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Abstract

The Melodramatic Unconscious: The Cinematic Afterlife of Fin-de-Siècle Vienna

Maxfield Fulton

2022

This dissertation centers on four auteurist films by Max Ophuls, Liliana Cavani, Nicolas Roeg, and Stanley Kubrick which turned to the artistic, intellectual, and cultural history of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna in order to adapt classical Hollywood melodrama for the art cinema genre. Drawing on art history, aesthetic philosophy, literary theory, and film studies, the dissertation intervenes in an ongoing discourse about the relationship between modernism and melodrama. Whereas scholars of European art cinema have tended to focus on how modernist provocateurs have appropriated Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* in order to undermine classical melodrama's immersive emotionality and advance social critique, my project traces an alternative tradition of auteurs who engage not in a subversion rather a *submersion* of melodrama. Throughout the project, I develop the concept of the "melodramatic unconscious," the aesthetic and erotic impulses that undergird melodrama's manifest moral polarities.

At the heart of the project are four films which chart turn-of-the-century Vienna's *Nachleben* throughout the Cold War and post-Soviet period, when the concept of "Vienna 1900" gained purchase on the international imaginary: Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974), Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980), and Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Each of these films illuminates different dimensions of the melodramatic unconscious—the conceptual, the transformative, the

mythical, and the seductive. In chapter one, I examine how Ophuls's *Ur*-text mobilizes the conceptual properties of an indexical medium through the metaphor of the circle, the figure *par excellence* of the Viennese imaginary, from the *Ringstraße* to the *Riesenrad* to the waltz. In chapter two, I detail how Cavani explores the perennial melodramatic theme of victimhood through her treatment of Viennese architecture, figuring erotic desire as a neo-Secessionist force of anti-Historicist transformation. In chapter three, I demonstrate Roeg's affinities with the ahistoricism of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Sigmund Freud, arguing that the film's saturation of historical citations belies its aspiration to the timelessness of myth. In chapter four, I trace Kubrick's final gesture of a Viennese-inflected erotics of authorship, a seductive relation effected through hyper-optical form and androgynous authorial surrogacy. Detailed stylistic and narratorial analyses of these key films are situated within a constellation of other Vienna-based films, and contextualized within the broader cultural reception of Vienna 1900 in academia, the art world, and the popular press from the 1930s to the present.

The Melodramatic Unconscious: The Cinematic Afterlife of Fin-de-Siècle Vienna

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of
Yale University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Maxfield Fulton

Dissertation Director: Nicola Suthor

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INTRODUCTION

The wayward child of Peter Brooks and Fredric Jameson has gone to the movies. The title of this dissertation alludes to key texts in the intellectual tradition from which it issues, books whose principal arguments and assumptions it seeks to interrogate: Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1976) and Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). Another touchstone for the present study is indicated by its subtitle: Carl Schorske's indispensable *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1981). Each of these studies betrays a fundamental concern with the closely associated categories of the moral, the social, and the political: for Brooks, post-Enlightenment melodramatic conventions indicate a "moral occult";¹ for Jameson, every text—indeed "everything"—is political;² for Schorske, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna bred the twentieth century's "a-historical culture" as a defense against fears of "social and political disintegration."³ But the melodramatic unconscious, as conceptualized in the films of Max Ophuls, Liliana Cavani, Nicolas Roeg, and Stanley Kubrick, and elaborated in the present study, purports to lie deeper than these valorized categories.

If every method contains an argument, then this formalist study advocates an appreciation of beauty and sexuality unredeemed by promises of "radical political potential." Rosalind Galt's *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (2011) and Caroline Levine's *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015), two brilliant contributions

¹ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 5.

² Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 20.

³ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, xviii.

to the canon of aesthetic philosophy and formalist methodology, are nonetheless marred by cynical claims that analyzing the narrative structure of a Victorian novel or attending to the virtuosic camera movement of a Communist propaganda film will yield a more equitable world.⁴ *Caveat emptor*. Social reform has long been a primary concern of scholars who seek to explain the relationship between film modernism and melodrama. Scholars of European art cinema, including Katherine Woodward, Brigitte Peucker, Scot Loren, and Jörg Metelmann, have demonstrated how filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, Michael Haneke, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Lars von Trier have yoked Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* to melodramatic scenarios and tableaux of heightened affect in order to undermine the immersive emotionality of classical Hollywood melodrama and stimulate their audience's political consciousness.⁵ This dissertation traces an alternative tradition of modernist melodrama, one that dispenses with the lofty political pretensions of the hybrid genre. Though Ophüls, Cavani, Roeg, and Kubrick all made decisively political films throughout their long careers, each of them turned to melodrama and to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna in order to make their most apolitical or micro-political works. In these films, they discovered—and celebrated—the “melodramatic unconscious,” the erotic and aesthetic impulses that undergird melodrama's manifest moral polarities.

In his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant distinguishes between three different modes of satisfaction (*Wohlgefallen*): the agreeable (*Angenehm*), the good (*Gut*), and the beautiful (*Schöne*). For Kant, the beautiful is distinct from the

⁴ Levine doubles down on her practice of instrumentalizing literary study in order to effect social justice in “Still Polemicizing After All These Years,” 129-35.

⁵ See Woodward, “European Anti-Melodrama,” 34-47; Peucker, *The Material Image*, 129-58; and Loren and Metelmann, *Irritation of Life*.

agreeable and the good because it is disinterested (*ohne alles Interesse*). Unlike the agreeable, judgment of the beautiful transcends individual preference by demanding universal assent;⁶ unlike the good, the beautiful is an object of universal satisfaction without concepts (*ohne Begriffe*).⁷ Whether or not we agree with Kant that these three modes of satisfaction operate independently of one another, his theory is useful because it distinguishes three autonomous categories of value. For my discussion of the melodramatic unconscious, I identify three corollaries of the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good: the erotic, the aesthetic, and the ethical. Prior scholarship on melodrama has tended to subordinate the categories of the erotic and the aesthetic to the ethical—in classical Hollywood and modernist melodramas alike, sexual psychodynamics and a foregrounding of excessive *mise-en-scène* may be hallmarks of the genre, but they ultimately serve to communicate a political message, either a critique or a defense of the status quo. In contradistinction, Ophüls, Cavani, Roeg, and Kubrick refuse to subordinate the values of the erotic and the aesthetic to the ethical. In the tradition of Sigmund Freud and Alois Riegl, these filmmakers present a vision of humanity driven by erotic and aesthetic impulses, which can scarcely be hidden beneath the mask of ethics. In the two-century history of the melodramatic mode, the Revolutionary promise of the “moral occult” has given way to *fin-de-siècle* decadence.

The previous decade saw a spate of book-length studies of Vienna and Austria on film. In 2010, the Wien Museum Karlsplatz staged *Wien im Film: Stadtbilder aus 100*

⁶ Both Hannah Arendt and Sianne Ngai interpret Kant’s intersubjective conceptualization of aesthetic judgment as the basis for political formation and positive sociality. (Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” 219-26; Ngai, “Critique’s Persistence”).

⁷ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 94-97.

Jahren. The exhibition, which surveyed Vienna-based films from 1918's *So fallen die Lose des Lebens* (dir. Friedrich Rosenthal) to 2010's *Der Räuber* (dir. Benjamin Heisenberg) was accompanied by an exhibition catalogue with essays on urban space, the waltz, and the *süßes Mädel*. In 2012 Robert Dassanowsky edited the Vienna edition of Intellect's "World Film Locations" series, which surveyed the appearance of Viennese landmarks in feature films from 1922's *Sodom und Gomorrah* (dir. Michael Curtiz) to 2011's *A Dangerous Method* (dir. David Cronenberg). Timothy Conley's massive 2016 *Screening Vienna: The City of Dreams in English-Language Cinema and Television* covers nearly every extant English-language film set in Vienna, grouping them into quintessentially Viennese themes: the imperial past, science and medicine, immigration, music, theatricality, love and death. Even more compendious is Franz Grafl's 2017 *Imaginiertes Österreich: Erzählung und Diskurs im internationalen Film*, which expands its purview from films about Vienna to films about Austria, and covers not only English-language films but international productions from Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, the USSR, and Yugoslavia. Alexandra Seibel's 2017 *Visions of Vienna: Narrating the City in 1920s and 1930s Cinema* focuses on a selection of transatlantic filmmakers working during the *Rote Wien* era (1919-1934) who forged the cinematic imaginary of Late-Habsburg Vienna: Ernst Lubitsch, Jacques Feyder, G. W. Pabst, Erich von Stroheim, Werner Hochbaum, Max Ophuls, and Willi Forst. In 2018, Dassanowsky followed Seibel's Red Vienna-era study with a massive volume on Austrian and American film during the following period of Austrofascism (1933-1938): *Screening Transcendence: Film under Austrofascism and the Hollywood*

Hope, 1933-1938.⁸ Following these microhistories, Jacqueline Vansant's 2019 *Austria Made in Hollywood* spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s, documenting Americans' changing attitudes toward Austria as reflected in Hollywood productions.

Each of these wide-ranging studies has informed my broader sense of Vienna on film. In effect, my study picks up where Seibel and Dassanowsky left off: with Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), filmed after the end of World War II. Although my study proper spans over fifty years (from 1948 to 1999), the parameters of my "case studies" are much more tightly defined than in the prior-mentioned volumes. Far from a survey of Vienna on film from the postwar era to the present, this dissertation focuses on four interrelated films that constitute the subgenre (or even microgenre) of the "melodramatic unconscious": Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974), Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980), and Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1980).

On a superficial level, each of these films is a romantic melodrama that revolves around a male-female pairing: a multi-decade obsession punctuated by a one-night stand (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*); an abusive relationship rekindled as a violent but consensual affair (*The Night Porter*); a consensual but tumultuous relationship that terminates in a deadly non-consensual rape (*Bad Timing*); and a dissatisfying marriage simultaneously threatened and reinvigorated by the specter of infidelity (*Eyes Wide Shut*). While these pairings are ostensibly heterosexual, queer subtext abounds, from gay-coded characters (*The Night Porter*'s Max Aldorfer, *Eyes Wide Shut*'s Bill Harford), to

⁸ Dassanowsky, *Screening Transcendence*.

homosocial pairings (*Bad Timing*'s Alex Linden and Friedrich Netusil), to a kaleidoscopic reconfiguration of traditional gender roles throughout the course of each film. Taken in the aggregate, these films focus more or less equally on their male and female protagonists in terms of substance, style, and screen time. The protagonists of *The Night Porter* and *Bad Timing* are given equal weight within their films, and the ostensibly gynocentric *Letter from an Unknown Woman* balances the superficially androcentric *Eyes Wide Shut*. However, the treatment of gender in these films is by no means symmetrical. The male protagonists typically (but not invariably) possess higher occupational prestige, financial resources, and other modes of institutional power which they eagerly exploit in order to seduce and control women. Each of the female protagonists, however, emerges as the heroine of her story, even when her story culminates in her untimely death (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *The Night Porter*). Lisa Berndle, Lucia Atherton, Milena Flaherty, and Alice Harford are by no means idealized; they are narcissistic, self-destructive, and deceitful. But so are Stefan Brand, Max, Alex, and Bill. At their worst, Max and Alex are even abusive and homicidal. By comparison, these women come off looking pretty good. By celebrating complex female protagonists, these films fit squarely in the tradition of the "woman's film."

Each of these films was either shot (partially) in Vienna (*The Night Porter*, *Bad Timing*), set in Vienna (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*), or based on a Viennese source text (*Eyes Wide Shut*). While public urban space figures into all of these films, it is in private domestic spaces—namely, apartments—that these melodramatic scenarios reach their highest emotional pitch: Stefan covering his eyes in grief after reading Lisa's letter;

Max and Lucia clinging onto their love under Nazi surveillance; Alex's rape of Milena and simmering interrogation by Netusil; Alice and Bill's dual confessions which bookend the latter's erotic misadventures. Further, each of these films foregrounds the quintessentially Viennese theme of the proximity of Eros to Thanatos. *Letter from an Unknown Woman's* framing device is a romantic missive from the grave; from the *Konzentrationslager* to the *Karl-Marx-Hof*, the *The Night Porter's* protagonists engage in rape, sadomasochistic play, and gentle lovemaking amid an ever-present threat of murder; *Bad Timing's* detective plot revolves around the rape of an unconscious woman that results in her near death; and *Eyes Wide Shut* is replete with both causal and associational links between sex and death.

Given Freud's famous discussion of the link between Eros and Thanatos in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), these films seem to invite psychoanalytic interpretations. Naturally, many scholars have diagnosed their protagonists with various pathologies: masochism (Lisa, Lucia, Max, Bill), sadism (Lucia, Max, Alex), Stockholm syndrome (Lucia), addiction (Stefan, Milena), and narcissism (Lisa, Alex, Alice). While I draw upon psychoanalysis—in particular, the work of Freud, Karen Horney, Erich Neumann, Norman O. Brown, Gilles Deleuze, and Lee Edelman—and engage in my own share of armchair diagnosis, the title of my dissertation belies my counterintuitive conviction that these films are ultimately less concerned with psychopathology than with value. In turn-of-the-century Vienna, Freud, Klimt, and Schnitzler were not merely engaged in the exploration of the unconscious, but in the *excavation* of the unconscious. Similarly, these filmmakers—who identify the values of the erotic and the aesthetic as the

unconscious of the ethical—render the unconscious manifest. These films attribute the suffering of their heroines to their circumstances, not individual psychopathology. These films celebrate their heroines’ valuation of the erotic and the aesthetic, even when it is impossible for them to reconcile these values with the social world. Their project is not to reveal women’s unconscious but to reveal melodrama’s unconscious. Similarly, my project does not seek to dig up the unconscious content of these films—to put them on the couch, so to speak—but rather to focus attention on the values immortalized on the surface of the screen, between the parameters of the frame; to augment their practice of cinematic conceptualization with one of critical conceptualization. Despite these four films’ commitment to the values of the aesthetic and the erotic, each of them celebrates these values by illuminating a different dimension of the melodramatic unconscious: the conceptual (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*), the transformative (*The Night Porter*), the mythical (*Bad Timing*), and the seductive (*Eyes Wide Shut*).

