

Schmutztitel
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An adaptation is a power move, a reshaping of something already existing, a domination of an already present form, in which the protagonist, narrative and direction is subject to subjugation by the adapting author, in this case auteur. With the shifting medium, the message shifts at large, the creative license and liberties taken can mute the original libertines' most disobedient idiosyncrasies and force them into a new order within a new form.

In 1816 Hoffmann writes about obsessive desire and fixation

In 1864 Dostoevsky writes of fantasy scenarios of revenge and grand humiliation

In 1926 Schnitzler's jealousy structures neurosis and paranoia

In 1928 Bataille's transgression turns sacrilegiously violent because of pathological fixations

In 1955 Nabokov rationalizes obsession with a child with a confessional narrative voice

1983 Jelinek writes the experience of repression into the structure of language itself

And in 1998 Houellebecq shares the compulsion of pornographic consumption

This is a one hundred and eighty two year long span of perversion in literature and only one of these opuses of fantasy is written by a woman.

1905 Freud publishes *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, yet when Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* is published in 1983, long past the sexual revolution, she is still heavily reprimanded for her "immoral", "perverse", "disgusting" and "misanthropic" text.

In our current era we're both open and intrigued by the psycho-pathology of the former, so-called "degenerate's" fantasies. It is not, at least, no longer only, considered filthy, low-brow, gratuitous acts of disorder to write or read about atypical desires. In fact they have become so normative that one might become ousted as a prude simply for considering them deviating from the norm at all. What was once considered a pathology is now considered healthy exploration and we can freely intellectualise and analyse the various root causes for its existence according to high-brow sensibilities, instead of hiding them as smirch, schmutz, smutt. The 80's, an era in which Jelinek penned her *Piano Teacher*, was not an era ripe for female theories of repression, compulsion and obsession as desire. In fact female perversion is perhaps still the last frontier of the corrupted, the depraved, since the trope that we are the purer and fairer sex is a hard-shaken one.

A poem of amalgamated excerpts from critique of Jelinek's novel, at the time, could read:

Die trostlose Atmosphäre, die kaputte Protagonistin

Banal oder oberflächlich

Der Ewig-Gleiche Hamster im Laufrad

Menschenverächter, Huren-Schreiben, Perversionen der Liebe

In 2001 Michael Haneke's adaptation of *The Piano Player*, in which he transfigures the protagonist into *The Piano Teacher*, is released. And linguistic satire ironizing patriarchy, themes of repression and critique of bourgeois highbrow culture become sanitized, without dialling down deviancy, into a visual

analysis of psycho-pathological realism, replacing fantasy. Jelinek's erratic, not always particularly impressive syntax. Obsessive, repetitive, repressive linguistic exercise borderlines between humour and disorder, but shifts through Haneke's adaptation, into an acutely formal approach.

As a parallel transformation through legitimisation by way of a man's order, I can't help but think of Sabina Spielrein's transfiguration from Carl Jung's patient into Carl Jung's colleague. Haneke's image of Erika promotes Jelinek's written portrayal of Erika with a post-Freudian Deleuzian ownership of her own disorder. Through her gestural language – slowly moving, barely speaking, composed cold demeanor she embodies dignity. Whereas Jelinek satirizes her as a Freudian case study and often cliché. With this shift from crazed to collaborator, Haneke affords the protagonist an autonomy which the book seems to go through great lengths to shorthand her. But does reducing the volume which embodies her in Jelinek's choices, reduce the character to the point where she is characterized by her own reduction? Is the adaptation a canon of the male gaze, which attempts to manifest as a less rigid, post-Freudian approach whilst doing so through a thoroughly Freudian lens.

When the visual framing shifts, the gender perspective shifts also: Erika becomes the object of cinematic observation, rather than the subject controlling the narrative, even through her bouts of what would have once been referred to as hysteria. But in removing some of these frenzied traits, does Haneke, himself, neuter Erika?

The austere mise-en-scène mirroring Erika's personality uses silence as violence – the image is still, devoid of embellishment and descriptors, in opposition, Jelinek's interior conflict is emphasised in the abundant staccato repetition through obsessive, repressive linguistics.

