

Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: "La Pianiste"

Author(s): Jean Ma

Source: *Grey Room*, Summer, 2007, No. 28 (Summer, 2007), pp. 6-29

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20442764>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20442764?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



The MIT Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Grey Room*

JSTOR

"All my desires on paper for
you to peruse at will!"
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.



Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: *La Pianiste*

JEAN MA

I would like to be recognized for making in The Piano Teacher an obscenity, but not a pornographic film. . . . Insofar as truth is always obscene, I hope that all of my films have at least an element of obscenity.

—Michael Haneke

Michael Haneke's 2001 film *La Pianiste* (also known as *The Piano Teacher*), based on the 1983 novel *Die Klavierspielerin* by the Austrian writer and Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek, tells the story of a relationship between a middle-age piano professor at the prestigious Vienna Conservatory and her pupil, a young man from a privileged and cultured family who desires her affections as well as her tutelage.¹ The film's publicity at the time of its release included one widely circulated photograph of teacher and student, played respectively by Isabelle Huppert and Benoît Magimel, locked in a passionate embrace as they kneel on the floor of what appears to be a public lavatory. In a single glance the image encapsulates the predictably steamy allures of the romance narrative for the film's potential audience, a genre affiliation that remains familiar even as it is spiced with the transgression of pedagogical and generational propriety. *La Pianiste*, however, invites such expectations only to betray them, as the film vigorously and mercilessly deconstructs the very conventions of romance, critiquing both the signifiers of heterosexual love in which it traffics and the ideologies of sex and gender upon which its gratifications are founded. The significance of coupling here has less to do with the dissolution of differences and the contingencies of social position within the crucible of passion than with the inevitable and necessary failure of love to suspend such differences—a failure reflected in the disturbing outcome of the affair between the main characters. If the global history of the romance narrative encodes a utopic desire to heal a ruptured social order in the flights and fortunes of individual desire—as evidenced in the genre's marked investment in stories of crossing and passing, across racial, ethnic, national, religious, and class divisions—then *La Pianiste* confronts desire with exactly that which it seeks to escape. What the film presents to the viewer is not melodrama, the

director notes, but rather a “parody” of melodrama, an anti-romance.²

Or, indeed, given the shocking turns of its story—replete with references to violence and pornography, brutal in both the acts it depicts and its effects upon the viewer—the film might more appropriately be described, as one commentator suggests, as an instance of “modernist, cerebral horror,” centering upon the eponymous protagonist, Erika Kohut, as both monster and victim.³ The fastidious, severe, and austere elegant Professor Kohut reveals a side of her persona incommensurable with her façade of respectability during her unusual nightly pursuits of sexual stimulus and her propensity for auto-mutilation. Her student Walter Klemmer’s declaration of love prompts the full expression of her sexual idiosyncrasies: Erika curtails Walter’s ardent outbursts of affection, instead setting forth the terms of their intimacy in a letter that minutely details a tableau of bondage, with Erika playing the role of the submissive and Walter that of her torturer and master. He in turn responds to her proposition with vehement repulsion and affront. The alternating frustrations that mark their courtship culminate in a harrowing climax that is at once difficult to watch and opaque in its implications vis-à-vis what has previously transpired between the couple: Walter charges into Erika’s apartment in a state of rage, then beats and rapes her. The fantasy of escape held forth by romance collapses into a dystopic reality where sexual relations are inseparable from gendered dynamics of objectification and coercion, bearing out in a vivid fashion Jelinek’s intractable insistence on the impossibility of authentic and reciprocal connection between men and women.⁴ In view of this outcome, Christopher Sharrett locates the film within “a line of U.S. and European cinema locating mental breakdown and social disorder precisely at the heart of Western bourgeois patriarchal civilization.”⁵

La Pianiste further underscores the violence and perversity of erotic passion through a strategy of cognitive dissonance. Its disconcerting story is set to the sounds of Bach, Schumann, and most important, Franz Schubert and takes place in Vienna, the capital of the European classical tradition, with the relationship of the piano teacher and the student constituted through an aesthetic ideal of classical music as much as through an idiom of violation. Such a strategy does not reduce merely to a stylistic effect of ironic counterpoint, with sublime background music heightening the shock effect of base actions. Rather, music is foregrounded as a principle mechanism of enunciation, operating at multiple narrative levels throughout the film. As well as figuring the identity of the characters and mediating their desire for one another, music instantiates a tension between the ideal and the obscene, the ineffable and the corporeal, as a structuring polarity within the narrative. This polarity is crystallized in order to set the stage

for Erika and Walter's affair but is also evaporated by an echo effect as it becomes difficult to distinguish the relationship of lovers from that of teacher and student, and to mark the boundary between the rarefied realm of high art and the more prosaic settings in which its promise of transcendence is pursued, summoned, actualized and sometimes broken. On the one hand, the intrusions of the particularities of class and gender identity that differentiate Erika's and Walter's position within the cultural economy of classical music serve to deflate the universalist claims of art, to cement it within concrete relations of power. On the other hand, something of the transcendent remains intact in the film's framing of the aesthetic, lingering in the beckon of a detached position from which to contemplate and critique these same relations of power. In *La Pianiste* classical music functions both diegetically in the description of repression and suffering and structurally as a key to comprehending the film's strategy of disrupting heterosexual romantic norms from within their cultural lexicon. If such a strategy can be described as a sort of subversive mimicry, the film escalates the political and ethical stakes of mimicry with its explicit representation of sexual violence aimed as an indictment of the very social mechanisms that give rise to sexual violence. In the conjunction of aesthetics, sexuality, and violence, we can begin to discern the distinction between obscenity and pornography, between the critical and affirmative valences of shock—a distinction that is crucial for a work that endeavors to condemn by showing.