In chapter one, I position Ophuls’s Hollywood “woman’s picture” as an *Ur*-text of the melodramatic unconscious. An adaptation of Stefan Zweig’s exasperating 1922 novella, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is the second installment in Ophuls’s “trilogy” of films based on Viennese sources and set at the turn of the twentieth century. Ophuls began his directorial career in the 1930s, when the *Wiener Film* genre reached the peak of its popularity with the musical comedies of Willi Forst and Walter Reisch, and Jewish filmmakers who had worked in Germany and Austria fled to work in France and the United States. Along with his Schnitzler adaptations *Liebelei* (1933) and *La ronde* (1950), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* links Ophuls to other émigré directors such as von

Stroheim, Fritz Lang, Lubitsch, Anatole Litvak, Otto Preminger, and Billy Wilder, who found in imperial Vienna the ideal setting for ill-fated romance. Ophüls's films, however, are Viennese not only in location, but also in form; *Letter from an Unknown Woman* deploys the eminently Viennese motif of circularity to mobilize the conceptual properties of the "indexical" medium of film, harkening back to the intellectual world of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna in which the erotic and the aesthetic not only operated as sensual stimulants but crystalized into fundamental conceptual categories.

In chapter two, I focus on Cavani's treatment of Viennese architecture in *The Night Porter* order to challenge both the film's detractors, who condemn the film for its eroticization of the Holocaust, and its admirers, who mistake Cavani's complex dialectics of victimhood for a mere collapsing of the distinction between victim and victimizer. I argue that although Cavani sets her film in postwar Vienna, the struggle between her concentration camp survivor protagonist and the predatory ex-Nazis who intimidate, entrap, and ultimately murder her, recapitulates the ideological conflict between nineteenth-century Historicist architecture and turn-of-the-century Secessionism. By celebrating Lucia's creative agency to transform traumatic experiences of victimization in the *Lager* into a source of sexual gratification in the present, Cavani's film champions the Secessionist philosophy of erotic transformation against the proto-Fascistic prescription of a fixed correspondence between style and ideology endemic to Historicism. Operating as Cavani's artistic surrogate, Lucia's method of erotic transformation finds its corollary in Cavani's auteurist mode of aesthetic transformation.

In chapter three, I demonstrate that although *Bad Timing* brims with references to Vienna's artistic, cultural, and intellectual heritage, it relishes the particularity of its Viennese locale only to undermine it. Considering *Bad Timing* within the broader landscape of the postmodern reception of Vienna 1900, I argue that the thematic resonances of Vienna 1900 are undergirded by a distinct ideological resonance: a privileging of the realm of myth over the realm of history. Paradoxically, *Bad Timing* incorporates historical citations in order to de-historicize itself. By unmooring Secessionstil, Expressionism, and psychoanalysis from their historical contexts, *Bad Timing* implies that Klimt, Freud, and Schiele matter not for their historical and cultural specificity, but rather their supposed timelessness and universality. Through close attention to the film's stylistics—its rendering of psychoanalytic processes; its emphasis on performative engagements with material culture; its intermedial collapsing of temporal boundaries; its idiosyncratic aesthetics of the encounter—I demonstrate how Roeg's conspicuous citationality gestures toward a melodramatic unconscious that entails an atavistic notion of tragic inevitability, rather than a progressive notion that melodramatic suffering can be relieved through a rectification of social ills.

In chapter four, I counter one of the principal assumptions of the critical literature on *Eyes Wide Shut* by insisting that Kubrick's affinity with Schnitzler was more atmospheric than ideological, meditating on the film's incorporation of Viennese *Stimmung*, with its embedded allusions to *fin-de-siècle* material culture, Biedermeier revival domesticity, Secessionist stylistics, and Expressionist compositions. I then segue into a methodological excursus, using the Stargate sequence from Kubrick's *2001: A*

Space Odyssey (1968) as an occasion for an innovative application of Vienna School formalism, particularly Alois Riegl's influential categories of haptic and optical modes of representation. By illustrating the erotic potential of Kubrick's signature "corridor shots"—which exemplify the optical mode by pushing the representation of space to its limit—my chapter provides a rejoinder to several decades of work which has reserved a positive political valence for the haptic cinematic mode. I insist that Kubrick's use of the optical mode does not necessarily work to buttress the illusion of a coherent, dominant spectatorial subject; instead, it stages a seductive, melodramatic relation between filmmaker and viewer. Ultimately, I argue that throughout his career, Kubrick developed an erotics of authorship by integrating the aesthetics of the sublime and of the uncanny into his auteurist style. I conclude by arguing that with *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick turned to the feminized eroticism of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, as refracted through Ophulsian melodrama, in order to disavow his abiding masculinism and realign his authorial practice with the figure of the seductive woman.

CHAPTER ONE: Invitation to the Dance: Film as Conceptual Medium in Max Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948)

Fade in to the lobby of Berlin's "Grand Hotel," circa 1932. A parade of men in suits and women in furs circulate through the revolving doors to a plucky rendition of Strauss's "*An der schönen, blauen Donau*" (1866). A dissolve to a high-angle view of the lobby reveals the circular structure of the hotel, a shape repeated by the round reception desk on the ground floor, appearing, in this view, like a circle in a spiral [Fig. 1]. From our perch, we see guests and employees alike circling the circle, displaying the same brisk gracefulness of Strauss's waltz. Another dissolve plops us back down to the reception desk where we track the principal players through curvilinear, winding motion. We may ostensibly be in Berlin,¹ but the spirit of place is Viennese; within moments, we'll meet our obligatory *süße Mädels*, the determined stenographer Flaemmchen (Joan Crawford). Adapted from the 1929 novel *Menschen im Hotel* by Vienna native Vicki Baum, Edmund Goulding's *Grand Hotel* (1932) was marketed to capitalize on its all-star ensemble.² But its principal formal innovation lies in its mobilization of the motif of circularity on three separate registers: narrative structure, visual style, and spectatorial engagement. It all comes full circle, so to speak, at the end of the film. As each of the key players leaves the hotel one by one, a pair of giddy newlyweds enters through the revolving door; as the hotel staff continues to mourn the fresh killing of the Baron (John Barrymore), the concierge receives notification that his wife has just given birth to a boy.

¹ In actuality, a soundstage in Culver City.

² Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 114.

The sense of endings giving way to new beginnings evoked by these happenings finds a corollary in the ironic musings of Doctor Otternschlag (Lewis Stone): “Grand Hotel. Always the same. People come, people go. Nothing ever happens.” (The line itself is a repetition, with a difference, of Otternschlag’s observation in the film’s opening scene: “Grand Hotel. People coming, going ... nothing ever happens.”) As the camera tracks out of the revolving doors and into the street, we dissolve to the words “The END” floating above the M-G-M logo. But, in contradistinction to most classical Hollywood films, this ending card does not break with the diegesis of the film. Rather, it appears to be projected onto a screen within the lobby of the Grand Hotel. Though clearly a painting of the hotel lobby, the emphasis on the ubiquitous curves of the architecture and decor, coupled with the reprise of the “Blue Danube” waltz, links the film’s narrative and visual emphasis on circularity to the viewer’s embodied experience. Whereas traditional theories of cinematic suture depend on the editing codes of classical “realist” cinema, which rob the viewer of access to the immediate present first by directing her anticipation of the future and subsequently by remolding her memory of the past,³ *Grand Hotel*’s ending seeks to suture its audience *not* through the simulation (or signification) of a consistent, realist diegetic world, but rather through the embodied metaphor of circularity that binds the audience to the *unrepresented* world, the world of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. The film’s ending implies that although our stay in the Grant Hotel may only have lasted two hours, the waltz plays on indefinitely.⁴

³ See Daniel Dayan’s discussion of Jean-Pierre Oudart in “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,” 183-91.

⁴ Here I am indebted to John David Rhodes brilliant conceptualization of film spectatorship as “short-term tenancy” in *Spectacle of Property*, 1-54.

Or at least for another seventy years. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Stanley Kubrick pushes the transtemporal appeal of Strauss's waltz to a cosmic extreme. When introducing us to Station V, Kubrick follows *Grand Hotel*'s lead by playing the Blue Danube waltz against conspicuously circular architecture [Fig. 2]. Kubrick's principal objective was to harness the sublime formlessness of outer space into beautiful form.⁵ But he succeeded also in foregrounding form over narrative to draw the audience's attention to the intersection of the perceptual and the conceptual. Although the film uses unconventional editing to convey shocking lapses in time—in the match cut from the Dawn of Man to the Space Age, in the overlapping ages of man David Bowman (Keir Dullea) cycles through in the penultimate sequence—it also yields a unique embodied experience of *durational* time.⁶ As in the final moments of *Grand Hotel*, *2001* strikes up the band to pull us into the dance.

Back on Earth, a French woman (Julie Delpy) and an American man (Ethan Hawke), having just arrived in the city of dreams, board the *Straßenbahn* for a trip around the *Ringstraße*, passing *Gründerzeit* landmarks like Henrich von Ferstel's University building (1873). In this scene from his Gen X rom com *Before Sunrise* (1995), director Richard Linklater harkens back to the turn of the century to when the Lumière and Pathé brothers made actualities of the *Ringstraße* from a tram's-eye view [Figs. 3-4]. Like *2001*, *Before Sunrise*'s six-minute, traveling long take stimulates our embodied

⁵ Kubrick claims, "I wanted something that would express the beauty and grace that space travel would have, especially when it reached a fairly routine level with no great danger involved." (Quoted in Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 359).

⁶ Annette Michelson's description of this spectatorial experience in "Bodies in Space," 54-63, remains unmatched.

awareness of the duration of time in a film about the passing of time that takes place in a city in which various time periods intersect [Fig. 5].⁷ Several minutes into the ride, Jesse lapses into a mock Freudian accent when he asks Céline, “Describe for me your first sexual feelings towards a person”—tramcar as time machine. Thus, the film yokes the *Ringstraße*’s iconic Viennese-ness to the recursive dimension of cinematic time.⁸

Before Sunrise was directly inspired by Max Ophuls’s *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948),⁹ another Vienna-based romance by a director closely associated with circularity. Although his Viennese films studiously eschew the *Ringstraße* and the Blue Danube waltz, circles abound nonetheless. As in *Grand Hotel*, in *La ronde* (1950), a French-language adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler’s *Reigen* (1897), circularity plays out on three levels: on the narrative level, the story alternates between ten different couplings, each one linked to the next by a common participant; on the stylistic level, Ophuls punctuates the scenes of love with recurring footage a carousel, a symbol of restless desire [Fig. 6]; and on the spectatorial level, our Raconteur (Anton Walbrook) guides us through the stage set as Ophuls’s signature mobile camera launches us into movement.

⁷ Insisting that, “for any film-lover in the audience, the Viennese setting, the visit to the *Prater*, the complex examination (however different in spirit and conclusion) of romantic love, cannot fail to evoke *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” Robin Wood enumerates five key periods indicated by the film’s arsenal of references: the classical world of “Virgil, Troy, Carthage, and ‘Italy’ ... Purcell’s late seventeenth-century England; “Vienna about 1900”; Hollywood, about 1947; and Vienna, 1995.” (Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*, 326). Susan Ingram and Markus Reiseleiter remark that the film presents Vienna as a “charmed and charming city over which time does not seem to have any power.” (Ingram and Reiseleiter, “*Before Sunrise*,” 98).

⁸ The film makes another gesture toward iconic Viennese circularity. In one of the funniest scenes, Jesse and Céline encounter a pair of “part-time actors” on the *Zollamtssteg* bridge. One of the actors explains that their current avant-garde production, *Bring Me the Head of Wilmington’s Cow*, will be staged in the 2nd district (*Leopoldstadt*) near the *Prater*. He asks, “Do you know the *Prater*?” and Céline answers, “Ah, the big Ferris Wheel” while making a circular gesture with her right hand.

⁹ Wood reports that Linklater screened *Letter from an Unknown Woman* for Delpy and Hawke prior to filming. (Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*, 328).

In the following chapter, I will show that *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is more than one of the most beloved entries in Ophuls's filmography, more than a key text in the film studies literature on the "woman's film" and classical narrative technique. Indeed, the film's themes of all-consuming desire and an insular romance that rejects the social world resurged in films like François Truffaut's *L'Histoire d'Adèle H.* (1975) and Nagisa Ōshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) that feature no direct references to Vienna.¹⁰ But by mobilizing metaphor to re-conceptualize the intersection of melodrama and *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a transitional film that reconfigures both the *Wien Film* romances of the 1930s and '40s, and the contemporaneous Hollywood "woman's film," in order to generate a new tradition of art cinema melodrama. An *Ur-text* for this new subgenre, its influence can be felt on the three films discussed in the subsequent chapters.

I. Ophuls's Vienna

Ophuls made five films set in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, none of which were made in Vienna. *Liebelei* (1932), a German-language film adaptation of Schnitzler's 1895 play of the same name, was made in Berlin; a French-language version, *Une histoire d'amour* (1933), was filmed in Val-de-Marne. Another French production, *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* (1940), chronicled the final days of Franz Ferdinand (John Lodge) and Sophie Chotek (Edwige Feuillère). In Hollywood he made *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, and within two years he was back in Val-de-Marne shooting *La ronde*. While none of

¹⁰ Stephen Heath declares that "from one perspective"—that of the desiring cinematic look—*In the Realm of the Senses* is the "direct and ruinous remake" of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. (Heath, "The Question Oshima," 146).

Ophuls's other films feature Viennese settings, several of them boast conspicuously Viennese elements: the waltz plays a crucial role in *Le roman de Werther* (1938); *Lola Montès* (1955) features Bavarian and Central Austrian scenery, as well as a Sacher-Masochian protagonist decked out in furs amidst a snowy landscape¹¹; and the *Belle Époque* romance *Madame de...* (1953) is so saturated with waltzes and *fin-de-siècle* opulence that Alan Williams insists that its Paris setting differs only “anecdotally” from Ophuls's Vienna, which itself has “little historical specificity” and “seems rather distilled from media images of the city—and hence largely from Schnitzler.”¹² By the time Ophuls arrived in Vienna in 1926 to pursue a career in the theater, the city's pre-World War I era which came to fascinate him had long since passed.

Though Ophuls's Viennese films were influenced by his own memories of the city,¹³ he also collaborated with Viennese natives, such as Anton Walbrook, who appeared in both *La ronde* and *Lola Montès*, and cinematographer Franz Planer who, only one year after shooting *Liebelei*, helped director Willi Forst and screenwriter Walter Reisch pioneer their influential *Wien Film* genre with the Franz Schubert biopic *Leise flehen meine Lieder* (1933). Planer would go on to shoot two more Viennese Films for Forst and Reisch—*Unfinished Symphony* (1934) and the exquisite *Maskerade* (1934)—before decamping to Hollywood where he would reunite with Ophuls for *The Exile* (1947). *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, their third collaboration, constituted a return to the *fin-*

¹¹ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 293.

¹² Williams, “Reading Ophuls Reading Schnitzler,” 75.

