschreiten” (Jelinek 1988a: 108).

<sup>2</sup>“Nur der Tod kann die beiden trennen, unter er steht auf dem Kofferranhänger Erika als Zielhaften angegeben” (Jelinek 1988a: 32).

<sup>3</sup>“Erika spürt das Prickeln zwischen den Beinen, das nur der von Kunst and für Kunst Ausgewählte fühlt, wenn er über Kunst spricht” (Jelinek 1988a: 102; trans. mod.).

<sup>4</sup>The German reads as follows: “Es [das rosa Fleisch] wuchert and ufert aus...,” the verb *wuchern* connoting luxurious, even rank growth, a good return (on one’s money) (Jelinek 1988a: 107).

<sup>5</sup>“In eine Frau bohren sich extralange blutrot lackierte Fingernägel, in die andere Frau bohrt sich dafür ein spitzer Gegenstand, es ist eine Reitpeitsche. Sie macht eine Delle in das Fleisch und zeigt dem Betrachter, wer hier der Herr ist, und wer nicht; und auch der Betrachter fühlt sich als Herr. Erika spürt das Bohren direkt mit. Es verweist sie nachdrücklich auf ihren Platz auf der Zuschauerseite” (Jelinek 1988a: 107).

<sup>6</sup>This is, of course, a continuing theme in feminist responses to pornography and, in particular, to visual representations of sadomasochistic sexuality: pornography is not only an image, but an act, or, as Catherine MacKinnon insists, “pornography is no less an act than the rape and torture it represents” (MacKinnon 1994: 20). For further discussion, see Horeck 2004; Cornell 1995; Hart 1998.

<sup>7</sup>“Öfter wird sie nicht hineingehen, denn sie bevorzugt kräftigen Kost, was Pornos betrifft. Diese anmutig geformten Exemplare der Gattung Mensch hier in diesem Innenstadtkino agieren ohne jeden Schmerz and ohne die Möglichkeit auf Schmerz. Vollgummi. Der Schmerz ist selbst nur die Folge des Willens zur Lust, zum Zerstören, zum Zugrunderichten, und, in seiner höchsten Form, eine Art von Lust. Erika würde die Grenze zu ihrer eigenen Ermordung gern überschreiten” (Jelinek 1988a: 108).

<sup>8</sup>“Erika ergründen will, was nun dahintersteckt, das so sinnezermürend sein soll, daß jeder es tun oder sich wenigstens ansehen will,” a wish, a compulsion, that supports her sexual looking throughout the book: “Im Billigfilm blickt man tiefer, was die Frau betrifft” (Jelinek 1988a: 109).

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<sup>9</sup> "... selbst wenn man die Frau aufschnitte, sähe man nur Gedärme und Innenorgane"; "Ihr Körper hat noch nie, nicht einmal in Erikas aufgespreizter Standardpose vor dem Rasierspiegel, seine schweisgsame Geheimnisse preisgegeben, nicht einmal seiner eigenen Besitzerin!" (Jelinek 1988a: 109).

<sup>10</sup> "Der Mann muß oft das Gefühl haben, denkt Erika, daß die Frau ihm etwas Entscheidendes in dieser Unordnung ihrer Organe verbirgt. Gerade diese allerletzten Verborgenschaften stacheln Erika an, immer Neues, immer Tieferes, immer Verboteneres betrachten zu wollen" (Jelinek 1988a: 109).

<sup>11</sup> The sadomasochistic relationship between Erika and Klemmer—in particular, the violent sexual confrontation that follows Erika's attempt to contract the terms of her own torture—has been central to the controversy of both Jelinek's book and Haneke's film. The back-cover blurb of the English edition of *The Piano Teacher*—redesigned to emphasize that the novel is "now a major prize-winning film"—reads as follows: "Erika Kohut teaches piano at the Vienna Conservatory by day. But by night she trawls the porn shows of Vienna while her mother, whom she loves and hates in equal measure, waits up for her. Into this emotional pressure cooker bounds music student and ladies' man, Walter Klemmer. With Walter as her student, Erika spirals out of control, consumed by the ecstasy of self-destruction." For detailed responses to the sadomasochistic dynamic of the relationships among Erika, Mother and Klemmer, see Wheatley 2006 and 2007; E. Wright 1992; Wyatt 2006.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion, see Bersani 1988.

<sup>13</sup> "[D]a gibt es ein Gesetz dafür. Der Mann schaut auf das Nichts, erschaut auf den reinen Mangel. Zuerst schaut er auf dieses Nichts, dann kommt die restliche Mutti auch noch dran" (Jelinek 1988a: 54).

<sup>14</sup> In a cluster of articles on sexuality, sexual difference, and the superego, published between 1923 and 1933, Freud analyzed the feminine form of the Oedipus complex to account both for the girl's sexual difference, her femininity, and for her deformed relation to culture. The boy's terror at the sight of her "mutilation"—her lack of a penis—is central to the account of both fetishism and Oedipal law. For further discussion see Lebeau (1995, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> "Die Natur scheint keine Öffnungen in ihr gelassen zu haben. Erika hat ein Gefühl von massivem Holz dort, wo der Zimmermann bei der echten Frau das Loch gelassen hat" (Jelinek 1988a: 52).