The rape scene in *La Pianiste* can be considered alongside numerous other disturbing images of extreme violence that punctuate the films of Michael Haneke, images whose unsettling graphic effects issue directly from their pronounced eschewal of sensationalist or dramatizing effects. Such images are often framed within a gaze so deliberately restrained as to border on clinical, captured in long static shots that allow the intensity of the pro-filmic to both build up and dissipate in real time, bringing together the before and after of the event in a single continuum that exerts unusual demands upon the tolerance of the audience while insisting upon the human face of pain and the subjectivity of the victim. The oftentimes startling visceral effect of such sequences is more readily associated with the excesses of the horror film than the art film, and in this regard Haneke's work participates in a recent turn toward explicit, at times gory, violence in European art cinema, exemplified in films by contemporaries such as Gaspar Noé, Marina de Van, and Catherine Breillat, to name only a few.⁶ If this development suggests as much about

the crossings of high and low genres—for instance, art film and horror—in contemporary film culture as about shifting boundaries between the obscene and the permissible, then what distinguishes Haneke's films and positions them decisively within a strategy of modernist reflexivity, as opposed to postmodern hybridity, is their investigation of the ways in which the effects of violence are inseparable from its forms of circulation and representation. Works like *Benny's Video* (1992), *Funny Games* (1997), and *Caché* (2005) have addressed the complicit role of the mass media, in particular television, in the reproduction of violence as a commodity. *La Pianiste* takes up such concerns in its scrutiny of the uneasy proximity between sexual violence, pornography, and film.

Pornography is introduced as a theme in the film's story when Erika, relishing some stolen hours of relief from her routine—obtained through subterfuge to avoid the wrath of her hypercontrolling mother—visits a sex shop to watch videos in a private booth. The location of the sex shop in a shopping mall underscores the commodified character of the pleasure Erika seeks, the only pleasure available to her given her social isolation, as does the matter-of-factness with which Erika purchases tokens from the cashier. The setting of the booth, littered with the used tissues of its previous occupants, reminds us of the reality effect attendant to a class of representations that do not merely reproduce sexual acts onscreen but also aim to provoke a sexual response in the body of the viewer. The definition of pornography as a genre, that is, entails a slippage between the fictional and the actual, between depiction and realization, such that the social and moral anxieties surrounding it frequently respond less to its actual contents than to its ambivalent position between reality and image, its seeming suspension of the very function of mediation. (For this reason, critics of pornography frequently cite the real harm inflicted upon its performers during its production, as well as upon the consumer during viewing.) With the advent of representational technologies like film capable of producing images of unprecedented likeness to reality, such anxieties contaminate the medium itself. Thus Linda Williams notes that the 1986 Meese Commission on Pornography turns to André Bazin's essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" to build its case against pornography, citing his well-known assertion that the photographic image is existentially equivalent to "the object itself."⁷ From this, she remarks, follows Stanley Cavell's assertion that the "ontological conditions of the cinema reveal it as inherently pornographic."⁸ If the heightened reality effect of film threatens to overwhelm the rational defense of the spectator, as apparatus theory maintains, affecting her at the level of the unconscious, then that of pornography similarly overcomes the viewer's agency with its capacity to arouse somatic responses, as an example of what Williams terms "body

genres,” which are frequently stigmatized for “the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or the sensation of the body on the screen.”⁹ Thus while D.H. Lawrence could argue in defense of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, “Culture and civilisation have taught us to separate the word from the deed, the thought from the act or the physical reaction. We now know that the act does not necessarily follow on the thought,” it is this very intransitivity and interval of reflection upholding the inviolability of the written word that is obviated by the filmic image.¹⁰

La Pianiste can in no way be considered a pornographic film (in the way it might be considered a revisionist melodrama or horror film). But the issues raised by pornography concerning the unruly transitivity of representation are highly relevant to the film’s reflexive commentary upon gender, sexuality, and violence. If the film touches on pornography, it is as a symptom of a set of social conditions to be brought to light, called into question, and critiqued. But by going further, in presenting the viewer with graphic configurations of sexuality and violence—lethal bursts of rage, cutting, masochism, rape—*La Pianiste* also provokes us to ask how a representation of violence can achieve an interrogation of, rather than a participatory reiteration of, violence. This question—whose answer is by no means self-evident given the extent to which, as Haneke persistently reminds us, contemporary mass media are complicit in the perpetuation of social violence—is articulated by the director in terms of a distinction between the obscene, or that which retains its capacity to outrage the audience, and the pornographic, which renders obscenity banal and anesthetic. “Whether concerned with sexuality or violence or another taboo issue, anything that breaks with the norm is obscene,” he maintains, while

by contrast, pornography is the opposite, in that it makes into a commodity that which is obscene, makes the unusual consumable, which is the truly scandalous aspect of porno rather than the traditional arguments posed by institutions of society . . . I think that any contemporary art practice is pornographic if it attempts to bandage the wound, so to speak, which is to say our social and psychological wound.¹¹

How might the transgression of social and representational norms work to actually challenge those norms rather than to collude with them? Given that the very definition of obscenity as that which has been deemed unrepresentable reinscribes the validity of the law—with the act of prohibition entailing the frisson of the illicit instead of vice versa—then how can the shock effect of violation work to critique social norms and the ideologies they uphold?¹² Is it possible to speak of the obscenity of social norms themselves?¹³

Even if the mere presentation of certain actions and images threatens to exceed the narrative and rhetorical edifice of meaning in which they are situated, *La Pianiste* remains invested in the power of such images to elicit a critical response. Yet the film does not make good on this investment by offering its viewer the comfort of a morally unambiguous perspective from which to condemn the violence she sees. Rather, the film explores the murky territory between description and conflation—between the work *on* pornography and the work *of* pornography—by framing its representation of sexual violence in a way that renders it particularly difficult to interpret. Its climactic scene has been the subject of much debate, understood by some as a fulfillment of Erika’s masochistic desires,¹⁴ and by others as a violation of her desire. While my own reading lies squarely and insistently in the second camp, in the remainder of this essay I will confront the ambiguities contributing to the misapprehension of this scene of rape as consensual sex in order to turn them in a different direction, insofar as these ambiguities uphold, rather than detract from, the film’s effectiveness as a feminist denunciation of gendered violence.