¹³ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* screenwriter Howard Koch claims that Ophuls insisted on an all-female band for Lisa and Stefan's waltz in the *Prater*, “recalling that women musicians were often employed in Viennese amusement parks.” (Koch, “From Script to Screen with Max Ophuls,” 42).

de-siecle world of *Liebelei*, a snowcapped Viennese wonderland of Mozart operas, *Fiaker* rides, and fatal duels. Alexandra Seibel observes that in *Liebelei*, “Ophuls avoids familiar Viennese landmarks such as famous buildings or sites (like St. Stephan’s or the Ferris Wheel),” opting instead to present the city “through distinctive turn-of-the-century iconography, including military men, horse-drawn carriages, aristocratic interiors, and spectacularly royal ceremonies associated with the Kaiser; and through typical cultural activities, like visits to the opera and to the coffeehouses and playing music and dancing waltzes.”¹⁴ While, unlike *Liebelei*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* does in fact include St. Stephens and the *Riesenrad*, they are both relegated to background scenery [Fig. 7]. Though recreated in soundstages on the Universal lot, the Vienna of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* resembles *Liebelei*’s Berlin-based reproduction.

As Andrew Sarris observes, Ophuls’s *fin-de-siècle* films don’t merely take place in the past—they foreground a sense of “pastness.”¹⁵ Ophuls’s films don’t just return us to the past—they draw attention to the phenomenon of returning. Among Ophuls’s characters, this nostalgic fixation on the pasts ranges from wistful to obsessive. In the former case, we have *La ronde*’s Raconteur (Walbrook) who proclaims, “I adore the past. It’s so much more peaceful than the present and so much more certain than the future”; in the latter case, we have Lisa (Joan Fontaine), who, according to Sarris, will “never ... accept a world she can sense in all its concreteness and immediacy. She is too enmeshed in the trap of time, too paralyzed by the numbness of nostalgia.”¹⁶ In both films, the

¹⁴ Seibel, *Visions of Vienna*, 78.

¹⁵ Sarris, “Max Ophuls,” 351.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

presentation of “Vienna 1900” is eminently artificial: weaving around an intricately decorated soundstage, *La ronde*’s Raconteur inquires, “But just where are we? On a stage? A film set? One doesn't know anymore. On a street. We're in Vienna. It's 1900. Let's change our costume”; *Letter from an Unknown Woman* opens with the assurance that we are witnessing “Vienna About 1900” [Fig. 8], though careful attention to time indices in the film reveals that the “*about* 1900” is a liberal term. We learn we are in “Vienna about 1900” at the very beginning of the film, which, because the film is told primarily through flashback, takes place near the *end* of the film’s narrative timeline. If “about 1900” implies the first decade of the twentieth century, then the earliest point in the film’s narrative timeline, when we are introduced to Lisa as an adolescent girl, would take place roughly two decades earlier in the 1880s. However, when the adolescent Lisa inspects Stefan’s (Louis Jourdan) apartment in his absence, she encounters a poster for one of his concerts dated May 6, 1894, placing the latest events in the timeline near the outbreak of World War I. One could argue that although the events of the film occur over a span of two decades, the film flattens the timeline so that each event takes place in the same historical year. In other words, in the lives of the film’s characters time marches on while historical time is frozen in a permanent Vienna 1900, a *fin-de-siècle* with no *fin*. However, one subtle change in the *mise-en-scène* does indicate the passage of historical time: the switch from gas to electric lighting in Lisa and Stefan’s apartment complex as well as Stefan’s favorite haunt. Thus, the film generates a parallel between the cycles of return in the film (Lisa and Stefan both leave and return to Vienna after their respective sojourns in Linz and Milan, then return to the past in their imaginations as Lisa writes the

titular letter and Stefan reads it) and the viewer's own virtual "return" to the historical moment of "Vienna about 1900." Critics have interpreted the filmmakers' choice to set the film in Vienna 1900—a revision of Stefan Zweig's novella, which ends *after* World War I, sometime between 1918 and 1922—as an attempt to produce a fetishistic "memory-spectacle,"¹⁷ to suggest that postwar "instabilities" find their origin in this historical moment,¹⁸ and to generate "an air of nostalgia" for old-world Vienna.¹⁹

Producer John Houseman was persuaded to hire Ophuls to direct the film after screenwriter Howard Koch showed him the French-language version of *Liebelei* (*Une histoire d'amour*).²⁰ Concerned that the film was "in the highly charged romantic tradition of Vienna at the turn of the century," which was, according to Koch, "definitely not the kind of story Hollywood did well,"²¹ both Houseman and Koch were attracted to Ophuls for his "bitter comment on the prejudices of the Austrian military caste and the tragic stupidity of the dueling code,"²² a sensibility that yielded a film Houseman described, approvingly, as "bittersweet Viennese."²³ Houseman attests that although Ophuls had only spent a brief time working in Vienna, during production he was "tireless and insatiable—to the point of exasperation—in his insistence upon authentic and

¹⁷ Heath, "The Question Oshima," 154.

¹⁸ Wexman, "The Transfiguration of History," 4.

¹⁹ Naremore, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 11.

²⁰ Houseman, *Front and Center*, 210.

²¹ Koch, "From Script to Screen," 42.

²² Houseman, *Front and Center*, 210.

²³ *Ibid.*, 212.

imaginative detail.”²⁴ Despite Ophuls’s obsessive desire to meticulously recreate the Vienna he remembered, and to include iconic monuments like St. Stephens and the *Riesenrad*, in the film *fin-de-siècle* Vienna operates not just as a collection of signifiers, but a collection of metaphors. The film’s orientation toward the metaphorical dimensions of turn-of-the-century Vienna is indicated by its thematic emphasis on two eminently Viennese traditions: theater and music. The theme of theatricality runs throughout the film, from Lisa and Stefan’s outing in the historically performative space of the *Prater*,²⁵ to their reunion at the opera house, to the ubiquity of curtains and curtain substitutes (e.g., hanging rugs) in the *mise-en-scène* over the course of the film.²⁶ Music plays an even larger role. Having changed the occupation of Zweig’s reader from a “famous novelist” [*bekannte Romanschriftsteller*]²⁷ to a concert pianist, the filmmakers invite further meditation on Vienna as the city of music. On a narrative level, music functions to heighten the intensity of Lisa’s obsession by reference to historical precedent: the first piece she hears Stefan play is Franz Liszt’s *Étude No. 3, Un sospiro* (1849), a reference to the Lisztomania which swept France and Germany in the 1840s.²⁸ Alexander Dhoest proposes that music in the film functions as more than a narrative device or a thematic

²⁴ Ibid., 214.

²⁵ See Ladd, *The Streets of Europe*, 101-02.

²⁶ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 350.

²⁷ Zweig, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 11.

²⁸ See Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 204-05. Like Lisa, some Listomaniacs cathected their affection for the composer onto associated objects, preserving his garbage like relics: “Swooning lady admirers attempted to take cuttings of his hair, and they surged forward whenever he broke a piano string in order to make it into a bracelet. Some of these insane female “fans” even carried glass phials about their persons into which they poured his coffee dregs. Others collected his cigar butts, which they hid in their cleavages.” (Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 372).

link to Vienna, that it is in fact “a metaphor for Ophuls’s film style.” Acknowledging that Ophuls often compared the role of a director to that of a conductor rather than that of an author, Dhoest argues that music operates as an aural counterpart to Ophuls’s moving camera, one that indicates both mood and tone, expressing the emotions of the characters while ironically commenting on them.²⁹ Expanding on Dhoest’s argument, I believe that in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* music not only function as a metaphor that attunes us to the characters’ emotions (and the director’s attitude) but more importantly as a gesture toward the dynamics of metaphor itself. Following Richard Wagner’s writings on music, philosopher Susanne Langer refuses the idea that music is a vehicle for self-expression. Expanding on Ernst Cassirer’s idea of symbolic forms, Langer defines music as “an unconsummated symbol,” adding, “articulation is its life, but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression.”³⁰ In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls employs musical metaphors not merely for purpose of expression, but rather for purposes of *expressiveness*. Such expressiveness draws Lisa to Stefan, while her own abilities remain bound to the realm of expression. The change in Stefan’s professor also generates a key asymmetry between the characters. In Zweig’s novella, one writer addresses another; in Ophuls’s film, a writer addresses a musician. Stefan’s medium is music, Lisa’s is language. Being locked out of one another’s creative realms, both characters are ultimately more deeply moved by each other’s work in the film than in Zweig’s novella: Lisa kneels in rapture as Stefan plays a piano rendition of Carl Michael Ziehrer’s

²⁹ Dhoest, “Ophuls Conducting.”

³⁰ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 240.

“*Weaner Mad’ln*” (1899) waltz in the *Prater*, Stefan covers his eyes in grief after finishing Lisa’s letter [Fig. 9]. In a sense, Lisa’s letter consummates Stefan’s unconsummated symbols. While Lisa spends her life subordinating herself to the expressiveness of Stefan’s music—an expressiveness which is in excess of meaning³¹—at the end of the film, her expression triumphs over his expressiveness: through her letter, she imposes meaning on her the events of her life, as well as Stefan’s. Whereas Stefan’s endless cycle of womanizing leaves him frustrated and desperate to find an ideal woman who would break his seduce-and-abandon pattern (an ideal that, as his vague recognition of Lisa implies, can only be sought in the past), Lisa’s insistence that his time with her gave her life meaning (“My life can be measured by the moments I’ve had with you and our child”) consequently gives *his* life meaning and inspires him to face Johann Stauffer (Marcel Journet) in a duel to honor Lisa and his son.

Music in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* thus functions as one site of negotiation between narrative, style, spectatorship, and the operations of metaphor. The film capitalizes on Vienna 1900’s status not only as a highly sensual time and place, but a highly conceptual time and place. As I will explain below in the section on the film’s relationship to politics, what prior scholars have described as Ophuls’s techniques of distanciation are in fact gestures toward metaphorization, gestures that bind the melodramatic mode to the conceptual ecosystem of turn-of-the-century Vienna’s artistic heritage and intellectual history. Scholars have identified a split in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna between the ahistorical aestheticist tradition (Gustav Klimt, Sigmund Freud, Egon

³¹ For an analysis of the “exaggerated role” of music in the woman’s film of the 1940s due to its ability to represent the ineffable, see Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 97.

Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Arnold Schoenberg)³² and the politically oriented, critical tradition (Schnitzler, Rosa Mayreder, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Kraus, Joseph Roth, Otto Weininger, Adolf Loos, Robert Musil),³³ between the “disruptive” (Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka) and the “disciplinary” (Loos, Kraus, Schoenberg, Ludwig Wittgenstein). Hal Foster goes so far as to claim that “already at the beginning of the century ... we find in Vienna an opposition fundamental to much modernism that followed: an opposition between expressive freedom and rigorous constraints.”³⁴ But all of these artists and thinkers have something in common—they are all highly *conceptual*, which is one of the reasons scholars have found synergies among their work in different fields.³⁵ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is of a piece with this tradition. For all its sensuality and atmosphere, its stirring music and moving performances, it is ultimately more conceptual than carnal.

II. Melodrama and Metaphor

Bad reviews of film masterpieces usually contain a kernel of truth. Bosley Crowther’s dismissal of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is no exception. Crowther cautions, “beware of this overwritten ‘Letter.’ It will choke you with rhetoric and tommyrot.”³⁶ Crowther is right that *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is highly rhetorical, as is the genre of melodrama more generally insofar as it pushes various elements of film—

³² See Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*.

³³ See Beller, “Introduction,” 1-25, and Janik, “Vienna 1900 Revisited,” 27-56.

³⁴ Foster, “1900a,” 56.

³⁵ See Kandel, *The Age of Insight*.

³⁶ Crowther, “*Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 214.

narrative, performance, *mise-en-scène*—to a fever pitch. It's no wonder that seventy years after Crowther's takedown, the more sympathetic Gilberto Perez devotes nearly half of his study of film rhetoric to melodrama.³⁷ Perez insists that "melodrama in Max Ophuls tends to the allegorical, the mythical,"³⁸ and we can file both of these designations under the category of metaphor, which Perez enthrones as "the queen of tropes."³⁹

Metaphor is an instrument of conceptualization. Conceptualization is a double-sided coin, a dual process of enrichment and impoverishment. Cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe metaphor as operating on the opposing principles of hiding and highlighting.⁴⁰ In the process of metaphorization, the vehicle by necessity highlights certain aspects of its corresponding tenor, and hides others. I say *by necessity* because each vehicle differs from its tenor in some respect. If the vehicle and tenor were identical, their union would not constitute a metaphor. The process of conceptualization follows a similar trajectory. Of course, a concept can serve as a tenor in the process of metaphorization. But for the purpose of understanding the process of conceptualization itself, we must take the concept as the the vehicle and the unruly assortment of phenomena being conceptualized as the tenor. Just as metaphor's vehicle hides and highlights different aspects of the referent, so the concept depletes the richness and particularity of the phenomena it conceptualizes, while at the same time fortifying that phenomena by crystalizing it into a comprehensible form. Film scholars such as Tom

³⁷ Perez, *The Eloquent Screen*, 199-344.

³⁸ Ibid., 261.

³⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 10.

Gunning, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson have traced mainstream European and American film's trajectory from a "cinema of attraction" to a cinema of narrative integration,⁴¹ refined in Hollywood through the development of a rigorous, industrialized mode of production, a mode which in effect tamed the boundless spectacle of audiovisual life, rendering it more comprehensible, more assimilable, more classical.⁴² If narrative was the primary means by which the classical Hollywood cinema (among other narrative cinemas) sought *both* to deplete audience perception of the rich heterogeneity of the world *and* to fortify audience understanding of the world through generic convention and classification, then what role does metaphor play in classical film as distinct from narrative? This is a crucial question for *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, in which metaphor inflects its narrative in order to justify the link between genre and place, between melodrama and "Vienna about 1900."

Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that "there is *directionality* in metaphor." They contend that not only do we "understand one concept in terms of another," but "specifically, we tend to structure the less concrete and inherently vaguer concepts ... in terms of more concrete concepts, which are more clearly delineated in our experience."⁴³ *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, however, *reverses* this directionality. The film takes a concrete, easily comprehensible story (girl meets boy, girl falls in love with boy, girl and

⁴¹ Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction," 63-70.

⁴² Bordwell justifies the use of the term "classical" to describe Hollywood's mode of production between 1917 and 1960 by asserting that "the principles which Hollywood claims as its own rely on notions of decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self-effacing craftsmanship, and cool control of the perceiver's response—canons which critics in any medium usually call 'classical.'" (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 3-4).

⁴³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 112.

boy make love, boy abandons girl, girl carries torch, girl dies, boy cries) and renders it more abstract and more complex through the imposition of metaphor. Whereas in daily life, metaphor functions as a conceptual aid, transforming the world into a more comprehensible and navigable forum for action, in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, metaphor demands more conceptual labor from its audience. Working against the photographic medium's tendency toward the indexical, toward a representation of the pro-filmic world that can evade the conceptualization that manifests in the other arts, Ophüls constantly foregrounds the operations of metaphor in shaping the so-called indexical image.