„Sie drückt die Klinge wieder in den Handrücken, wieder, wieder, wieder.“

„Sie will nicht, sie darf nicht, sie kann nicht, sie wird nicht.“

„Konzentrieren, konzentrieren, konzentrieren. Nicht weinen, nicht zittern, nicht fühlen.“

„Sie darf nicht, sie darf nicht, sie darf nicht...“

„Die Klaviatur, die Klaviatur, die Klaviatur... sie darf nicht spielen, sie darf nicht spielen, sie darf nicht spielen...“

Could it be that Haneke's adaptation retroactively legitimises Jelinek's voice? By a slight of linguistic hand he exchanges the player for the teacher and superimposes onto its, at times antithetical original, a new image; refined, clean, stark and structured, which reformats the tone of Jelinek's writing into an echo of that same form.

An image is a re-presentation. A visual adaptation re-presents the text in a form which is devoid of the need for fantasy, since the images supply this imaginary landscape. I've often refused an adaptation because it does not correspond with the image I have in my head of a protagonist or an interior or an era. In these cases there is a mismatch, a kind of Paris syndrome malaise about the adaptation which skews the image, in which you had hoped to meet your own figment of your imagination. Reading a novel is to create a parallel internal imagined world – a film for one.

But it is not impossible to leave room in our imagination for depiction, adaptation and interpretation which does not correspond with its provenance. We often accept interpretations which are far removed

from our own. But can we ever truly separate the text from the image? Once a visual adaptation is seen, does the image not become forever transposed to the text? Can we separate the actor – Isabelle Hubert from the protagonist – Erika Kohout? The author – Jelinek, lays the ground for the auteur – Haneke, who needs his actor – Hubert to realise his vision. Jelinek does not need Haneke or Hubert but benefits from the immortalizing clean, clear, strict image they produce together.

Is the adaptation the fantasy that dominates the subject itself by materialising the text? Maybe the book becomes trapped under the boot that is the film; the image eats the text, the text becomes digested into the film. If so, is there a dominant and subservient dynamic between text and image which echoes the topical discourse of sadism and masochism? Does Jelinek's book become elevated by becoming trapped? Is it freed by its bondage? Or does this clinical perspective simply reduce Erika into an object? Compared to the book in which Erika's voice is heard, whether spoken or thought, in excess, Haneke's Erika seems to conjure her demeanor largely through her restrictions. The *leitmotif* which is the bookends of Jelinek's prose - explicit language, societal, patriarchal and class critique, linguistic intensities which exaggerate Erika's perversions are lost and left unexpressed by Haneke's, in comparison, near mute Erika.

Haneke also engages in interpretative translation which shifts and reframes the protagonist with one simple gesture. The title-choice of turning the player into the teacher. This is the one most powerful linguistic choice Haneke makes. Because even though the French release was titled *La Pianiste*, the international release and the far more known version was decided upon by Haneke who kept the English title from Neugroschel's translation. The shift contains within it Haneke's gaze, which is inherently grounded in the visual, the seen, but holds within it a roleplay which allows him to shift the story to his own desires.

Jelinek's Erika is *the player*, bound to this discipline, a type – de-individualised as character, the daughter, she, the piano player, Erika. Within her title as piano player lies her failures and shortcomings to become the virtuoso that her tyrant-matriarch still deludes herself that she can become, and if she cannot, must sabotage anyone else to become in her place. If the *jouissance* cannot be obtained by Erika, it must not become an attainable pleasure for anyone else.

But Haneke affords Erika didactic authority in a way in which we don't see her in Jelinek's novel, she regains autonomy through her role as teacher, a teacher with implicit discipline and implicit influence. She has a standing within the institution, a powerdynamic dominance, whereas Jelinek tries to alienate Erika from the institution and Viennese society as a whole, critiquing it as a bourgeois construct. Haneke places her as a point of authority within it before we've even seen the film, in his title, maybe only to be able to undermine her even more strikingly, by stripping her of that power later. The tragedy and comedy of personas that Jelinek builds by oscillating between the many persons, 1st and 3rd, is reduced and cleaned up in Haneke's version, narrowed to the one.

Even Jelinek herself said that – “*this film gives this character Erika Kohut, who really is undignified and ridiculous, her dignity back*”

Herein lies the issue for me. The text is written by a female author, with female subjectivity. The voice we hear emanating from Erika's psyche, her desires are not always ordered, the point being that they are dis-ordered. The book's *raison d'être* seems to be, to be transparent about these disorders, particularly those conventionally considered "unattractive" such as extreme desperation, which are rarely a part of the male figment of conventional desire. The novel is an assertion of the female protagonist as flawed, the female experience with masochism and atypical desires and abused interiority, it doesn't try to put make-up on Erika's blemishes but rather shows her warts and all.

Haneke's male gaze externalises Erika as severe; her complex interiority simplified because of her astute somatic presence, and although we understand her as a gestalt – we of course see her complexity, she still remains less mercurial, so then it begs the question – is this what we mean by dignified?