The challenges that the rape scene poses for the understanding of the audience lie in its familiarity: what shocks is not only the sudden intrusion of violence into the realm of intimacy, but also the uncanny echoing of Erika’s fantasies in Walter’s actions. Slightly earlier in the film, Erika demonstrates her receptiveness to Walter’s romantic overtures with the offering of a letter; its contents are relayed to us when he reads the letter aloud in her presence: “Then, gag me with some stockings I will have ready. Stuff them in so hard that I’m incapable of making any sounds. Next, take off the blindfold please, and sit on my face and punch me in the stomach to force me to thrust my tongue in your behind.” Here Walter pauses to inquire incredulously, “Is this supposed to be serious?” and continues reading:

For that is my dearest wish. Hands and feet tied behind my back and locked up next door to my mother but out of her reach behind my bedroom door, till the next morning . . . If you catch me disobeying any of your orders, hit me, please, even with the back of your hand on my face. Ask me why I don’t cry out for my mother or why I don’t fight back. Above all, say things like that so that I realize just how powerless I am.

Walter responds by storming out in disgust, but returns the next day and, upon entering Erika’s apartment, slaps her face and asks, “Is this really what you had imagined?” As he continues to assault Erika, he recites the letter from memory over Erika’s pleas to stop: “*As for my mother, pay no attention to her. Yes? Am I quoting you exactly? Give me lots of slaps darling. Hit me hard, no, hit me around the face and hit me hard. At your service, dear*

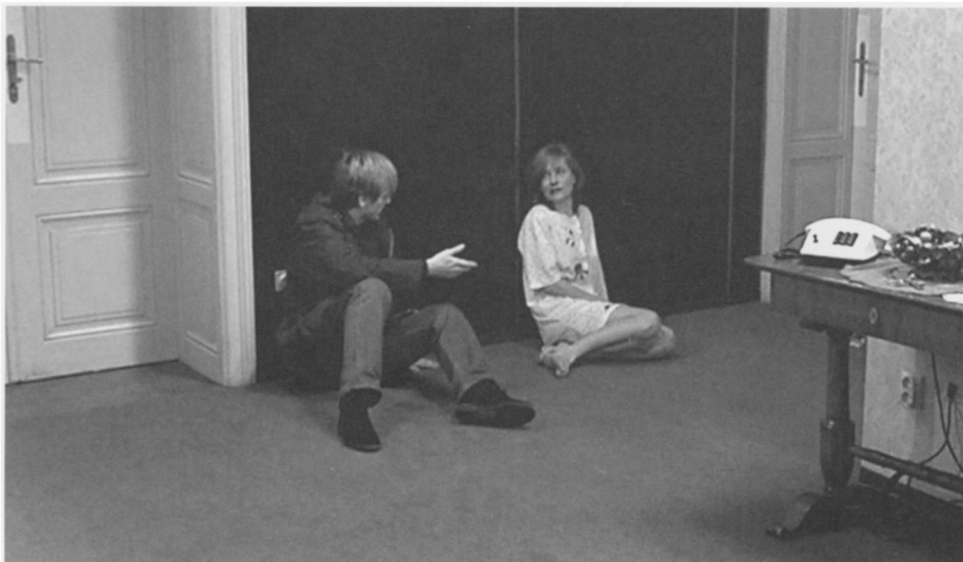
lady.” At this point, he strikes Erika’s face. “Is that what you want?”

To take Walter’s words at face value would be erroneous, as the two encounters present fundamentally different configurations of sexuality, violence, and power. At the same time, however, these differences become intelligible only against the backdrop of the film’s various reiterations and resignifications of violence across shifting realms of fantasy and reality, private and public, inscription and enactment. Thus I propose to approach sexual violence in *La Pianiste* as Deleuze considers pain in his essay “Coldness and Cruelty,” as a trope that “only acquires significance in relation to the forms of repetition which condition its use.”¹⁵ The troubling echoes of the one scene in the other disallow a reading that would insist upon a clear-cut distinction between fantasy and reality—that would invoke theater as a metaphor for sexual “role-playing,” for instance—even as these two scenes trace a trajectory from the perverse idiosyncrasy of individual desire (masochism) to the general social existence of violence against women (rape). They signal the operation of a structure of repetition and circularity that not only sets the film apart from conventional narratives of seduction and coupling, whether ending in fulfillment or failure, but also underwrites a critical strategy that works from within the idiom of power and domination rather than claiming a position that transcends ideology. In this regard, Haneke’s description of the film in terms of parody takes on a heightened meaning: as well as mimicking the conventions of genre for the purpose of a metacommentary on genre, *La Pianiste* further locates this metacommentary within a series of mimetic reenactments that locate the possibilities of social critique within the language of the symptom itself.¹⁶

||||

“Is this really what you
had imagined?” *La Pianiste*.
Dir. Michael Haneke, 2001.
Film still.

In the two scenes described above, violence marks both the moment of intersubjectivity and the negation of its realization, inscribing



a hierarchy of control that calls into question the very possibility of reciprocity. This uneven dynamic of control is not unique to the sexual encounter but rather pervades the routine of work and the mundane interactions between Erika and her students. The opening scenes in the film introduce her character in the context of her profession as a piano instructor and establish the remarkable stringency and loneliness of her daily schedule, which consists of eight hours conducting lessons at the conservatory, followed by privately commissioned rehearsals before retiring to the apartment she shares with her domineering mother. The images of Erika at work present a life dedicated to an aesthetic ideal whose rigor is directly proportional to its rigidity. The interpersonal relations that transpire within the space of the conservatory are oriented entirely toward the attainment of this ideal, informed as well by an unambiguous hierarchy between the teacher who instructs, guides, commands, and the student who receives and internalizes her instructions in the process of training. Erika's place in this hierarchy is secured through expert knowledge and talent, sanctified by the institutional authority of the conservatory. A guardian of the gates of high culture, she exercises enormous control over the fate and mental health of the aspiring musicians who seek entrance through these gates.