From the jump, the framing device of the letter serves to conceptually bind the film's narrative structure to turn-of-the-century Vienna. In the international imaginary, *fin-de-siecle* Vienna has been dominated by a key theme: the proximity of Eros to Thanatos. This theme has manifested in two fundamental ways. On the one hand, as a generator of aesthetic frisson, as in Klimt's paintings and Schnitzler's plays and novellas. On the other, as an articulation of a repressed, counterintuitive truth, as in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and in particular his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In the first scene, Lisa's eponymous missive declares, "By the time you read this letter, I may be dead," alerting us that the very title of the film refers to a love letter from the grave, a document *par excellence* of Eros and Thanatos.⁴⁴ However, the Eros-Thanatos *cliché* is

⁴⁴ In Zweig's novella, the unknown (and unnamed) woman begins her letter, "My child died yesterday (*Mein Kind ist gestern gestorben*)," and does not allude to her own impending death until the second paragraph. (Zweig, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 12-13).

only an *entrée* into the film's conceptual mode, priming us to attune our expectations to the film's metaphorical imagination.

Ophuls draws us into the film's diegesis not only by narrativizing but also by metaphorizing space. What we lose in immediacy we gain in contemplative investment. Like Josef von Sternberg, the Vienna-born director whose costumer, Travis Banton, would supply the gowns for *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls's visual style has been associated with the "perversions" of fetishism and masochism.⁴⁵ Camille Paglia insists that "fetishism ... is clearly a conceptualizing or symbol-making activity."⁴⁶ Played over her visual and haptic encounters with Stefan's possessions—in his absence—Lisa's narration emphasizes the cerebral dimensions of her fetishistic fascinations. Our first image of Lisa is in a flashback to the earliest point in the narrative timeline, when our adolescent heroine attends a moving van full of Stefan's instruments. Lisa's voiceover claims:

I think everyone has two birthdays, the day of his physical birth and the beginning of his conscious life. Nothing is vivid or real in my memory before that day in spring when I came home from school and found a moving van in front of our building.

For Lisa, the erotic and the conceptual are one and the same; her awakening of erotic desire is not only perceptual, rendering her (remembered) life "vivid and real," but also conceptual, marking "the beginning of [her] conscious life." The very fact that she uses the masculine third person to describe this experience ("the beginning of *his* conscious

⁴⁵ See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 14-26, and Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* and "Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*," 35-57.

⁴⁶ Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 20.

life”) indicates that she has conceptualized the phenomenon of being initiated into conscious life beyond idiosyncratic personal experience. Throughout the film, Lisa returns again and again to Stefan’s possessions, lavishing as much adoration on them as she does on Stefan. Even the city of Vienna itself becomes a substitute for her desire. Recalling the time after she had returned from Linz, but before her initial *rendez-vous* with Stefan, Lisa rhapsodizes:

Vienna, when I saw it again, seemed to have taken on a new splendor. All the time I’d been away I thought of it longingly as your city. Now it was our city.

Among several critics who have asserted Lisa’s masochism,⁴⁷ Gaylyn Studlar has provided the most comprehensive analysis. Studlar insists that Lisa “makes Stefan the fetishized centerpiece of an almost mystical exaltation and a superficially ‘desexualized’ contemplation.”⁴⁸ This emphasis on masochistic contemplation carries over from Lisa’s experience of Stefan to our experience of the film. Just as masochistic strategies of contemplation allow Lisa to take control within circumstances that otherwise deny her control, to wring pleasure from a situation which, on its face, should leave her pleasureless, so the film’s metaphorization of its central themes (love, death, time) invites us to transfigure the experiential into the conceptual, to exert a degree of intellectual agency over a narrative that eludes our control. Just as Lisa extracts pleasure and meaning from tragic events that are out of her control (Stefan’s abandonment, her contraction of typhus), so we are encouraged to do the same, to derive pleasure and

⁴⁷ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 88-89, 133; Jellerson, “Hysteria and the Camera in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 21; and Naremore, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 65.

⁴⁸ Studlar, “Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 44.

meaning from displeasing situations and meaningless events. In his classic essay on melodrama and tears, Steven Neale argues that viewers cry during melodrama because they feel a sense of powerlessness over the course of events, just as melodrama's protagonists are subject to "chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last-minute revelations, *deus ex machina* endings." These chance occurrences—whether random or fateful—mobilize "an *excess* of cause over effect," distinguishing melodramatic narration from the mainline of nineteenth-century realism, which emphasizes "social and psychological motivation."⁴⁹ As I will address below, some critics, while ostensibly championing the genre of melodrama, curiously resist acknowledging the conventionally melodramatic elements of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*'s narrative, working from the premise that the film operates on a nineteenth-century realist model. For whatever reason, they are so determined to attribute Lisa's death to "social and psychological motivation" that they cannot accept that the narrative frames it unambiguously as an accident. Willfully blind to the facts, these critics seem desperate to blame Lisa's death on psychopathology or patriarchy or, better yet, on psychopathology *caused by* patriarchy. Perhaps out of fear that their beloved protofeminist, leftist Max Ophuls may have made a resolutely apolitical film, or at least a film which minimizes and marginalizes its own political commentary, these critics resist the complacency that melodramatic catharsis can engender. Heaven forbid Ophuls would stoop to what Molly Haskell calls the "lowest level" of the woman's film, the "weepie," which is "founded on a mock-Aristotelian and politically conservative aesthetic whereby

⁴⁹ Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," 7.

women spectators are moved, not by pity and fear but by self-pity and tears, to accept, rather than reject, their lot.”⁵⁰ These critics insist that *Letter from an Unknown Woman* must be read as a social commentary that puts audience tears in the service of eliminating their own psychopathologies and removing the social obstacles to their flourishing. (If the film offers any useful social commentary, it’s that trains should institute better safety protocol, such as efficiently labelling quarantined compartments.) But such a perspective rests on a reading of Lisa’s masochistic strategies as pathological, whereas Ophüls’s film in fact celebrates them as a triumph of intellectual creativity. And it is this very creativity—this intellectual stimulation and conceptual demand—that Ophüls fosters through his metaphorization of narrative, style, and spectatorship. In other words, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* conceptualizes masochistic spectatorship as an interactive rather than passive process.

Lisa’s masochistic infatuation with Stefan is not merely a prelude to their union, but in fact a *substitute* for their union. When Stefan abandons Lisa on his trip to Milan, it becomes clear that he holds the power to determine their *interpersonal* dynamic (i.e., whether or not their relationship will proceed). In reaction, Lisa resorts to masochism in order to take control of her *personal* experience of the interpersonal situation. If Lisa cannot find romantic fulfillment in a marriage with Stefan, she *can* find fulfillment through the exertion of her own agency within her given circumstances. By refusing to disclose Stefan’s identity to the nuns who cared for her after the birth of her son,⁵¹ Lisa

⁵⁰ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 155.

⁵¹ One of the attending nuns assures Lisa, “If we knew who he was, he might be willing to accept his responsibility.”

declines to leverage power over her interpersonal dynamic with Stefan, claiming, “You may wonder why I never came to you for help. I wanted to be the one woman you had known who had asked you for nothing.” Unabashedly self-aggrandizing, Lisa perceives her decision not to use Stefan Jr. (Leo B. Passim) as a bargaining chip to secure Stefan’s attachment as a moral triumph: not only does she want Stefan to be free to pursue his own professional and erotic desires unfettered by the responsibilities of fatherhood, she also wants to play the martyr, to be the “one woman” who extended Stefan such curtesy. In addition to moral pleasure, Lisa also generates erotic pleasure through her masochistic strategies. While the film never hints at a consummated incestuous relationship between Lisa and Stefan Jr., it does flirt with the para-incestuous psychoanalytic concept of the mother’s displacement of erotic energy onto her child. Lisa lets Stefan Jr. sleep in her bed while she is away at the opera, and has clearly been moulding him into an imitation of his father, encouraging him to develop his musical talents and blithely excusing his habitual carelessness.⁵²

Studlar argues that Lisa’s masochistic impulses are paralleled by the “masochistic structuring” of the film’s narrative, citing its “‘frozen’ doubling of scenes, the intensely repetitive visual and aural components, cyclical narrative structure, and a temporality centered around suspense and anticipation.”⁵³ Following Gilles Deleuze’s literary analysis of the work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Studlar recognizes that masochism is a “formal system” that creates “a second world or heterocosm to contain the excesses

⁵² Lisa remarks, sanguinely, “He has lots of talents, but not for finishing his milk. Or for brushing his teeth.”

⁵³ Studlar, “Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 37.

of masochistic fantasy.”⁵⁴ Such a reading implies that the film’s ubiquitous metaphors of circularity are in some sense a manifestation of Lisa’s own masochistic strategies for controlling her unaccommodated desires. Unfortunately, Studlar succumbs to puritanical moralizing in the name of feminist grievance, bemoaning Lisa’s masochism as “a pathologically defensive response to a world in which women have little power” which results in both “psychic triumph” and “physical self-annihilation.”⁵⁵ Setting aside what should be an obvious fact—that Lisa dies of typhus, not masochism—Studlar’s interpretation of the film as an example of “masochistic textuality” defines the film’s narrative trajectory as narcissistic, hermetic, exclusive, a circle that closes. But Ophuls’s metaphors are never that simple.

III. The Waltz as Metaphor

“The circle is the central metaphor in Ophuls’s work,” claims Michael Kerbel.⁵⁶ The theme of circularity is so central to Ophuls’s films that to address it has become something of a critical *cliché*. But, as Susan White points out, even if it has become a “jaded truism” that Ophuls’s cinema is “above all (and redundantly) a cinema of movement” it “is also profoundly true.”⁵⁷ Circles and rhymes so pervade the various levels of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*—*mise-en-scène*, dialogue, camera movement, narrative structure—that they cannot be discounted. Among a plethora of circular, spiral-

⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 51. In a later essay, Studlar doubles down on this point, insisting that “Lisa represents the masochistic subject whose steely determination achieves a triumph of masochistic desire—her own death.” Here Studlar disturbingly insinuates that in the end Lisa got what she desired, or perhaps, in a more sinister register, what she deserved. (Studlar, “Max Op(h)uls Fashions Femininity,” 80).

⁵⁶ Kerbel, “*Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 60.

⁵⁷ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 23.

like, and otherwise curling motifs that populate the film's *mise-en-scène*—umbrellas, staircases, rococo ornamentation, lamps, the fountain in Linz and the assembled military band that performs Wagner's "*O du, mein holder Abendstern*" (1845) beside it, the rotating backdrops behind Lisa and Stefan's stationary train car, and the bicycle wheels of the operator who puts it into motion, the magnifying glass that encircles Lisa and Stefan Jr. [Figs. 10-13]—a number of these motifs are eminently Viennese: the *Riesenrad* at the *Prater*, *Fiaker* wheels,⁵⁸ and, most significantly, Lisa and Stefan's waltz on an otherwise empty dance floor [Fig. 14]. As in several of Ophuls's films, most forcibly *Madame de...*, the waltz presents an analogy between a visual motif within the *mise-en-scène* and with camera movement itself, with Ophuls's "heady arabesques"⁵⁹ translating pro-filmic content into visual style. The film's use of repetition in both dialogue and event brings circularity to the level of narrative, and this analogy between visual style and narrative structure has not escaped critical notice.

Unity is one of the rationales critics have proposed for Ophuls's binding of visual style and narrative structure through the mutual theme of repetition. Tony Pipolo insists that the "correspondence" between Ophuls's circular visual style and the film's circular narrative structure yields "an unusually fine coherence and lucidity" that suggests a "continuity of the emotional life ... rather than a fragmentation."⁶⁰ Deleuze takes Pipolo's analysis a step further, arguing that Ophuls seeks not merely unity, but perfection.

⁵⁸ An earlier film that advances a forcible association between circularity and Vienna is Erich von Stroheim and Rupert Julian's *Prater-set* melodrama *Merry-Go-Round* (1923).

⁵⁹ Williams, "The Mastery of Movement," 74. Rosalind Galt has also described Ophuls's camerawork with regard to the figure of the "arabesque," but with a more self-conscious eye toward Orientalist discourse. (Galt, *Pretty*, 172-76).

⁶⁰ Pipolo, "The Aptness of Terminology," 178.

Deleuze describes Ophuls's images as "perfect crystals" because their motifs of circularity and repetition—mirrors, waltzes, circus tracks, carousels—create self-contained worlds whose "crystalline perfection lets no outside subsist."⁶¹ Deleuze's conceptualization of the closed circuit as a figuration of perfection has a Jungian pedigree. Writing in the late 1940s, contemporary with *Letter from an Unknown Woman's* production, the analytic psychoanalyst Erich Neumann argued that the cross-cultural proliferation of uroboric imagery in ancient art and symbolism indicates a universal desire to conceptualize—to "grasp"—an original state of perfection characterized by "wholeness, unity, non-differentiation, and the absence of opposites,"⁶² a "prewordly" state void of time and space,⁶³ a preconscious union of masculine and feminine principles.⁶⁴ While both Deleuze and Neumann posit the circle as a figure of perfection, neither of them attribute it an entirely positive valence. Just as Neumann contends that the development of both individual and collective consciousness depends on the hero distinguishing his ego from the pre-conscious realm of non-differentiation,⁶⁵ so Deleuze contends that Ophuls's characters are "imprisoned" in his crystalline worlds.⁶⁶

This evaluation of Ophulsian circularity as negative commentary is widely shared. In accordance with Deleuze, Sarris views repetition in Ophuls as a signal of his

⁶¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 84.

⁶² Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-51.

⁶⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 84.

characters' "imprisonment in time."⁶⁷ Similarly, Peter Harcourt argues that repetition signals immobility, viewing Ophuls's characters—particularly his heroines—as victims of illusions, "trapped" by their memories of the past.⁶⁸ Also contending that repetition in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* connotes Lisa's "inability to move forward,"⁶⁹ Kerbel describes this affliction as "spiritual immobility."⁷⁰ Roger Greenspun sees repetition in Ophuls as a "curse,"⁷¹ and Stanley Cavell claims that in Ophuls "repetition signals death."⁷² But the most extreme interpretation comes from Robin Wood, who argues that Ophuls's characters are "perpetually imprisoned" by "Time and Destiny," which are signified by Ophuls's tracking shots.⁷³ By yoking fatalism to circular form, Wood harkens back to one of the most vehemently misogynistic writers in the Viennese canon: Otto Weininger. In an essay entitled "On the Unidirectionality of Time" (*Über die Einsinnigkeit der Zeit*) published posthumously in 1904, Weininger argues that a conceptualization of time as circular rather than linear is unethical because absolves the conceptualizer of the moral obligation to exercise his or her free will and strive for an ideal future. Weininger attributes the fatalism inherent in this circular conceptualization of time to women, prostitutes, and "the character of the Bavarian-Austrian tribe, particularly the Viennese," who are constitutionally "fatalistic" (*fatalistisch*) and

⁶⁷ Sarris, *The American Cinema*, 72.