<sup>16</sup> "Der Münzschlitz wird beschickt, das Fenster klickt, und rosiges Fleisch erscheint, es ist ein Wunder der Technik" (Jelinek 1988a: 50).

<sup>17</sup> "Zehn kleine Pumpwerke sind unter Volldampf in Betrieb"; "Zuckend und stodsend entledigen sich in den Nachbareinsiedeleien die Schwengel ihres kostbaren Frachtguts" (Jelinek 1988a: 55).

<sup>18</sup> "Erika hebt ein von Sperma ganz zusammengebackenes Papiertaschentuch vom Boden auf und hält es sich vor die Nase. Sie atmet tief ein, was ein anderer in harter Arbeit produziert hat. Sie atmet und schaut und verbraucht ein bißchen Lebenszeit dabei. Es existieren auch Clubs, wo man fotografieren darf... Erika will jedoch keine Handlung vollführen, sie will nur schauen. Sie will einfach still dasitzen und schauen. Zuschauen. Erika, die zuschaut ohne anzustreifen. Erika hat keine Empfindung und keine Gelegenheit, sich zu liebkosten. Die Mutter schläft im Nebenbett und achtet auf Erikas Hände. Diese Hände sollen üben, sie sollen nicht wie die Ameisen unter die Decke huschen und dort an das Marmeladeglas fahren. Auch wenn Erika schneidet oder wenn sie sich sticht, spürt sie kaum etwas. Nur was den Gesichtssin betrifft, hat sie es zu hoher Blüte gebracht" (Jelinek 1988a: 54).

<sup>19</sup> Let's note that Erika's looking is distinct from another scene of pornographic consumption: the masturbatory session, enjoyed at home and alone. Masturbation, as psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall has suggested, is among the many erotic techniques employed "to bestow narcissistic reassurance about the body and self"; describing the analysis of a patient who, at the age of thirty-eight, discovers the experience of masturbation for the first time, McDougall recalls the woman's response: "Under the impact of this tardy discovery she exclaimed one day that for the first time in her life *she felt her body belonged to her and had limits*. Her attitude to her corporeal self changed" (McDougall 1995: 201, 1990: 378).

<sup>20</sup> "Aus allgemein künstlerischen und individuell menschlichen Erwägungen heraus extrahiert Erika die Wurzel: nie könnte sie sich einem Mann unterordnen, nachdem sie sich so viele Jahre der Mutter untergeordnet hat" (Jelinek 1988a: 15).

<sup>21</sup> "Doch da steht schon die Mama groß davor und stellt Erika. Zur Rede und an die Wand, Inquistor und Erschießungskommando in einer Person, in Staat und Familie einstimmig als Mutter anerkannt" (Jelinek 1988a: 5).

<sup>22</sup> "Erika schaut ganz genau zu. Nicht um zu lernen. In ihr rührt und regt sich weiter nichts. Doch schauen muß sie trotzdem. Zu ihrem eigenen Vergnügen. Immer wenn sie fortgehen möchte, drückt etwas von oben ihren gutfrisierten Kopf energisch wieder gegen sie Scheibe, und sie muß weiterhin blicken. Die Drehscheibe, auf der die schöne Frau sitzt, fährt im Kreis herum. Erika kann nichts dafür. Sie muß und muß schauen. Sie ist für sich selbst tabu" (Jelinek 1988a: 56).

<sup>23</sup> "Nur der Tod kann die beiden trennen, unter er steht auf dem Kofferranhänger Erika als Zielhaften angegeben" (Jelinek 1988a: 32).

<sup>24</sup> This point draws on the convergence between Jelinek and Jean Laplanche. See, in particular, Laplanche (1989).

<sup>25</sup> "Das Kind ist der Abgott seiner Mutter, welche dem Kind dafür nur geringe Gebühr abverlangt: sein Leben" (Jelinek 1988a: 28).

<sup>26</sup> "Der Tochter tastet noch einmal wie ein blinder Maulwurf nach dem Hauptkörper ihrer Mutter, doch die Mutter schaufelt der Tochter Hände fort. Die Tochter hat für ganz kurze Dauer das bereits schütter gewordene dünne Schamhaar der Mutter betrachten können. . . . Erika hat ihre Mutter sinnvoll aufgedeckt, damit sie alles, aber auch alles betrachten kann" (Jelinek 1988a: 236–7).

<sup>27</sup> "Die Tochter schleudert der Mutter ins Gesicht, was sie soeben erblickt hat. Die Mutter schweigt, um es ungeschehen zu machen" (Jelinek 1988a: 237).

<sup>28</sup> Isabelle Huppert (2001).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the "Dossier on Michael Haneke" published in *Framework* 47, 2 (2006). My own discussion has benefited, in particular, from J.D. Rhodes's discussion of the "long take" in Haneke's filming (Rhodes 2006).