At the same time, as a player as well as teacher of piano Erika subjects herself to the same regime that she imposes upon her pupils, disciplining her own body in accordance with the standards demanded by the composition.¹⁷ As *La Pianiste* makes clear, the very act of musical performance as an interpretation and realization of a score that consists essentially of an encoded set of instructions, requires a negation of the will of the performer. Virtuosity entails at once a display of exceptional mastery and exceptional submission. Thus Carolyn Abbate notes the automatism that generally underlies the interpretation of a score: "Nowhere is our machinelike status more clear than in a musical performance in which someone plays someone else's work . . . musical

At the conservatory.
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.



performance exists in a performance network in which a master voice animates a medium, the human performer, to reproduce his thoughts. There is a puppet master, and there is a marionette.”¹⁸ For Erika, this dialectic of mastery and submission plays out most starkly in the rigorous challenge of playing Schubert, whom she describes as “no walk in the park,” but her “favorite.” And in a conversation regarding Schumann, another composer who holds a special place in her work, she extends the stratifications of control characterizing the social space of the academy and the situation of performance to artistic production itself. “Have you read Adorno on Schumann’s *Fantasia in C Major*?” she asks Walter. “He talks of his twilight. It’s not Schumann bereft of reason, but just before. A fraction before. He knows he’s losing his mind. It torments him but he clings on, one last time. It’s being aware of what it is to lose oneself, before being completely abandoned.” In her anecdote, the relationship of performer and composer is internalized to the experience of the composer himself, as he oscillates between a loss and an assertion of control, between the limits of the body and the aesthetic overcoming of those limits.

Notably, this encounter represents Erika and Walter’s first meeting, signaling the arousal of their interest in one another, and as this interest develops further, the problematic of control introduced by Erika to this discourse on music is transferred to their discourse as lovers. Their desires find expression for the first time after he interrupts his studies in engineering to enroll in her master class, during a tryst that takes place in the women’s lavatory of the conservatory in the middle of a rehearsal of one of Bach’s *Brandenburg Concertos*. After an initial outburst of passion between the two, Erika breaks up the embrace that supplies the image for the publicity photograph and imposes a deliberately distanced and awkward format upon their interactions, forcing Walter to stand at a distance from her with his arms at his side as she manipulates his penis while watching him impassively. When he attempts to talk to her, she cuts him off with a series of curt and authoritative commands, as the concerto continues to play in the background: “Be quiet”; “Look at me, not at your penis”; “Hands off”; “Don’t move, or I’ll leave”; “Face me”; “Now you can put it away.” Erika ends by leaving Walter in a state of unconsummated arousal, deferring any further gratification by telling him, “I’ll write down what you can do to me. All my desires on paper for you to peruse at will.” The effect of her directions is to replace the spontaneity of their amorous entanglement with a pointedly denaturalized and formalized choreography of bodies. The scene replicates and heightens the dynamic of the piano lesson, with Erika playing the role of scenarist as well as teacher, asserting a disciplinary control over Walter’s bodily expressions and making him into her marionette. Her interjection of the written word into their lovers’

repartee in the promise of the letter heightens the delaying effect of her spoken commands, further dissolving the spontaneity of passion within the studious interval of writing and reading. The letter, as we soon discover, is a score for their affair, a notation of a sequence of commands to be enacted by Walter in a performative execution of mastery as submission.

Both of these encounters reveal the ways in which passion is mediated by the musical arts in *La Pianiste*. Indeed, during the private recital at the home of Walter's aunt Mrs. Blonsky, where the two are introduced to one another, the arousal of their feelings is indicated through a series of close-ups as each in turn listens to the other playing the piano. Erika's aesthetic approach to love, however, is deliberative and cold in contrast to Walter's heat. While he declares music to be something that "can bring us together," she eschews such romantic notions in her insistence upon the hierarchies that subsist in the realm of aesthetics, reflected not only in the relationship of teacher and student or of composer and performer but also in a cultural economy of music in which she is dependent upon the largesse of Walter's wealthy family, whose dedication to the support of the classical tradition allows her to exist as an artist. That the perverse and unusual bent of her desires finds a precedent in these aesthetic hierarchies indicates the need for a discussion that goes beyond the psychobiography of perversion within which many commentators have situated her fantasies. To be fair, the character of Erika Kohut in many ways cries out for psychoanalytic interpretation as a paradigmatic case study of repression, exhibiting symptoms of neurosis, psychosis, narcissism, and frigidity—all pathologies that have been named in connection with her in the critical reception of *La Pianiste*.¹⁹ To leave the question of her masochistic proclivities in the realm of pathology, however, would be to overlook the ways in which it holds up a mirror to and implicates the world surrounding it. Thus my reading of Erika's masochism turns away from a solely psychoanalytic framework in order to locate her symptoms



within a constellation of formal, contractual, and social relations, drawing upon Deleuze's discussion of the aesthetics of perversion.

In "Coldness and Cruelty," Deleuze challenges the commonplace tendency to view masochism and sadism as related and complementary perversions, located upon a single continuum of aggression, in order to show that the two represent fundamentally different dispositions toward desire, knowledge, and the law. Turning to the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and the Marquis de Sade, he argues that to discern what is at stake in these dispositions we must look beyond the descriptive function of language to the patterns of repetition and enunciatory positions that organize the discourse of masters and victims.²⁰ Deleuze's elaboration of masochism finds several parallels in Erika's situation: unlike the sadist who requires an unwilling victim, the masochist is a "victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade, and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes."²¹ In this regard, the masochist is "essentially an educator" in the subject of his own victimization, who must seek out a consenting participant with which to enter into "a system of reciprocal rights and duties."²² And insofar as the victim himself initiates and sets the terms of this contractual alliance, masochism involves acts of ventriloquism, with the victim speaking "through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself" and, conversely, with the torturer bound to the victim as a puppet, having consented to play a predetermined role.²³ The contractual and scripted aspect of masochism effectively reverses the physical hierarchy of victim and torturer, instating the one as the master of the other. Recast within the terms of intimacy set forth by the masochist are the relational constructs of teacher-student and composer-performer as these function to demarcate a set of fixed positions that enable the expression and enactment of desire and power, as well as their conversion and displacement between bodies. The masochist is essentially a scenarist, a composer of tableaux, whose fantasies transpire within the temporal

Opposite: Spontaneity and heat.
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.