⁶⁸ Harcourt, "Circles of Delight and Despair," 7, 10.

⁶⁹ Kerbel, "*Letter from an Unknown Woman*," 61.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷¹ Greenspun, "Corrections," 92.

⁷² Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 108.

⁷³ Wood, "Ewig hin der Liebe Glück," 235.

“apathetic” (*apathisch*). According to Weininger, this feminine, Viennese inclination toward fatalism manifests in the waltz, both as music and dance.⁷⁴

In one of the most celebrated articles on Ophuls’s camera movement, Daniel Morgan argues that Ophuls’s camera erects a structure of “dual attunement” which “responds to both the states of mind of characters and the social world they inhabit.” By demonstrating how the social world of *fin-de-siècle* Europe in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Madame de...* does not allow the film’s characters the “conditions for autonomy” necessary for ethical knowledge or action, Ophuls’s camera movements, according to Morgan, “provide a moral perspective on the film’s world that the characters themselves are unable to take.”⁷⁵ Morgan insists that Ophuls assumes a sympathetic but rather condescending attitude toward his characters: they *would* have done the right thing had their minds not been befogged by false consciousness. Only from the perspective of the early postwar years, when European society apparently reached the apogee of its ethical consciousness, could Ophuls achieve a “moral perspective” obscured by the rigid social prescriptions of the stratified *fin-de-siècle* world. Morgan’s analysis is of a piece with previously cited critics who read Ophuls’s style as a representation of his characters’ entrapment, and, more specifically, of his victimized female characters’ obstruction from achieving enlightenment.

But not everyone agrees. Resisting the notion that Ophuls’s female characters are trapped—by society, or by Ophuls’s imprisoning visual style—Alan Williams observes

⁷⁴ Weininger, “On the Unidirectionality of Time,” 84.

⁷⁵ Morgan, “Max Ophuls and the Limits of Virtuosity,” 131-32.

that Ophuls tends “to identify the men with the level of narration and the women with that of the meta-narration.”⁷⁶ Building on Williams’s idea, I contend that in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* Lisa functions as more than a tragic character imprisoned in nostalgic illusions. Rather, she operates in tandem with Ophuls himself as an agent who works at the edges of narrative structure, bringing the spectator into the fold. Circularity not only pervades the different levels contained within the film, but extends to the spectator’s experience of the film as well. While Kerbel reads Lisa and Stefan’s artificial train ride through Venice and Switzerland at the *Prater* [Fig. 15] as a poignant expression of “the concept of movement without progress,”⁷⁷ several critics have identified an analogy between the sequence and the experience of the film’s spectator. Virginia Wright Wexman argues that Ophuls draws this analogy by inserting two additional artificial backgrounds in the film: the non-diegetic panorama of the Vienna skyline that serves as a backdrop for the opening and closing credit sequences [Fig. 16], and the rear-projection he uses for Lisa’s “real” train ride, where she briefly purloins a program of one of Stefan’s concerts from an irritated fellow passenger.⁷⁸ Wexman reads this gesture as a self-reflexive comment on the filmmaking process. Williams also interprets the train ride’s cross reference to the opening credits as “meta-cinematic,” suggesting that Lisa and the spectator share similar “illusions.”⁷⁹ Whereas Wexman and Williams view this intratextual analogy as an enddistancing, self-reflexive gesture toward cinematic illusion, I

⁷⁶ Williams, “The Circles of Desire,” 40.

⁷⁷ Kerbel, “*Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 61.

⁷⁸ Wexman, “The Transfiguration of History,” 13.

⁷⁹ Williams, *Max Ophuls and the Cinema of Desire*, 50.

contend, on the contrary, that it brings the viewer into the fold. By extending the circular metaphor beyond the film's pro-filmic content, visual style, and narrative structure to include the experience of spectatorship itself, the film invites us more forcibly to engage with it conceptually on multiple levels.

Within the diegesis of the film, Lisa operates as narrator. But in tandem with Ophuls's cinematic storytelling, she exerts agency on a meta-narrative level. Although her letter presents a more or less linear narrative of her life (the letter begins in the "present," in the final hours of Lisa's life, but then proceeds in a straight line from her adolescence to her untimely death), the perlocutionary effect Lisa's linear narrative is Stefan's initiation into a cyclical experience of time. Prior to reading the letter, Stefan was no stranger to repetition: upon discovering that the stationary train operator has "run out of countries" and must "begin all over again" with a backdrop of Venice, Stefan cheerfully exclaims, "We'll revisit the scenes of our youth!"; like Lisa, Stefan also departs from and returns to Vienna; when Stefan reunites with Lisa at the opera house, he confesses, "I've seen you somewhere, I know," even if he can't remember her name; and, as Laura Mulvey astutely points out, Stefan's occupation itself is "driven by the circularity of practice and performance."⁸⁰ However, Lisa's letter intensifies Stefan's emotional experience of circularity, enabling him to transcend the minor feelings induced by prior repetitions—the exasperation of prolonged seduction, the tedium of relocation, the itch of near recognition, the frustration of rehearsal—by giving him a chance to

⁸⁰ Mulvey, "Love, History, and Max Ophuls," 23.

imaginatively re-live Lisa's life in the span of an hour, an hour that culminates in an outpouring of major grief as Stefan covers his eyes in despair [Fig. 9].

Stefan's initiation into a more comprehensive, emotionally heightened mode of repetition manifests not only on the level of narrative, but also on the level of visual style. Stefan reads the letter beside a large circular lamp [Fig. 17], instituting a connection between circularity and enlightenment. When Stefan learns that Lisa bore and raised his son, he inspects a photograph of them in a mock hot air balloon through the lens of a round magnifying glass [Fig. 13]. Though eminently practical, Stefan's use of the magnifying lens, with its black frame emphasizing its circular shape, represents the figurative lens through which Stefan revises his understanding of the past. Upon finishing the letter, Stefan runs through a nonsequential assortment of memories of his reunion with Lisa and of their visit to the *Prater*, each of which is ringed by revolving plumes of smoke [Figs. 18-20]. The circular framing of these misty memories not only lends the imagery a subjective quality that marks them as Stefan's memories, but further illustrates that John's subjective faculty of conceptualization itself has been reoriented toward circularity. While Mary Ann Doane insists that Hollywood romances exacerbate the mechanism of repetition used in classical texts, thus transforming it "from a tool of cognition into an instrument of pure affect,"⁸¹ in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* repetition operates, for Stefan as well as the viewer, as both a tool of cognition and an instrument of affect, however impure. Like Stefan, we also encounter Lisa's letter as we

⁸¹ Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 108.

encounter Ophuls's film, both of which encourage us to adopt a circular mode of conceptualization.

In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, circularity does not signify closure. Contrary to critical opinion, it does not merely convey character entrapment or unify content and form. By grafting circularity onto the genre of melodrama—a genre marked by excess and impossibility, by imperfect “resolutions” that are often more compensatory than satisfactory—Ophuls advances a conception of circularity more complex than the Platonic perfection of the ring, a circularity of movement between levels, closer to the model of spirals and circuits. At the end of the *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, when Stefan has been initiated into a circular conceptualization of the past, he does not accept that the circle of Lisa's life cycle has closed. As the ghostly image of an adolescent Lisa reappears in the doorway to Stefan's apartment complex, their narrative seems to be brought full circle, returning Stefan (imaginatively) to the time and (literally) to the place where they first met. But rather than closing the circle, Lisa's apparition spurs Stefan to action: by electing to participate in the duel with Stauffer, knowing that doing so guarantees his own death, Stefan takes on the responsibility of closing the circle himself. The final shot of the film shows Stefan's carriage proceeding away from the camera, a mirror image of the film's opening shot [Fig. 8]. Despite the reflection of the prior arrival in this departure, it is an open ending. As the wheels of the carriage recede into the distance, our own imaginations are set into motion as we speculate on how the duel will play out. Thus the circuit of narration, action, and imagination routes from Lisa through Stefan to us.

Ophulsian circularity involves movement. Taking to heart Lola Montès's declaration that "Life, for me, is movement" (*La vie pour moi, c'est mouvement*), Sarris insists that Ophuls's moving camera "does not so much comment on life as constitute it." Comparing Ophuls's fluid *mise-en-scène* with von Sternberg's frozen, composition-forward style, Sarris claims that Ophuls's cinema is "memorable ... for its lengthy waltzes across the barriers of time."⁸² Certainly, a time-traveling potential inheres in Ophuls's mobile style, a potential that finds its realization in the waltz montage of *Madame de...* in which Louise (Danielle Darrieux) and Baron Donati (Vittorio De Sica) sustain an unbroken dance that elides the intervals between their *rendez-vous* [Fig. 21]. Similarly, at the end of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, when Stefan cycles through his memories of Lisa after finishing her letter—the only sequence in the film that unambiguously represents *his* consciousness—the dramatic pounding and screeching of Daniele Amfitheatrof's score gives way to Stefan's piano rendition of "Weaner Mad'ln" played over a repeated image of the couple dancing in the *Prater* [Fig. 20]. In this scene, the waltz—as sound and image, music and dance—does traverse the barriers of time, serving as an aid to memory. However, the recurrence of the waltz is not only sensual but conceptual, determining not only the content but the form of Stefan's memories. In his

⁸² Sarris, "Max Ophuls," 58. Another type of ubiquitous movement in the film, which as far as I know has never been acknowledged in the critical literature, is the recurring motif of wind blowing through Lisa's wispy bangs. This motif typically occurs in scenes set in the outdoors, offering a practical motivation and keeping with Ophuls's demand that "real" snow (and real horse manure) be used to create verisimilitude on the soundstage. However, there are several instances of the wind blowing through Lisa's hair in interior scenes, most notably when she opens the transom to Stefan's apartment to hear him practice in the early morning hours, and when she and Stefan ride in the closed stationary train car at the *Prater*. Such instances may signal an open window off-screen, but more likely they suggest that wind-blown hair is a visual corollary for Lisa's desire for Stefan, a motif repeated half a century later in Adrian Lyne's adultery melodrama *Unfaithful* (2002). Circularity permeates the film's atmosphere itself. Notably, once the film reintroduces us to Lisa several years into her marriage to Stauffer, her hair has been frozen into an immovable coiffure.

imagination, Stefan waltzes from one fleeting image to the next, a temporal spiral reinforced by the smoke swirling around each discrete vignette.

The waltz recurs throughout Ophuls's films as a privileged trope that stimulates the medium's capacity to encourage conceptualization. Whether or not we agree with Langer that film's "artistic potentialities became evident only when the moving camera was introduced" because "the moving camera divorced the screen from the stage,"⁸³ the film medium's ability to both simulate movement and capture performance renders it hospitable to representations of and analogies with the waltz. In "Media Hot and Cold," Marshall McLuhan categorizes both the waltz and film under the rubric of "hot media." According to McLuhan, the waltz "emerged" in the late eighteenth century as "a hot and explosive human expression that broke through the formal and feudal barriers of courtly and choral dance styles."⁸⁴ However explosive, the waltz is far from spontaneous. McLuhan defines hot media as exclusive (i.e., "high definition," filled with data that leaves little room for the receiver's "participation") and cold media as inclusive (i.e., "low definition," requiring that the receiver complete the "message" through improvisation).⁸⁵ The waltz thus *involves* the dancers insofar as they are needed to perform the dance, and they may feel *involved in* the dance while performing it, but the dance is so "mechanical" that it doesn't require the type of "chatty" improvisation

⁸³ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 411.

⁸⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

demanded by the Twist, McLuhan's exemplar of a "cool" dance form.⁸⁶ Similarly, the medium of television—still in a relatively nascent stage of development at the time of McLuhan's writing—demanded much more from audiences than cinema because it supplied much less in terms of audiovisual information. McLuhan's analogy between the waltz and cinema—both being highly mechanical *and* highly emotional—helps partially illuminate Ophuls's use of the waltz. In one regard, *Letter from an Unknown Woman's* treatment of the waltz is hot in McLuhan's sense: Stefan's seduction of Lisa at the *Prater* has a mechanical, repetitive ease, requiring little improvisation on his part. In fact, once the band has stopped playing for the couple, having vented their own frustration with the tedium of repetition, Stefan proceeds to the piano to play "*Weaner Mad'In*," the same waltz he just heard, refusing even to improvise a different music selection, let alone an impromptu. But Ophuls's use of the film medium is decidedly much cooler, much more *involved*, than McLuhan's description. Certainly, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* contains as much visual and aural data as the average contemporary live-action Hollywood film (we are by no means in the low-resolution realm of animation or experimental film), and its narrative presents no serious challenges to a viewer accustomed to the conventions of classical Hollywood storytelling, which in the 1940s was accruing radical though easily assimilable complexities.⁸⁷ But *Letter from an Unknown Woman's* translation of the waltz from content to style generates a cinematic

⁸⁶ Ibid., 27. In actuality, compared with the court dances that it gradually succeeded in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the waltz was considerably less formalized, and left much more room for "individual self-expression." (Yaraman, *Revolving Embrace*, 1).

⁸⁷ See Bordwell, *Reinventing Hollywood*.

metaphor that invites spectatorial conceptualization, thereby rendering the film a cool variation in a hot medium.

Charles Affron reads Ophuls's dancelike camerawork as an analogy for his characters' desire.⁸⁸ Such an analogy harkens back to anxieties over the explosion of the waltz in Europe in the 1760s. Whereas the seventeenth-century-born minuet and the *contredanse* are eminently social dances, requiring intricate choreography and exchanges among partners, the waltz focuses exclusively on the couple.⁸⁹ Further, the physics of the dance require that the partners maintain both an intimate embrace and intensive eye contact, lest they be unbalanced by the centrifugal force generated by their double circular motion.⁹⁰ Early anxieties over the waltz were gendered, just as prohibitions on female sexuality differed from those on male sexuality in *fin-de-siecle* Vienna.⁹¹ Dance historian Sevin Yaraman cites an abundance of textual evidence indicating that the moral "outrage" generated by the waltz in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focused almost exclusively on its effects on women.⁹² By the end of the nineteenth century, even as the dance had come to signify bourgeois etiquette, it was also closely associated with the para-bourgeois figure of the *süße Mädel*, a Viennese type identified by Schnitzler in his early play *Anatol* (1893) who "had to exude atmospheric qualities, such as the rhythm of waltzes in every movement of the body."⁹³

⁸⁸ Affron, *Cinema and Sentiment*, 97.