Once again I think of Sabina Spielrein, as I think of Jelinek vis-à-vis Erika's double exposure, in tandem. How her hysteria-cum-academica opened up so many paths of thinking for so many prominent male erudites, whilst remaining herself marked as the 'lover' of Jung – sexuality being the quickest route to delegitimise a woman's cerebral sage. Sabina's theories and writings resulted in the publishing of over 37 academic papers, many of which inspired concepts we now think of as Freudian or Jungian. Her existence helped formulate some of the most well known psychoanalytical concepts, such as transference and anima, yet, she became a footnote in the margin of a male strata even though one could have found a way, by now, to consider many psychoanalytical concepts having a Spielreinian genesis. Jelinek's oeuvre is harder to summarize but she's produced over 60 works including plays and novels, and yet she was ousted from the Viennese cultural institution for her radical views and critical gaze upon the very same.

Jelinek turns the gaze back on the reader, and society, as a critic. She positions us as observers but also as parts of Erika, making the act of reading a confrontational experience, because we must confront ourselves through her mirroring, she makes us experience her thoughts, desires, abuse and anxieties directly. Because it is confrontational, it is not passive. We read, we interpret, we inhabit.

Whereas Haneke turns us, the spectator, into voyeurs. We do not inhabit her, we observe her, with an objectifying external gaze, Erika becomes an object which highlights her alienation and the distance between her and us, making it far easier to pity her. And what role do we, the spectator, embody when we look whilst we don't want to see what we're observing. The reader is not as easily deterred as the onlooker, we rarely close our eyes to a book or hold our hands in front of them, to blind us to its horrors. When we read we enter the scene because we must visualise ourselves, the scenario, but when the *mis-en-scène* is set, each and every element determined, we must find ourselves spectators of it, rather than find ourselves as protagonists within it.

There is a shame element to watching, which we can illustrate by Andrea Büttner's triangle of shame. On which 3 vertices you'll find -

I am ashamed – of something – in front of someone

This diagram can easily be applied to watching. To the image. The third 'in front of someone' does not need to be an external onlooker, watching you watching, it can simply be the possibility that someone

might oversee what you are watching, or the imagined idea that someone might catch you in the act of watching, or more often an element of yourself standing over you. There is a well known phenomena of feeling shame watching something embarrassing, immoral or unethical, even when entirely in private, which proves the plurality of the 'someone'.

Whereas a text is something of a natural coda. Its visual presence is not immediately legible and can be abstracted very easily. Only the cover tells the tale of what we might be consuming, commonly only a title and author, requiring specific knowledge for its decodification, sometimes some god-awful illustration or graphic and the image is the one to create associations. I go on a date with a couples counselor, who's written a book on the topic, and is appalled by his publisher's suggested dust jacket, because he feels it undermines the text in one fail swoop. That is the power of the image. The moving image is the whole quick truth and thus creates an intra-diegetic storyline in its watching experience. You, your 'self', also become part of the story of watching, where the potential voyeur of your watching; your webcam, your neighbouring backseat train passenger, or your child or partner suddenly entering your room and catching you in the watching act, becomes a potential scenario of shame.

Some of the scenes Haneke makes us watch hurts, makes one feel sick, or angry, because we get the whole visual information, a full language, we cannot protect ourselves from it, as we can with a text, and it hits you, viscerally, in the gut.

So since we're being struck and thus chastised, by watching, can then watching *The Piano Teacher* be anything but a masochistic experience when the Deleuzian definition of masochism means *cold suspense, pedagogy and education through suffering*. And can Haneke be anything but a sadist when the definition includes *cold rational violence and demonstration through destruction*. Whereas Jelinek seems to create humour which is both funny and awkward, sometimes ridiculous, but manages to cushion us before the fall into malaise, desperation, torment and despair, despite being far more graphic, she seems to allow for warmth in her irrationality, entirely lacking the coldness of aesthetic suspense and austere analysis, bordering on comedy more than once or twice. Is this the *syzygy* of text and image?

In the text - Jelinek's Erika is a subject made out of language. And I can't help but think of Barthes saying that (and I paraphrase) "*Whoever prepares to speak must realize the mise-en-scène imposed by the use of speech.*" And so I see myself through you, the gaze of my audience, in this very moment, as a subject made out of language. A Lacanian interpretation could be that the gaze is mediated, not through the image, but through language, which makes us question our own positioning relative to our desires. Are we repulsed, are we fatigued or are we intrigued? This says something about *us*.