Below: Coldness and cruelty.
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.



duration of waiting, delay, and suspense, patterned upon “the immobile and reflective quality of culture.”²⁴ Thus Deleuze describes the masochistic attitude as fundamentally aesthetic, driven by the faculty of imagination (in contrast to the pure reason that impels the sadist) and whose objective is not merely the satisfaction of carnal desire but also an “ascent from the human body to the work of art.”²⁵

In the fictive universe of Sacher-Masoch, the masochist is always a masculine subject held in thrall to the whip wielded by a “Venus in furs” or some such feminine icon of cold beauty. In its reversal of this schema, *La Pianiste* complicates the prismatic architecture of fantasy described in “Coldness and Cruelty” and forces us to dwell further on the status of violence within the masochistic scenario. If violence is to a certain degree neutralized by prior consent in the account given by Deleuze, which consistently paints the masochist as a male subject-victim in search of a female object-torturer, the film does not allow for a similar circumvention of its descriptive effects. For the figure of the *female* masochist, as many have noted, provokes a certain anxiety in view of the uncomfortable congruities between her position and the subordinate position of all women in a patriarchal world. As Williams points out, “Because women have so often been presumed not to have sexual agency, to be objects and not subjects of desire, masochism has in many respects been taken as the ‘norm’ for women under patriarchy.”²⁶ Thus the female masochist appears to be complicit with her own disempowerment, having internalized the norm to such a degree that her pleasure depends upon it. She is, the words of Lynda Hart, the woman who “asks for it,” who assents to her own victimization, who crafts her desires as “an iconic reproduction of the oppressive model.”²⁷ If male masochism can aspire to the transfiguring condition of art, then its female counterpart can only lapse into the banality of femininity as a given social condition.²⁸

Despite the difficulties of mapping the female victim onto the masochist aesthetic described here, however, we find in Deleuze’s view of masochism as an engine of “dialectical reversal, disguise, and reduplication” a useful starting point from which to approach the film’s representation of Erika’s sexuality. The masochistic scenario sets into motion a series of transpositions that do not only occur between victim and torturer, as “a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse,” but also extend beyond the parameters of the fantasy itself.²⁹ For Deleuze the violence that attends this scenario originates not from within the inner recesses of the individual psyche but rather from without:

With Sade and Masoch the function of literature is not to describe the world, since this has already been done, but to define a counterpart to the world capable of containing its violence and excesses. . . . Thus eroticism is able to act as a mirror to the world by reflecting its excesses, drawing out its violence.³⁰

While sadism draws out the violence of the world in order to multiply it through a process of quantitative reiteration and accumulation, the dialectical spirit animating masochism reflects the excess of violence in order to reconstruct it in a different format that nonetheless still preserves this excess. In this regard, we can also understand masochism as a disposition toward reality, defined chiefly in terms of disavowal as a particular operation of knowledge. “Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is,” Deleuze writes, an operation that “neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it.”³¹ It is therefore not only consent that neutralizes violence, but the artfulness of the refusal that does not deny, but instead displaces.

Such an account of masochism is striking for the way that it undermines the confidence with which we can define perverse or deviant sexuality in opposition to a norm by calling attention to the reverberations of normalized forms of violence within the realms of fantasy and desire. In *La Pianiste* we can begin to see how the ordinary world it portrays takes on a menacing cast when glimpsed through the reflecting lens of Erika’s masochism, as it draws to the surface the subtle forms of coercion coursing through the interactions of men and women to reveal an ubiquitous undercurrent of everyday violence. This undercurrent emerges in the sidelines of the film’s central drama, finding expression in moments illustrative of the details of Erika’s existence. For instance, after she furtively trails Walter to an outdoor ice rink, she spies two young girls as they practice figure skating suddenly interrupted by the members of Walter’s ice hockey team, who surround them and aggressively push them off the ice. In another scene, Erika cruises the lot of a drive-in movie theater and plays peeping tom to a young couple engaging in vehicular sex, drawing upon herself the fury of the man when he spots her and chases her through the lot yelling, “Stay there, cunt!” And when one of her students attempts to apologize to her after she has caught him browsing pornographic magazines with his friends at a bookstore, she firmly rejects his apology, demanding “What for? Sorry isn’t enough if I don’t know why. Are you sorry because you’re a pig, or because your friends are pigs? Or because all

women are bitches for making you a pig?”

While the film contains numerous incidents where Erika seems as much a sadist as a masochist, particularly toward her students, one scene in which she vents her violent impulses on her own body is especially important as a prefiguration of her entanglement with Walter. Erika locks herself in the bathroom and perches at the edge of the bathtub with a razor in one hand and a mirror in the other. Her body is framed in a long shot, turned to the right, so that what she is doing as she holds the mirror between her legs is not apparent until bright red blood begins to flow down the side of the tub. When her mother calls her to dinner, she efficiently washes away the evidence of her activities, bandages her cuts with a sanitary napkin, and enters the living room to join her mother at the table. The two converse about Erika's day as the mother lays out their meal. She suddenly pauses and asks, “What's wrong with you?” pointing to the blood that is streaming down Erika's leg. “Is that why you're in a bad mood? You might be more careful. That's not very appetizing.” What Erika's mother perceives is exactly what we as an audience have been shown, blood dripping from an imperceptible source, and she misconstrues this sign as menstruation. This misconstrual, along with Erika's choice of bandage, accomplishes a stunning deflation of the shock of this self-infliction of violence, referring its effects to the natural, and vaguely unappetizing, cause of female anatomy. At the same time, this juxtaposition of the shocking and the banal refracts back onto the female body in order to render it strange, uneasy, menaced. Their exchange frames Erika's auto-mutilation not as symptom of self-alienation but rather as a self-reference to the body, achieved by a violent mimicking of the biological processes that mark sexual difference. Erika's actions ultimately construe femininity as a wound—a wound that appears as a natural condition but whose origins in fact lie elsewhere.