⁸⁹ Yaraman, *Revolving Embrace*, 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹¹ Keiser, "The 'süßes Mädel' in *Fin-de-Siècle* and Modern Vienna," 64.

⁹² *Ibid.*, viii.

⁹³ Seibel, *Visions of Vienna*, 67.

According to Langer, the dance holds a privileged place in the development of symbolic consciousness because historically it abstracted a sense of power from practical experiences, creating an “autonomous realm ... of mystical forces.”⁹⁴ Langer describes this “magic circle,” generated by dances like the *Reigen*, as a holy realm that excludes the profane, a realm that the dancers enter through an process of *ekstasis*.⁹⁵ Langer’s insight holds for the function of the waltz in *Ophuls*, as a metaphor that gathers conceptual power by concentrating forces that may remain obscured in practical life. In other words, as we watch Stefan and Lisa waltz to diegetic music, we become cognizant of the non-practical imposition of form onto their bodies. However, *Ophuls*’s dances are far from Langer’s ideal of autonomous realms. While Langer’s conceptualization of the dance is based on the relatively simple model of the *Reigen*, *Ophuls*’s is based on the more sophisticated model of the waltz. Though characterized by “repetitive continuity,” an “aesthetic hallmark” that distinguished the waltz from earlier courtly dances with their requisite changes in steps and direction,⁹⁶ the waltz is figured in *Ophuls* as a complex mode of circularity, of circles spiraling inside circles. Such complexity is not only formal, but social. In the *Prater* scene, *Ophuls* pays due attention to the class dynamics undergirding Lisa and Stefan’s waltz, cutting to the disgruntled musicians who complain that they prefer to play for married people because “they have homes.” Even in *La ronde*, a film whose narrative structure is modeled on the *Reigen* or circle dance, *Ophuls* keeps the magic circle porous. While reimagining Schnitzler’s *Reigen* metaphor as a carousel,

⁹⁴ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 190.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-92.

⁹⁶ McKee, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz*, 99.

the film presents the Raconteur as a grand conceptualizer who sets the machinery of the ride (and, correspondingly, the plot) in motion. But he is not, as Langer's analysis of the *Reigen* would suggest, wholly excluded from the dance, a profane man peering into the sacred realm without ecstatically entering into it. Rather, the film is full of breaks and interruptions, of characters traversing the diegetic world of Vienna 1900 and the contemporary stage world which the Raconteur inhabits. His performative gestures extend outward to the audience as well as inward to the characters from a diegesis nested within another diegesis. The Raconteur operates, like the trope of circularity, as a node of conceptual entanglement.

As Saige Walton has argued, entanglement is an essential quality of baroque cinema.⁹⁷ Walton's focus on the sensual and phenomenological qualities of baroque film finds an analogue with descriptions of Ophuls's "baroque" cinema, which tend to focus on perceptual features of his style. In film studies, "baroque" cinema is typically conceptualized as an alternative to "classical" style, which usually entails "self-effacing craftsmanship."⁹⁸ As Alan Williams points out, Ophuls's films depart from classical conventions because of their self-*reflexive* craftsmanship—their emphasis on opulent costumes and obstructive sets, the "cinematic pyrotechnics" of their highly visible camera movements—which inhibits character identification and perceptual realism, two principal ideals of classical form.⁹⁹ Sarris argues that Ophuls's devotion to "baroque opulence"

⁹⁷ Walton, *Cinema's Baroque Flesh*.

⁹⁸ Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 4.

⁹⁹ Williams, *Max Ophuls and the Cinema of Desire*, 10.

believes the vanity and tragedy lurking beneath the “sensuous fabrics and surfaces.”¹⁰⁰ For White, Ophuls’s baroque style “glorifies the arabesque and the detail,” standing in contrast to the “‘classical’ severity” of monumental Nazi art.¹⁰¹ References to “baroque clutter” recur throughout descriptions of Ophuls’s *mise-en-scène*,¹⁰² with its ubiquitous curtains, grillwork, plants, and *objets décoratifs* temporarily obscuring principal players during moments of dramatic import. Across the board, critics reduce the Ophulsian baroque to an obstructive style which either inhibits spectatorial immersion in the diegetic worlds of his films, or redirects spectatorial focus away from the gestalt and onto the detail.

When confronted in a 1957 interview by Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut about *Lola Montès* being labeled “baroque,” Ophuls confessed that he didn’t understand the contemporary usage of the term. Although he ventures that it may be intended as a synonym for “voluptuous,” his only reference point for what constitutes “baroque” art is the “charming” architecture of Austrian churches, architecture which “reflects the sun, ... is truly musical, and gives a certain dignity to the surroundings.”¹⁰³ By all indications, Ophuls did not set out to replicate a baroque aesthetic in his films, let alone generate a self-consciously baroque cinematic style of his own. However, whether or not Ophuls conceptualized his self-conscious deviation from the classical Hollywood style as baroque, he *did* understand his deviation as excessive, based on a desire for longer takes

¹⁰⁰ Sarris, *The American Cinema*, 71.

¹⁰¹ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 321.

¹⁰² McQuiston, *We’ll Meet Again*, 182.

¹⁰³ Rivette and Truffaut, “Interview with Max Ophuls,” 25.

and more complex camera movement. Excess itself is a quality that unites melodrama and the baroque by distinguishing them from the classical mode. As Perez argues, melodrama developed in eighteenth-century Europe as an excessively subjective alternative to classicism.¹⁰⁴ Ophuls doubles down on subjective excess by marrying melodrama to the baroque, carrying the subjective over to the intersubjective, extending an invitation to the viewer to join its conceptual dance. For some critics, what makes Ophuls's cinema baroque is how it shuts the viewer out, how it disrupts her view. I argue, on the contrary, that what is baroque about Ophuls's cinema is how it invites us in. Contrary to critics who read the film's recurring metaphors of circularity as stylistic and structural correlates to Lisa's narcissistic desire to seal herself in a world of fantasy,¹⁰⁵ Ophuls's baroque film is eminently intersubjective. As the aforementioned circuits of action and imagination demonstrate, circularity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is an eminently interpersonal phenomenon. Like the baroque, it invites the viewer in through form.

"Baroque clutter" is merely an epiphenomenon of Ophuls's baroque style, which inheres in more comprehensive aspects of his filmmaking: his complex treatment of spatial depth, and his dizzying relays of narrative perspective and identification. Ophuls's ubiquitous use of obstructive ostentation—the aforementioned ubiquitous curtains, grillwork, plants, and other *objets décoratifs* [Fig. 22]—does not serve to merely to obstruct our view of the principals, but more importantly to provide a sense of recessionary

¹⁰⁴ Perez, *The Eloquent Screen*, 201.

¹⁰⁵ Marcantonio, "Letter from an Unknown Woman."

space. Art historian Heinrich Wölfflin distinguishes classical art, which exhibits planarity (*Flächenhaften*), from baroque art, which creates a sense of recession (*Tiefenhaften*). This is not to say that classical or Renaissance art lacked a sense of depth, but rather that such depth was divided among a series of clearly delineated planes. In baroque art, such divisions lose their clarity; “the nerve center has shifted to the relation between front and rear parts,” and “the eye is constantly compelled to connect things in depth.”¹⁰⁶ Wölfflin insists that “the beauty of recession ... is always bound up with the impression of movement,”¹⁰⁷ a fitting description for how Ophuls’s moving camera coupled with his ornate *mise-en-scène* encourages viewers’ eyes to rove through the baroque space of his films. For instance, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*’s first elaborate tracking shot, which introduces us to Lisa at the moment of her initiation into erotic consciousness, begins by being edged out of the moving van by a man hoisting a harp [Fig. 23], a simulation of *being* in space. Lisa’s subsequent wandering through Stefan’s apartment, optically and haptically taking in his “beautiful things,” continues to model a baroque experience of space.¹⁰⁸ Circular forms also encourage such movement throughout the *mise-en-scène*, which is proliferate with open curves in the form of rococo motifs [Fig. 11] and iron railing.

¹⁰⁶ Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, 157.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰⁸ Another aspect of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*’s baroque space inheres in Franz Planer’s noirish photography, whose extreme contrasts of light and dark veer from Renaissance *chiaroscuro* straight into baroque *tenebroso*. Ophuls’s hybridization of the “woman’s film” and film noir, a formula he repeated in *Caught* (1948) and *The Reckless Moment* (1949), is in league with *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945, dir. John Stahl), *Mildred Pierce* (1945, dir. Michael Curtiz), and *Sudden Fear* (1952, dir. David Miller).

The baroque imaging of Ophulsian space finds an analogy in the baroque narrativization of that space. For decades, scholars have debated the film's proper narrative perspective: are the events of the letter as imaged in the film a visualization of Lisa's memory or Stefan's?¹⁰⁹ Does their framing from an "objective" point of view signal Lisa's comprehensive awareness of the past, or does it represent an ironic authorial commentary on Lisa's *naiveté*,¹¹⁰ particularly with regards to the working-class laborers who keep the machinery of the Viennese dream world in motion?¹¹¹ I side with Avrom Fleishman, who detects "an intersubjective constitution of perspective"¹¹² that relays through Lisa, Stefan, Ophuls, and what Neale calls "the views of the world."¹¹³ This relay constitutes a "baroque construction" not merely for its complexity, as Fleishman suggests,¹¹⁴ but for the way such complexity invites the viewer to become entangled in a web of identifications, misapprehensions, and sly commentaries, just as the film's baroque *mise-en-scène* beckons our wandering eye.

The film's famous pair of high-angle staircase shots fuse baroque space with baroque narrative. Filmed in succession to preserve the camera set-up,¹¹⁵ these near-

¹⁰⁹ See Perkins, "Same Tune Again!" 41-48, and Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, 179-84.

¹¹⁰ See Hunt, "The Paradox of the Unknown Lover" 55-60, and Pipolo, "The Aptness of Terminology," 167-70.

¹¹¹ See Wilson, "Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*" 1123-40; Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," 213-16; and Morgan, "Max Ophuls and the Limits of Virtuosity," 135.

¹¹² Fleishman, "Written Narration," 159. Donald Jellerson and Glynis Kinnan provide a complementary argument that the film destabilizes straightforward identificatory strategies, particularly with regards to gender. (Jellerson, "Hysteria and the Camera in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*," 13-24; Kinnan, "His Story Next to Hers," 261).

¹¹³ Neale, "Narration, Point of View, and Patterns in the Soundtrack of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*," 100.

¹¹⁴ Fleishman, "Written Narration," 159.

¹¹⁵ Bacher, *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios*, 151.

identical shots of an adolescent Lisa witnessing Stefan return to his apartment with a conquest [Fig. 24] and of an adult Lisa herself occupying the the position of the seduced [Fig. 25] have served as the fulcrum on which many arguments over the film's dynamics of identification have turned. Accommodating wildly varying interpretations—repetition with a difference as a representation of Lisa's evolving consciousness,¹¹⁶ an indication of her tragic obliviousness,¹¹⁷ a symbolization of her masochistic drive,¹¹⁸ or an illustration of her “mechanical” resignation to fate¹¹⁹—the baroque relay of perspective and valence conjured by the twin shots mingles with the baroque lines of the “ornate curving staircase,” which Forrest Williams deems “the very symbol of Ophuls's visual style and dynamic sensibility.”¹²⁰ This intersection of the narrational and the spatial baroque invites a Wölfflinian recession into the conceptual matrix of the film itself, blurring the distinction between separate planes of cinematic articulation.

In a recent study of the Austrian film industry during the four-year period of Austrofascism preceding the *Anschluss* of 1938, Robert Dassanowsky argues that the Viennese Film genre which flourished during the period was a form of “baroque cinema” in the sense that it launched a Catholic “counter-Reformation” against Protestant Nazi film aesthetics.¹²¹ Among the qualities of these films he describes as baroque—“massing,

¹¹⁶ Pipolo, “The Aptness of Terminology,” 175; Affron, *Cinema and Sentiment*, 94.

¹¹⁷ Camper, “Distance and Style,” 24; Wilson, “Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 1122.

¹¹⁸ Jellerson, “Hysteria and the Camera in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*,” 24.

¹¹⁹ Wexman, “The Transfiguration of History,” 8; Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 171.

¹²⁰ Williams, “The Mastery of Movement,” 74.

¹²¹ Dassanowsky, *Screening Transcendence*, x.

movement, chiaroscuro, ornamentation,”¹²² the “concept of life as performance and performance as life”¹²³—Dassanowsky includes the genre’s “baroque intensity in its use of metaphor and allegory.”¹²⁴ This link of continuity between the Viennese Films of Forst and Reisch and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* belies a signal point of discontinuity: whereas Dassanowsky argues that the baroque aesthetics of the Viennese Films operate as “political critique” (scholars of baroque art, such as Evonne Levy, may be more inclined to use the term “propaganda”¹²⁵), Ophuls’s film constitutes a largely apolitical entry in a substantially political career.

IV. Melodrama and Politics

Like metaphor, the melodramatic mode operates as an aid to conceptualization. Melodrama makes emotion legible. It makes morality legible. But it does not, according to some critics, make social relations legible. In a striking passage of his classic essay on film melodrama, “Tales of Sound and Fury,” Thomas Elsaesser speculates that the “persistence of melodrama” over two centuries may indicate how popular culture “has resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.” While Elsaesser is concerned that melodrama has bred ignorance of the social and political dimensions of modern experience, he is nonetheless sympathetic with melodrama’s “healthy distrust of intellectualization and abstract social theory,” with its insistence “that other structures of experience (those of suffering, for instance) are more

¹²² Ibid., 78.

¹²³ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 78. For a classic account of the allegorical dimension of the baroque, see Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 165-258.

¹²⁵ Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*.

in keeping with reality.”¹²⁶ For Elsaesser, the power of melodrama lies in its emotional immediacy and graspable “structures of experience.” By referring to suffering as a “structure of experience” rather than just as an “experience,” Elsaesser appropriates the language of phenomenology. By doing so, he implies that melodrama engages the viewer on a perceptual rather than a conceptual level. By distinguishing these “structures of experience” from “intellectualization and abstract social theory,” Elsaesser implies that melodramatic emotions are satisfying because they minimize conceptual demand. Of course, to empathize with a suffering character necessitates a cluster of concepts—what is a human? what is pain? what is the human experience of durational pain?—but such concepts are “in keeping with reality” because viewers have likely experienced suffering personally. But melodrama, according to Elsaesser, does not typically demand that we conceptualize to any degree that abstracts or intellectualizes away from an immediate emotional experience. “Intellectualization” is conceptualization taken to an extreme, an untethering of a phenomenon from the “structures of experience” that bind it to reality. In this regard (but not in every regard) melodrama is anti-Marxist because it refuses to locate “reality” in the “abstract” structure of social relations. Responding to the Marxist critics Raymond Williams, Charles Eckert, and Chuck Kleinhans who expanded on Elsaesser’s ideological critique of melodrama by insisting that the genre displaces “‘real’ social conflict” onto family narratives, Christine Gledhill objects to the idea that “the ‘real’ lies in a set of socio-economic relations outside the domestic and personal

¹²⁶ Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury,” 47.

sphere.”¹²⁷ If Gledhill’s critique is somewhat misrepresentative—Kleinhan’s analysis of “the family under capitalism” by no means separates the domestic sphere from a broader network of socio-economic relations—it is nonetheless vital for revealing the gendered values that undergird evaluations of melodrama’s ideological evaluation.