<sup>30</sup> In *Die Klavierspielerin*, the capacity of images to take on a life of their own, to come at you from the screen, finds its counterpart in how eyes *behave*. As usual, eyes look, gaze, stare, peer. But they also gape, sniff, and knock people out of the way. At a peepshow, Erika is surrounded by men who would like to awaken her to life, but her look is enough to push them out of the way: "Nur mit Blicken schiebt sie draußen die Herren Besucher in Wartestellung beiseite." In the Vienna Prater, spying on a woman and her "Turkish guest"—a rhetoric that writes sexuality in terms of ethnic identity, ethnic conflict—Erika's eyes open wide, sniffing the air like a deer: "Diese Augen wittern, wie das Wild mit der Nase wittert, es sind hochempfindliche Organe. . . ." In this, one of the strangest moments in the book, Jelinek underlines the

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coincidence between sexuality and sense as the couple fucks their way into Erika's eyes: "Wie der Heimat Haus fickt sich das Paar aus dem schönsten Wiesengrunde heraus und in Erikas Augäpfel." Like the foreigner, a man screwing himself into a woman (Jelinek's next sentence), the couple given over to sex grind their way into Erika—or, at least, into her organs of vision: one of the effects of Jelinek's precise use of eyeballs, *Augäpfel*, is to force us to picture the eye as an organ, as the "ball" of nerves between socket and lid. But organs of, and for, what? (Jelinek 1988a: 53; 57; 143; Jelinek 1988b: 51–55; 142).

<sup>31</sup> For an invaluable and rare discussion of Otto Fenichel, see Marriott (2000).

<sup>32</sup> "Only the technique of film," writes poet and novelist Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1913, "permits the rapid sequence of pictures which approximates our own imaginative faculty; it might even be said to imitate its erratic ways" (Andreas-Salomé [1913] 1987: 101). This is, it should be said, one of the first statements on cinema as a specific mode of representation, a technology of the moving image and, later, sound that lays claim to a profound correspondence with the mind, with *how* and *what* the mind thinks. "In the movies," writes Hugo Münsterberg in his initially influential, and then long-forgotten, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, first published in 1916... "we rush from one place to a dozen others; get only glimpses everywhere; never have time to think about a social problem or conflict which the scene suggests." Reflecting on the social and psychological effects of the moving pictures, Münsterberg was, again, among the first commentators on film to derive the power of the moving image—its vivid impressions, its capacity to "force itself on the consciousness," to solicit the members of its audiences to imitate what they are looking at—from the capacity of cinema to imitate, and distract, the mind: "The associations," Münsterberg insists, "becomes as vivid as realities, because the mind is so completely given up to the moving pictures" (Münsterberg [1916] 2002: 191–4). For further discussion of these points, see Lebeau (2008).

<sup>33</sup> Or, perhaps, to coerce the spectator into vision? See Grossvogel (2007) for further discussion.

<sup>34</sup> The attack is there in the very rhythm, and logic, of Jelinek's syntax, as she forces her readers up close to Erika's fingers, to mother's graying hair, that gray hair in Erika's hands. "Du Luder, du Luder, brüllt Erika wütend die ihr übergeordnete Instanz an und verkrallt sich in ihrer Mutter dunkelblond defärbten Haaren, die an den Wurzeln grau nachstoßen. Auch ein Friseur ist teuer und wird am besten nicht aufgesucht. Erika färbt der Mutter jeden Monat die Haare mit Pinsel und Polycolor. Erika rupft jetzt an den von ihr selbst verschönten Haaren. Sie reißt wütend daran. Die Mutter heult. Als Erika zu reißen aufhört, hat sie die Hände voller Haarbüschel, die sie stumm und erstaunt betrachtet" (Jelinek 1988a: 9).

<sup>35</sup> "Das Hauptproblem der Mama besteht darin, ihr Besitzum möglichst unbeweglich an einem Ort zu fixieren, damit es nicht davonläuft, "Diesem Zweck dient der Fernsehapparat, der schöne Bilder, schöne Weisen, vorfabriziert und verpackt, ins Haus liefert" (Jelinek 1988a: 7).

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion, see Wellbery (1996) and Lebeau (2008).

<sup>37</sup> The work of D.W. Winnicott is essential to the development of this discussion. The implications of his thinking for theories of cinema and mind remain, largely, to be considered. In 1967, in "Mirror Role of Mother and Family in Child Development," Winnicott described the visual exchange between mother and baby as fundamental to the field of vision as well as the condition of a selfhood forged through the work

and pleasures of looking and being looked at. See Winnicott [1967] (1999): p. 117. For discussion of Winnicott and cinema, see Konigsberg 1996; Kuhn 2005.

<sup>38</sup> More specifically, this sequence follows the episode in which Evi feigns blindness at school: The close-ups on faces in that sequence are marked by the child's refusal to see the adult who confronts her.

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