This idea of violent reiteration similarly informs Erika's masochistic attitude as a way of negotiating the wound of femininity as it



is exposed within the domain of sexual intimacy. The victimization that she demands for herself from Walter must be seen as a stance constituted in opposition to, as a refusal of, the gestures of chivalry that he continually offers, gestures that would deny difference and mask gender inequality to allow it to go unacknowledged and therefore unquestioned. Even as the masochistic fantasy scripted by Erika mirrors a relationship of power organized along the lines of sexual difference, it simultaneously transforms this relationship in the process of its reauthoring and contractual restaging. If the very definition of romance depends upon an emplotment of love, upon “love’s extension, its repetition into institution” in the words of Lauren Berlant, Erika’s strategy represents an attempt to construct intimacy as a space of freedom that is not thoroughly conditioned by power, yet without disavowing the existence of power.³² By contrast, Walter’s insistence upon a normative notion of romantic love—succinctly captured in his entreaty to Erika, “Why destroy what could bring us together?”—amounts to a disavowal of the “natural law” of gender in the interest of collusion with the social order. This collusion is realized to its fullest extent in the rape scene, a parody of consummation in whose wake the full significance of Erika’s masochism emerges as the standard of health against which her “sickness” is measured. If masochism registers a reaction against the subordination of femininity that preserves the very condition reacted against, then the literalism of Walter’s act of violence, against the spirit of the letter, shuts down this dialectic of violence with abrupt finality.

||||

Opposite: Auto-mutilation.
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.

Below: “It’s not very appetizing.”
La Pianiste. Dir. Michael Haneke,
2001. Film still.

Walter, however, is not the only monster in this horror film, and Erika’s own capacity for brutality toward others renders her doomed from the start, suggesting the fragility of the illusion of control sustained by her appropriation of violence. This much is



confirmed in the final scene, when Erika and Walter cross paths at the conservatory just before a recital in which she is to perform the day after the assault. Left alone in the lobby after their brief encounter, Erika removes a knife from her purse, weakly stabs herself in the heart, and leaves the building. The film offers no redemption for any of its characters as it traces a circular loop from condition to reaction in which the compulsion to repeat violence trumps any possibility of transformation or escape beyond the given.³³ In view of this outcome, inconclusive in accordance with the logic of linear narrative exposition, how are we to make sense of *La Pianiste*'s edifice of interlocking repetitions of sexuality, power, and violence across the realms of word and image, notation and performative execution, fantasy and reality, and art and life? Does the film's lack of a resolution ultimately return us to the merely descriptive territory of pornography?

We can recall how classical music serves as the engine of the film's brutal reproductions. This becomes apparent in the remarkable opening credit sequence that introduces Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise* as a sort of leitmotif within the film's narrative structure, to be repeated at key moments throughout the story, always in association with Erika's character. *Die Winterreise* consists of twenty-four songs, settings of poems by the minor German poet Wilhelm Müller, that detail the plight of a solitary wanderer who roams through an icy landscape of desolation and death, having abjured the comforts of human companionship. The film emphasizes the seventeenth song of the cycle, "In the Village," whose lyrics are sung at several points:

Dogs are barking, rattling their chains. People are sleeping in their beds.

Dreaming of what they don't have, replenished of good and bad. And next morning, all flown away. So what? So what?

They've had their pleasure. And they hope that what they left behind might be waiting for them on the pillows.

Bark me away, you waking dogs. Don't let me rest in the sleeping houses.

I've reached the end of dreams. What will I do amongst the sleepers?

As Susan Youens points out, "In the Village" marks the moment when the wanderer recognizes the futility of dreams and illusion as "fantasy-deceptions incompatible with waking life." His isolation is signaled by not only his exclusion from the domestic repose of the villagers as he wanders in the night but also his conscious rejection of the deceptive pleasure of dreams.³⁴ The state of the wanderer invites comparisons with Erika, given her social alienation and her refusal of the illusions of romance. In the words of the director, "In the Village" encapsulates "the idea of

following a path not taken by others.”³⁵

Beyond its allegorizing of an interior emotional state, however, *Die Winterreise* also reconveys the structure of repetition that frames the film’s narrative, presenting a wanderer “walking around [a landscape] with no actual progress.”³⁶ Notable for its rejection of the motivic development that typically accompanies music’s conventional phrase structure, the song cycle formally reinscribes the wanderer’s obsessive reliving of the pains of his past in its circular design, the frozen vista of the winter journey in its brittle and paralytic arrangements. Adorno, in his 1928 essay “Schubert,” invokes a series of crystalline metaphors—metal, mineral, stalagmites, magma, light—to not only describe the composer’s work but also rescue his name from the kitsch appropriation that would equate its value with its sentimental resonance. In its crystalline divergence from organic musical forms, according to Adorno, resides the utopic value of Schubert’s work: “Right from its origin it never had anything other than a nonorganic, erratic, brittle, mineral existence, so deeply steeped in death that death held no fears for it.”³⁷ The pervasive presence of death and mourning in the work drags upon its temporal flow (accounting for, Adorno remarks, the composer’s difficulty with endings and finales), yet this is also the means by which death moves beyond “inner pain” to become “the affect of sorrow about the human condition.”³⁸ In its affective access to collective suffering, the work becomes a medium of a truth not otherwise accessible to knowledge: “In jagged lines, like a seismograph, Schubert’s music has recorded the tidings of man’s qualitative change.” The correct and only response to listening is tears, even as “we cry without knowing why. . . . This is music we cannot decipher, but it holds up to our blurred, over-brimming eyes the secret of reconciliation at long last.”³⁹

Erika’s mention of Adorno’s name during her conversation with Walter about Schumann can hardly be viewed as coincidental given the film’s *Winterreise* motif. Schumann’s awareness of his incipient loss of mind finds a parallel in Schubert’s knowledge of his impending death in the last years of his short life.⁴⁰ Erika’s choice of favorite composers emphasizes the connections identified by Adorno between music and suffering, between art and “the affect of sorrow,” connections that resurface in her own aestheticized approach to love as it rejects romantic idealism and strives at once to register and to overcome the contradictions of heterosexual love. Music as an art form is most effective when it confronts such contradictions, or “social antinomies,” argues Adorno, availing its conceptual language to

express the calamities of the social condition and call for change in the cipher script of suffering. It does not behoove

music to stare at society in helpless horror; its social function will be more exactly fulfilled if the social problems contained in it, in the inmost cells of its technique, are presented in its own material and according to its own formal laws.⁴¹