No one needs to resort to a complex taxonomy of ideological filmmaking—like the one famously proposed by Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, which issues from the premise that “*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it ... or within which it is produced”¹²⁸—in order to prove that Ophuls was an explicitly political filmmaker. No one needs to venture to the edge of what Jameson calls “absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation”¹²⁹ to discern a political message or a leftist ideological foundation in many of Ophuls’s films. Ophuls biographer Helmut Asper has detailed the director’s political commitments, which incubated during his tenure working as an actor and a director in the politically and aesthetically radical theater of the Weimar Republic.¹³⁰ Collaborating with political radicals like the director Fritz Holl, and members of the Communist Party, like actor Karl Paryla,¹³¹ Ophuls mounted a series of left-wing productions that decried the persecution of minorities: Jews, lesbians, prisoners, revolutionaries.¹³² While acknowledging the content restrictions imposed on Ophuls by each of the various national film industries in which he worked—

¹²⁷ Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field,” 13.

¹²⁸ Comolli and Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” 30.

¹²⁹ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 17.

¹³⁰ Asper, “From Stage to Screen,” 184.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 190.

German, French, Dutch, Italian, American—Asper maintains that Ophuls’s nonetheless “smuggled political innuendos into his films as contraband.”¹³³ Asper reads *Liebelei* as a call for pacifism, *Komodie om Geld* (1936) as an attack on capitalism, *Le roman de Werther* as a condemnation of the Third Reich, *La ronde* and *Le plaisir* (1952) as a critique of the bourgeoisie, and *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* and *Lola Montès* as complex meditations on pretty much all of the major social problems: oppression, revolution, treason, war, and the abuse of power.¹³⁴ Ophuls, according to Asper, communicated these political messages not merely through content, but through form—specifically, Weimar-inflected, anti-illusionistic, alienating form. Although, unlike Douglas Sirk—the other great *émigré*-purveyor of classical Hollywood melodrama—Ophuls never staged a Bertolt Brecht production, he knew Brecht personally and discussed his ideas on the theater during their mutual exile in Hollywood. Ophuls’s interest in anti-illusionism, however, was more likely influenced by Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), which he staged in 1925, starring as the director.¹³⁵

Brechtian distance has been a key concept for critics determined to argue that *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a politically committed film. Fred Camper, writing in the heyday of Marxist film criticism in the early 1970s, argues that the film is a thoroughly Brechtian text, its effects of “cinematic distance” constantly reminding us of its inherent artifice and preventing us from achieving “true union” with the characters and

¹³³ Ibid., 191.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 191-92.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 193.

the action.¹³⁶ Wood offers a more tempered interpretation, arguing—in two separate essays—that Ophuls’s balances “ironic detachment” with sympathetic “identification,” a balance that prevents a lapse into either sentimentality or cynicism.¹³⁷ For Wood, Ophuls’s delicate balance allows him to broach issues of gender and class, the two dominant themes in politically-oriented scholarship on the film. In addition to Wood, Williams, White, and Naremore have drawn attention to the film’s treatment of class dynamics, though their conclusions are not exactly radical: the perception of aristocratic freedom holds an allure for the bourgeoisie;¹³⁸ Lisa is susceptible to Freudian family romance;¹³⁹ and the working class is invisible to both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.¹⁴⁰ No one is arguing that Ophuls’s class analysis in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is anywhere near as biting as his satire of capitalism in *Komodie om Geld*, a film significantly set in the present in which it was produced. While Ophuls was a politically-oriented filmmaker, his political gestures were always timely and targeted, not general and diffuse. While Naremore insists that all of Ophuls’s Viennese films “indirectly suggest the political tensions that gave rise to Hitler,”¹⁴¹ it is clear that despite Letter’s class consciousness and gentle social commentary, Ophuls’s concerns were eminently more aesthetic than political. In this respect, his Vienna-based films are of a piece with the Viennese Films produced during the Austrofascist period, which were never overtly

¹³⁶ Camper, “Distance and Style,” 21.

¹³⁷ Wood, “Ewig hin der Liebe Glück,” 230, and *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*, 207.

¹³⁸ Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*, 209; Naremore, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 46.

¹³⁹ White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 169.

¹⁴⁰ Williams, *Max Ophuls and the Cinema of Desire*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Naremore, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 16.

political but were nonetheless “attentive to abuses of power, class conflicts, and financial disparities.”¹⁴²

Feminist analyses of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* range from readings of the film as an indictment of women’s oppression¹⁴³ to arguments that the film subtly deconstructs “phallic representation[s] of subjectivity and desire.”¹⁴⁴ Tania Modleski ends her classic essay on *Letter from an Unknown Woman* on a note of optimism, arguing that Lisa’s relationship to time is neither obsessional—focused single-mindedly on an ever-receding future goal—nor hysterical—in thrall to an irretrievable past. Lisa, according to Modleski, does not fit the Freudian definition of a hysteric because “she does not *suffer* from reminiscences,” she enjoys them. Modleski adds that it is in fact *Stefan* who fits the Freudian definition of the hysteric, whose incessant womanizing constitutes a futile repetition compulsion.¹⁴⁵ Though widely anthologized,¹⁴⁶ Modleski’s interpretation has fallen on many a deaf ear. A substantial contingent of commentators refuse to see Lisa as anything more than a victim of patriarchy or personal psychopathology. Following

¹⁴² Dassanowsky, *Screening Transcendence*, 82.

¹⁴³ Harcourt, “Circles of Delight and Despair,” 7.

¹⁴⁴ Kinnan, “His Story Next to Hers,” 259. Oddly, to my knowledge, no scholar has accused Ophuls himself of cynicism with regards to gender. Although he made several movies about people (mostly women) who were undone after committing adultery (or near-adultery), Koch reports that Ophuls engaged in a series of extramarital affairs with impunity. (Koch, “From Script to Screen with Max Ophuls,” 42).

¹⁴⁵ Modleski, “Time and Desire in the Woman’s Film,” 29. Although I appreciate Modleski’s refusal to pathologize Lisa’s desires, it bears noting that Lisa leaves little indication in her letter that she knows she has the upper hand. In fact, Lisa’s letter occasionally betrays her jealousy at Stefan’s perceived freedom. When she recalls the years she begrudgingly spent in Linz after her mother’s remarriage to Herr Kästner (Howard Freeman), Lisa inquires of Stefan, “You who have always lived so freely, do you have any idea what life is like in a little garrison town?”

¹⁴⁶ Within a decade of its publication in a 1984 edition of *Cinema Journal*, Modleski’s essay was not only reprinted among the “Reviews and Commentaries” section accompanying the published continuity script of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* in 1986, and in Christine Gledhill’s pioneering 1987 anthology on melodrama and the woman’s film, but also in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy’s fourth edition of their general reader on *Film Theory and Criticism* in 1992.

Simone de Beauvoir's argument that some women channel their energies into heterosexual romance in order to share in the male power that the patriarchal order prohibits them from securing by other means, Lucy Fischer argues that Lisa's psychopathology is a direct consequence of patriarchy—she is obsessed with Stefan because patriarchy won't let her *be* Stefan. Fischer reduces Lisa's choice to pursue a *grand amour* with Stefan rather than settle into a conventional marriage with Lieutenant Kaltnegger (John Good) or with Stauffer to a distraction from the *real* choice that patriarchy prohibits her from making: channeling her energies into a creatively fulfilling career, or channeling her energies into an impossible romance. Fischer laments, "If Stefan's creative possibilities include being a renowned concert pianist, Lisa's expressive outlet is limited to that of being an 'artist of love.'" ¹⁴⁷ Without denying that there were indeed structural barriers that prohibited women from certain occupations around the turn of the century, it is important to note in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* Lisa is a working woman who encounters several other working women, from the *Prater's* stationary train attendant to the enterprising Mme. Spitzer (Sonja Bryden). Lisa even encounters female *musicians*, from the *Prater's* dance hall orchestra to the opera singers performing in *The Magic Flute*. To be fair, none of these women are presented as renowned concert pianists like Stefan. But the film makes it eminently clear that even with all of his privileges and opportunities (which are considerable), Stefan remains miserable—desperate, dejected, depleted. Contrary to Fischer's theory, the film makes no indication that if offered the same "creative possibilities" as Stefan Lisa would have been

¹⁴⁷ Fischer, "Kiss Me Deadly," 95.

any happier than she was pining for him and feeding off of sublime memories of their fleeting union.

Further, Lisa does in fact exercise creative agency by authoring her own life story, an accomplishment that Mulvey and White curiously diminish.¹⁴⁸ Some critics have taken the argument for Lisa's agency a step further, insisting that she is a *femme fatale* who wittingly hastens Stefan's demise by inciting him to engage with Stauffer in a duel he's sure to lose.¹⁴⁹ In contradistinction to the critics who have downplayed Lisa's agency, these writers absolve Stefan of responsibility for his own actions. Broadening the interpretation that Lisa caused Stefan's death, Alan Williams suggests that the film allows us to "read" Lisa "as a source of death for all those she loves."¹⁵⁰ Whereas the more limited interpretation fails to recognize male agency, Williams's interpretation—which posits Lisa as the "source" not only of Stefan Sr.'s death, but of Stefan Jr.'s, too—entirely neglects the role of chance in the film's conventionally melodramatic narrative. Typhus is the source of Stefan Jr.'s death, not Lisa. If any person is directly responsible for Stefan Jr.'s death, it is either the "first conductor" who allowed Lisa and Stefan Jr. to board a quarantined car, or the "second conductor," who may or may not have remembered to

¹⁴⁸ White makes the bizarre claim that although "Lisa is an author in her own right" her failure to sign the letter arises "figuratively from her being a woman, and therefore not the traditional arbiter of her own tale." (White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 138). While Stefan may not have remembered precisely which unknown woman has written to him until his servant John (Art Smith) reveals her name, there is never any indication that he has mistaken a man as the arbiter of her tale. To make such a case, one would have to look beyond evidence internal to the text and acknowledge that this *Letter from an Unknown Woman* was in fact written by three men: Zweig, Koch, and Ophuls. Mulvey argues that, like other Ophuls heroines, Lisa dies from an "inability to assert control over [her] own narrative," which "ultimately marginalize[s her]." This could not be further from the truth, as Lisa exerts absolute control over her narrative—she is, after all, the one who imposes a narrative on her own life, and it is a narrative in which her own agency is anything but marginal. (Mulvey, "Love, History, and Max Ophuls," 26).

¹⁴⁹ See Greenspun, "Corrections," 92; Walker, "Ophuls in Hollywood," 48; and Fleishman, "Written Narration," 161-62.

¹⁵⁰ Williams, *Max Ophuls and the Cinema of Desire*, 58.

warn him about the quarantined car.¹⁵¹ While she thankfully avoids blaming Lisa for her son's death, Mulvey advances a similarly untenable interpretation of the film's ending. Mulvey insists that Lisa's death is "directly caused by the lover's rejection" and only "rationalized diegetically through the typhoid fever she has caught from her son."¹⁵² From a narrative standpoint, Mulvey's interpretation is wrong on its face: it is not Stefan's rejection of Lisa that "causes" her death, but his invitation to resume their affair that leads to her sending Stefan Jr. off on a two-week vacation. Further, Stefan doesn't reject Lisa during their reunion; rather, it is Lisa who abandons Stefan in his apartment once she realizes that he doesn't recognize her. Finally, even if Stefan *had* rejected Lisa upon their reunion—and the scene in his apartment does suggest this possibility, given that she may never live up to Stefan's ideal woman figured by his prized goddess statue—she would have died anyway, having contracted typhus *before* revisiting Stefan's apartment. By claiming that the contraction of typhus is a diegetic rationalization rather than a direct cause, Mulvey disturbingly implies that the *true* cause of Lisa's death is figurative, metaphorical, somehow extra-diegetic. With this claim, Mulvey succumbs to the pernicious anti-logic decried by Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* that disease is not merely a biological phenomenon but an indication of spiritual decay.¹⁵³ Though the

¹⁵¹ The second conductor asks the first, "Didn't I tell you that compartment was quarantined?" a question that can be taken literally or rhetorically.

¹⁵² Mulvey, "Love, History, and Max Ophuls," 26. Carla Marcantonio offers a similar interpretation, insisting that the fact that Lisa's "existence has been unacknowledged [is] a fact that, quite literally, kills her." (Marcantonio, "Letter from an Unknown Woman").

¹⁵³ Without invoking Lisa's fatal illness, Doane also blames Lisa for her own death, claiming that she and the doomed protagonists of *The Letter* (1940) and *Madame Bovary* (1949) "quite literally loved themselves to death." (Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 118).

film's treatment of the ravages of illness is dramatic, with its candle-lit death bed and searing orchestral score, its representation of the cause of illness is eminently practical.

But not all critics read (or misread) the film as resolutely political. Timothy Conley argues that the film deliberately eschews the political for the personal, in effect removing Vienna "from its historical location as the center of a dying empire."¹⁵⁴

Wexman puts the matter even more bluntly, insisting that the film "addressed no contemporary cultural or political issues."¹⁵⁵ In an unapologetically psycho-biographical interpretation, Wexman proposes that the film's regression to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna indicates Ophuls's desire to "poeticize" his "despair, both about his prospects as a German Jew and about the future of technology."¹⁵⁶ According to Wexman, Ophuls's style of movement and repetition evokes the "private space of memory" rather than "a larger historical reality," and his "melodramatic intensification" of Lisa's memories are an attempt to "exorcise ... historically motivated trauma."¹⁵⁷ Rosalind Galt accuses Wexman's interpretation of resting on "anti-pretty logic," because it figures Ophuls's decorative qualities as a rejection of "real meaning."¹⁵⁸ Commending critics like Chris Wisniewski for "taking Ophuls's pretty style seriously" (i.e., arguing that his camera movement raises questions about class and gender), Galt implies that there is only one "real meaning" that matters: the social world is flawed. Although she wrote a long,

¹⁵⁴ Conley, *Screening Vienna*, 25.