The task of music and, indeed, of art itself is not to appease or to harmonize the frictions and tensions generated by social contradictions but rather to enunciate, reveal, and hyperbolize such tensions in order to render them available to consciousness. “Art imitates not the world, but its conditions of alienation and domination,” and just as Schubert’s compositions take in the disaster of death as part of a homeopathic reckoning with the fear of death, so art takes in and mimics the conditions of social misery— injustice, domination, pain—so that they may be experienced in a transformative way. For Adorno, the critical capacity of art lies in its mimetic relationship to a damaged social order, and it is only insofar as “art enunciates the disaster by identifying with it” that it can put us back in touch with the alienation to which we have become habituated.⁴²

The critical possibilities embedded within the aesthetic hinge upon a dual position of simultaneous determination and negation, of proximity and distancing, wherein art preserves the very conditions that it protests. Contravening a Hegelian-romantic conception of aesthetic value that would leave behind the contingencies of material reality for the timeless, transcendent realm of universal truth and beauty, Adorno situates art in the position of a contradictory standstill between a desired utopia and fallen reality, at the locus of an unresolved tension between revelation and “the undifferentiated repetition of the status quo.”⁴³ Recalling the language of his analysis of Schubert, he describes the non-progressive stance of the work of art in terms of “an immanent, crystallized process at a standstill,”⁴⁴ which neither affirms the status quo by denying its supremacy nor reinstates it by extending its domain. The effect of aesthetic mediation can thus be understood as a kind of repetition *without* compulsion, whereby “space, time, and causality are maintained, their power is not denied, but they are divested of their compulsiveness.”⁴⁵ Haneke alludes to such an understanding of aesthetics when he discusses *La Pianiste*’s use of music: “Great music transcends suffering beyond specific causes. *Die Winterreise* transcends misery even in the detailed description of misery. All important artworks, especially those concerned with the darker side of experience, despite whatever despair conveyed, transcend the discomfort of the content in the realization of their form.”⁴⁶ His words point to the potential of art to move beyond a “bandaging of the wound” in excess of its own descriptive function, and his film stakes a claim to this potential through its formally self-conscious representation of obscenity. If

Haneke pursues such a critique by bringing together great music with a medium that Adorno rigorously excludes from his discussion of aesthetic theory, we can view his particular approach to modernism in terms of a further twist that binds the standstill of repetition ever tighter, in the complicit entanglement of an antidote composed of the poison itself.

Notes

I would like to thank the audience members of the panel “Rethinking Shock Value: Contemporary Representations of Sexuality” at the 2006 conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies for their responses to an early version of this paper. Many thanks also to my copanelists Susan Ericsson, Jonathan Hall, and Timothy Palmer. Christopher Gibbs generously shared his expertise on Schubert. Susan Bernofsky helped me to access Elfriede Jelinek’s untranslated comments on *Die Klavierspielerin*. I am especially grateful to Karen Beckman for her thoughtful editorial comments and gracious support. I dedicate this essay to Lauren Berlant, without whose teaching and intellectual inspiration I could not have appreciated the fascinating question of femininity and the compulsion to repeat—a question to which I find myself returning again and again.

1. *La Pianiste* was released with the English title *The Piano Teacher*. This imprecise translation of both the film’s French title and the unusual German term with which Jelinek titles her novel elides the derogatory and awkward undertones that play an important part in the presentation of the story’s main character. (A more common term for the female piano player would be *die Pianistin*.) I will refer to the film by its French title throughout this paper because it more closely approximates Jelinek’s original phrase and avoids the somewhat domesticating effect of the English translation.

2. Scott Foundas, “Interview: The Bearded Prophet of ‘Code Inconnu’ and ‘The Piano Teacher,’” *Indiewire*, 4 December 2001, http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Haneke_Michael_011204.html.

3. J. Hoberman, “Prisoner’s Songs,” *Village Voice*, 27 March 2002, <http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0213,hoberman,33363,20.html>. Christopher Sharrett also describes *La Pianiste* as a work of “contemporary horror,” comparable to *Psycho* in its “notion of the fractured subject, the ‘monster,’ as product of bourgeois family life.” See Christopher Sharrett, “The Horror of the Middle Class,” *Kinoeye* 4, no. 1 (8 March 2004), <http://www.kinoeye.org/04/01/sharrett01.php>.

4. The authorship of *La Pianiste* is shared by Elfriede Jelinek and Michael Haneke. Jelinek is an outspoken socialist feminist who addresses the conditions of capitalist patriarchy in a number of her works. “Nowhere in Jelinek’s entire *oeuvre* is sex presented as a mutually satisfying activity for both partners. It is generally violent and brutal.” Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality: An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1994), 47. Although a detailed consideration of the issue of adaptation would be illuminating in this context, in the remainder of this paper I will focus on the film, which deviates from the novel in its emphases even as it remains committed to its political vision.

5. Sharrett, “The Horror of the Middle Class.”

6. For a discussion of this turn toward the graphic focusing on French cinema, see Timothy Palmer, “Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body,” *Journal of Film and Video* 58, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 22–32.

7. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 184–185.

8. Williams, *Hard Core*, 185. Williams is citing Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 45.

9. On the relation of involuntary affects and film genres, see Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 2–13.

10. D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover/A Propos of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 307. For a discussion that usefully

extends a consideration of pornography's medium specificity to cyberporn and new media technologies, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), ch. 2.

11. Christopher Sharrett, "The World That Is Known: An Interview with Michael Haneke," *Kinoeye* 4, no. 1 (8 March 2004), <http://www.kinoeye.org/04/01/interview01.php>.

12. These questions can be asked of a number of contemporary independent productions and art films as well. An illuminating point of comparison for *La Pianiste* is Noé's *Irréversible* (2002)—also containing a rape scene, one even more violent and disturbing—whose transgressive qualities ultimately affirm the bourgeois values that the film purports to violate.

13. To a certain extent, the problem of how to invoke obscenity in such a way that breaks with the logic of prohibition constitutes the obverse of the problem faced by those who would invoke obscenity with the aim of legislating prohibition, one that is clearly illustrated in legal debates on the censorship of pornography. The conundrum that confronts advocates of censorship is how to present the object that they deem to be unrepresentable. Anne M. Coughlin points out, "Every porn scholar must include in her work some references to prohibited images of conduct. At the moment of introducing the pornographic references into her own text, the scholar necessarily confronts the question of whether and how to comply with the prohibition that she purports to be evaluating, which forbids the very representations to which she is about to refer." Coughlin parses the rhetorically contorting effects of this conundrum upon pornography scholarship with subtlety and humor in her essay "Representing the Forbidden," *California Law Review* 90, no. 6 (December 2002): 2146.

14. For example, Catherine Wheatley understands the significance of the rape scene in terms of the phrase, "Be careful what you wish for, it might come true," in "The Masochistic Fantasy Made Flesh: Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* as Melodrama," *Studies in French Cinema* 6, no. 2 (2006): 126. Likewise, Wheatley's conclusions about the film's relationship to the genre of melodrama are very different from my own.

15. Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1991), 119.

16. Such a strategy finds a certain parallel in Jelinek's tactics of hyperbolization throughout her writings, aimed at what one commentator describes as a Brechtian exaggeration of contradiction, where "outlandish fictional terror is simply a caricature of the very real violence of everyday life." Fiddler, 47. This is especially apparent in her 1989 novel *Lust*, frequently compared to *Die Klavierspielerin* because of its interweaving of sexuality and violence. *Lust* is a work of socialist feminist pornography whose detailed and interminable descriptions of sexual acts work toward an exorcism of pornography; some have described it as a work of "pornology," after Deleuze. For a discussion of this novel, see Fiddler, ch. 5; and Ulrich Strove, "'Denouncing the Pornographic Subject': The American and German Pornography Debate and Elfriede Jelinek's *Lust*," in *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*, ed. Jorun B. Johns and Katherine Arens (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1994), 89–106.

17. Amid the ever-expanding cycle of piano films, we can discern an interesting pattern in the representation of this musical instrument as a locus of the thwarted, muted, and repressed desires of female pianists, whose playing acquires the poignancy of a wordless expression of feelings otherwise inexpressible. More than an icon of sublimation mediating confinement and intensity, the

piano figures as a prosthesis of feminine voice and sexuality, suggestive of interiority and secret depths. On the evidence of films like *La Pianiste*, Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), and Dennis Dercourt's *The Page Turner* (2006), it begins to occupy a place in the iconography of the "women's film."

18. Carolyn Abbate, "Outside Ravel's Tomb," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52, no. 3 (1999): 477.

19. For an example of a psychoanalytic reading of *La Pianiste*, see Jean Wyatt, "Jouissance and Desire in Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*," *American Imago* 62, no. 4 (2006): 453–482. In discussions of both the film and the novel, the codependent relationship between Erika and her mother often figures centrally in the psychobiography of Erika's character. For instance, Sigrid Berka notes the relevance to the story of Jessica Benjamin's thesis that feminine masochism is rooted in the woman's failure to separate her identity from that of her mother. Sigrid Berka, "D(e)addyfication: Elfriede Jelinek," in *Elfriede Jelinek*, ed. Johns and Arens, 229–254.

20. The term *masochism* was named by Krafft-Ebing as a class of perversion after Sacher-Masoch, author of works such as *The Fountain of Youth*, *The Fisher of Souls*, and, most famously, *Venus in Furs*.

21. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 20.

22. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 21, 77.

23. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 22.

24. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 70.

25. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 22.

26. Williams, *Hard Core*, 213.

27. Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 87, 85.

28. Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), Vol. 14: 159–170.

29. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 22.

30. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 37.

31. Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 31.

32. Lauren Berlant, "The Compulsion to Repeat Femininity," in *Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity*, ed. Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (New York: Verso, 1999), 212.

33. Jelinek has stated that this ending, which is identical to that of the novel, was inspired by the conclusion of Kafka's *The Trial*.

34. Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's Winterreise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 60.

35. Sharrett, "The World That Is Known."

36. Theodor Adorno, "Schubert" (1928), trans. Jonathan Dunsby and Beate Perrey, *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 10.

37. Adorno, "Schubert," 10. "Schubert" was written by Adorno at the age of twenty-five, during a period spent in Vienna studying with Alban Berg. The value Adorno placed on Schubert's nonorganic forms can be usefully considered in connection with his championing of the Second Viennese School's denaturalization of tonality as the dominant language of musical composition, reflected for instance in Schoenberg's compositions, which Adorno admired for the way in which their "internal tensions rend the mantle of tonality." Theodor Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" (1955/1967), in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 636. Adorno invokes the idea of the crystalline structure in writ-

ings on both Schubert and Schoenberg, notwithstanding the significant differences between their positions in music history. Somewhat counterintuitively, “for Adorno, at that time, both represented alternatives to a musical canon centered on the organic, tonal sonata form.” Esteban Buch, “Critique of the Garden Gnome,” *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 29.

38. Adorno, “Schubert,” 12.

39. Adorno, “Schubert,” 14.

40. Schubert was diagnosed with syphilis in 1822 and died six years later at the age of thirty-one. In a letter to his friend Leopold Kupelwieser, dated 1824, he writes, “Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair over this ever makes things worse and worse, instead of better; imagine a man, I say, whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the felicity of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain at best, whom enthusiasm for all things beautiful threatens to forsake, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being?” Christopher H. Gibbs, *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42.

41. Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Books, 1989), 70.

42. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 19.

43. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 106.

44. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 180.

45. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 138.

46. Sharrett, “The World That Is Known,” 31. The director’s comments echo a statement about *Die Winterreise* made by Erika to one of her students who struggles to learn it: “It’s not purely descriptive. And it’s not drenched in indifference and sentimentality.”