¹⁵⁵ Wexman, "Transfigurations of History," 4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁸ Galt, *Pretty*, 173.

brilliant book defending the “pretty” against the an allegedly hegemonic critical preference for “robust and masculinist art house style”¹⁵⁹ she nonetheless succumbs to the historically masculinist conviction that the highest value in cinema is political efficacy, implying that a credo of prettiness for prettiness’s sake is intolerable. While repeating with utter conviction that pretty films—some of which are nearly a century old—harbor “radical political potential,” Galt’s project nonetheless rests on the premise that such potential (while ostensibly visible onscreen) can only be “redeemed for political transformation” by the heroic efforts of a film scholar.¹⁶⁰

If *Letter from an Unknown Woman* demands to be taken seriously, such demands do not necessarily transcend the spheres of the aesthetic and the erotic. Aestheticism echoes through the final words of Lisa’s letter. She attests, “My life can be measured by the moments I’ve had with you and our child. If only you could have shared those moments.”¹⁶¹ In the infamous “Conclusion” to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Walter Pater voices similar sentiments:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?
To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹⁶¹ The far more bitter ending to the letter in Zweig’s novella contains no such statement. (Zweig, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, 60-62).

¹⁶² Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 119-20.

By accounting the value of her life in terms of moments of erotic and aesthetic pleasure, stimulated by anticipations, experiences, and memories of Stefan and his music, Lisa proves herself a Paterian through and through.¹⁶³ Her sole regret—“if only”—is not for herself, but for Stefan, who never got to share in the very pleasure she thinks that he provided for her—a pleasure we know was largely generated by Lisa’s own richly conceptual imagination.

Despite the film’s intersubjective structuration, the baroque relay of perspectives is nonetheless anchored by Lisa and her titular letter. Although the film illuminates Lisa’s human imperfections, such gentle ironies do not invalidate her status as a supreme romantic conceptualizer. The film positions her as a tragic victim solely of typhus—not of patriarchal oppression, not of social hierarchy, not even of Stefan’s “rejection.” Faced with death, she makes triumphant use of her final hours, shaping a fulfilling narrative out of a life that many critics deem a failure. Through the conceptual act of writing, Lisa is not merely a citizen of Vienna at the *fin-de-siècle*; rather, she counts among the artists and intellectuals who shaped the international imaginary around Vienna 1900. Her final statement is no screed on the injustices of class stratification and gendered double standards, but rather a testament to her twin devotion to the aesthetic and the erotic, two principles which, for Lisa, find a common “object” in Stefan and incubate in her own imagination. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophüls honors these values by honoring Lisa and, by extension, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Contrary to Wexman, Ophüls’s decision to

¹⁶³ Lisa’s foil is her own husband. After witnessing her reunion with Stefan at a production of *The Magic Flute*, he turns a cold shoulder to her on the ride home, dismissing her “romantic nonsense” and insisting on the importance of “honor and decency.”

“return” to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna was not an attempt to escape the historical trauma of exile, the Second World War, and the technological developments that would enable mass annihilation, but rather a means of reckoning with his own ambivalence toward the city. Comparing Vienna unfavorably with Weimar Germany, citing the former as “a dying city that could only contemplate its own past” and the latter as a nation teeming with “urban industrial life,” Ophuls nonetheless confessed he was “fascinated” by Vienna’s “melancholy charm.”¹⁶⁴ In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls lets fascination take over, producing a tribute to the city as *schöne Leich*, celebrating a woman devoted to Eros in the face of Thanatos, and returning to old Vienna to provide a new direction for melodrama.

¹⁶⁴ Ophuls cited in Williams, “Reading Ophuls Reading Schnitzler,” 75.

CHAPTER TWO: Erotic Transformations: Dialectics of Victimhood and Anti-Historicist Auteurism in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974)

The first film in Liliana Cavani's self-proclaimed "Mitteleuropa trilogy"¹—followed by 1977's *Beyond Good and Evil* and 1985's *The Berlin Affair*—*The Night Porter* (1974) has been alternatively denounced as an apology for Fascism and celebrated as an anti-Fascist "polemic," a label Cavani repeatedly applied to her film during production.² Though set in Vienna in 1957, most critics have downplayed the significance of film's setting, insisting that Vienna merely provides a decadent atmosphere for a decadent love story. A notable exception is Robert Dassanowsky, who speculates that Cavani locates her story in Vienna because Austria's "dual victim-perpetrator" role in Nazism reflects the ambiguity between victim and perpetrator in Max (Dirk Bogarde) and Lucia's (Charlotte Rampling) relationship.³ In this chapter, however, I will demonstrate that Cavani's engagement with Viennese history extends much further back than the *Anschluss* of 1938. While the Third Reich and the Holocaust dominate the film's imaginary, *The Night Porter* draws upon Vienna's modern development—from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to interwar *Rote Wien*—in order to expand the stakes of historical engagement beyond *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. I will argue that *The Night Porter* advocates an anti-Historicist engagement with the past. The ideology fueling Cavani's aesthetic strategies is more broadly anti-collectivist than narrowly anti-Fascist, and is thus figured in the transgressive, anti-social dyad of Max and Lucia, particularly

¹ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 86.

² Bogarde, *An Orderly Man*, 140, 164, 183.

³ Dassanowsky, "Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other)," 168.

especially through the dialectic of Lucia's victimhood and the capacity for erotic transformation that it generates. With *The Night Porter*, Cavani enacts her own transformation of melodrama by engaging, transgressively, with one of its perennial themes: victimhood.

In the following chapter, I will first establish that while critics have long interpreted Max as Cavani's surrogate from a psychoanalytic perspective, Cavani in fact positions Lucia as her artistic surrogate. Lucia functions as Cavani's surrogate because her sado-masochistic play with Max duplicates Cavani's aesthetic strategy: the erotic transformation of the past. The second section traces the film's critical reception, which has been dominated by the problem of eroticizing the Holocaust. The third section discusses the film's treatment of victimhood, deliberately shifting the critical conversation from the focus on the film's victim-victimizer dynamics to a focus on the film's dialectic of victimhood and agency. While affirming Lucia's unambiguous victim status as a prisoner and later target of Nazi persecution, I demonstrate that the film rejects the agent-victim binary and presents Lucia as a heroine whose victimhood becomes a source of her agency. In the fourth section, I demonstrate how Lucia's agency, which manifests in her transformative erotic imagination, finds its parallel in Cavani's anti-Historicist treatment of Vienna's artistic, architectural, and musical heritage. While Cavani has acknowledged the influence of German Expressionism on the film's visual style, I align her film stylistically and philosophically with the neo-Mannerist Vienna Secession movement, which itself was founded on a rejection of *Gründerzeit* Historicism. Ultimately, Cavani rejects the Fascistic underpinnings of historicism's rigid categorical

correspondences, championing the unconscious's impulse toward personal gratification and anticipating the totalitarian ideological and aesthetic boundary policing of the film's critics by prefiguring them in the characters of the ex-Nazis. A Nietzschean devotee, Cavani stages a melodramatic conflict between Apollo and Dionysus over the uses and abuses of history for the present.

I. Lucia as Surrogate

As a character, Max has dominated the critical discourse surrounding the film. This focus is not entirely unwarranted; he has more screen time than any other character, and his occupation supplies the film's title. But underplaying Lucia's role, and refusing to pay Rampling's performance sufficient attention, has led to many critical distortions. The preoccupation with Max at the expense of Lucia has yielded two major arguments that I would like to challenge: first, that Max is a more fully realized character than Lucia; and second, that Max serves as Cavani's sole authorial surrogate. Susan Derwin crystallizes the first argument, insisting that "in terms of character development, Lucia is not presented with the same depth as Max. Throughout the film, she appears almost exclusively through the filter of Max's vision, and as a result, she exists before the viewer only in relation to Max."⁴ In proffering this view, Derwin joins critics such as Millicent Marcus who argue that Cavani reduces Lucia's subjectivity to a body which functions as "the literal staging ground for the struggle between dominance and submission"⁵; Mirto Golo Stone, who insists that Max and not Lucia "gains ... privileged access to the

⁴ Derwin, *Rage Is the Subtext*, 50.

⁵ Marcus, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz*, 52.

symbolic order” and “defines the symbolic terms in which the experience is to be understood”⁶; and Rebecca Scherr who figures Lucia as “a site of erotic investment and speculation for the spectator” who experiences her “through Max’s vision.”⁷ Similarly, Victor L. Schermer argues that Max is the film’s “true protagonist.”⁸ Associating Max with the trickster archetype, Schermer insists that he is a protean, “post-modern character,” a “deconstructed” array of multiple selves which rotate with the social context.⁹ Conversely, according to Schermer, Lucia’s personal development has been arrested by her sexual abuse leaving her, “relatively speaking, a one-dimensional character. Even as an adult, she shows little emotion, moral sense, or life experience.”¹⁰

Kaja Silverman advances the second argument. In a brilliant psychoanalytic reading, Silverman claims that although the film “unequivocally portray[s]” Lucia’s masochism, it is in fact more invested in Max’s identification with this feminized masochism.¹¹ In her feminist film theory classic, *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman expands her argument to address the dynamics of Cavani’s authorship. Describing Cavani as “a female author whose preoccupations are neither classically “feminine” nor overtly feminist,”¹² Silverman insists that Cavani’s “authorial subjectivity relies heavily upon her

⁶ Stone, “The Feminist Critic and Salome” 44.

⁷ Scherr, “The Uses of Memory and Abuses of Fiction,” 280-81.

⁸ Schermer, “Sexuality, Power, and Love in Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 933.

⁹ Ibid., 936-37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 933.

¹¹ Silverman, “Masochism and Subjectivity,” 5.

¹² Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 212.

imaginary relation to her male characters.”¹³ Contrary to critics such as Beverle Houston and Masha Kinder who argue, regrettably, that *The Night Porter* “celebrates female masochism,”¹⁴ Silverman posits that Max is the film’s true masochist, a figure marked by phallic divestiture, the renunciation of power, and the occupation of a traditionally feminine subject position.¹⁵ Although Silverman sought to critique some of the Freudian assumptions underlying Laura Mulvey’s classic formulation of spectatorial dynamics in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” she nonetheless came to a Mulveyan conclusion that masculine subjectivity lay at the heart of Cavani’s system of cinematic signification.

The first of these arguments is misguided, and the second is insufficient. Contrary to Derwin and Marcus, *The Night Porter* does not present Lucia as a mere body for ideological inscription, nor as a projection of Max’s consciousness. The film is full of scenes centered on Lucia in which Max is absent, in addition to memories presented from Lucia’s point of view. Further, she is a fully fleshed out character, brimming with desire, addled with conflict, haunted by ruminations. While she is less morally compromised—and thus less agonized—than Max, Lucia is far from the “one-dimensional” character observed by Schermer, and his insistence that Lucia shows less “emotion, moral sense, or life experience” than Max is absurd on its face (does Lucia really show less moral sense than a Nazi who continues to murder people after the war? Does being imprisoned and sexually abused in a concentration camp constitute insufficient life experience?). Further,

¹³ Ibid., 215. Schermer concurs, suggesting “one could argue that Cavani identifies herself with Max.” (“Sexuality, Power, and Love in Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 937).

¹⁴ Houston and Kinder, “*The Night Porter* as Daydream,” 363.

¹⁵ Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 219.

I believe, contra Silverman, that it is not only Max but also Lucia who operates as Cavani's authorial surrogate. Androcentric interpretations of the film have placed Max's dynamic relationship to power at the center of the film, when in fact Cavani uses Max's Fascist past, his latent bisexuality, his dizzying oscillation between cruelty and empathy, his coterie of ex-Nazis, and his apartment to flesh out the film's principal polemic, which is embodied by Lucia. Consistent with Hollywood's woman's film of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s,¹⁶ in Cavani's macabre melodrama Max is the object and Lucia is the subject. If, as Silverman argues, Max represents Cavani's role as a female director, and in particular her complex structural relation to power, then I will contend that Lucia duplicates Cavani's principal authorial project: the erotic transformation of the past.

Cavani's employment of Lucia as authorial surrogate is feminist by default if not by design. Cavani's relationship to feminism is far from straightforward. In a 1974 *New York Times* interview with Grace Lichtenstein, Cavani declared, "In ten years I've always felt perfectly at home with male colleagues ... I've never wanted to participate in any festivals that were exclusively for women because that's like making an exhibition of blind painters ... freaks. I don't love ghettos."¹⁷ Despite ongoing feminist efforts to defend Cavani's controversial film, often with recourse to Mulvey's landmark essay (published the year after *The Night Porter*'s international release), the film's feminist bona fides are based less on a deliberate critique or subversion of patriarchy than on its focus on an agentive female protagonist. In fact, Cavani anticipates and inverts Mulvey's categories.

¹⁶ See Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 153-88, and Doane, "The 'Woman's Film'," 283-98 and *The Desire to Desire*.

¹⁷ Lichtenstein, "In Liliana Cavani's Love Story, Love Means Always Having to Say Ouch," D19.

According to Mulvey, classical narrative cinema figures man as “maker of meaning” and woman as “bearer of meaning”;¹⁸ conversely, Cavani’s identification with Max rests on their shared position as bearers of meaning, and her identification with Lucia rests on their shared position as makers—or *re*-makers—of meaning. For Mulvey, the spectacle of the female image in film “tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.” Thus, according to Mulvey, woman’s “alien presence ... has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative.”¹⁹ But Lucia is by no means an “alien presence” in Cavani’s cinematic world, and no modifications of her screen presence are necessary in order to maintain narrative cohesion. If, in Mulvey’s formulation, the female image is antithetical to narrative development—a contention that would be taken up and expanded in feminist discourse about the role of “excess” in the filmic system²⁰—in Cavani’s film narrative fleshes out Lucia’s character, serving to illustrate the dialectic of victimhood and agency that constitutes Lucia’s subjectivity.²¹

Because her dialogue is limited, Rampling communicates depth of character primarily through her physical performance. Although Rampling’s performance has its

¹⁸ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰ Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” 130-42; Williams, “Film Bodies,” 2-13.

²¹ Critics have been so persuaded by Mulvey’s account of spectatorship that it is hard to see that voyeurism in *The Night Porter* is not exclusively gendered male. For every instance of male spectatorship—Max wielding his Leica camera, Klaus’s ever-present monocle, the ex-Nazis’s surveillance of Max’s apartment in the Karl-Marx-Hof—there is a corresponding example of female spectatorship—the prisoners who watch an SS guard rape a male prisoner and Max nurse Lucia’s wound, Lucia spying on the ex-Nazis’ tribunal, and Cavani’s own directorial gaze—not to mention the mixed gender audiences for Bert’s dance, Lucia’s cabaret routine, and the *Volksoper* production of *The Magic Flute*. Lucia’s spying on the Nazi tribunal in a profile shot reminiscent of Norman Bates’s (Anthony Perkins) surreptitious glimpse of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) undressing in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) exemplifies Cavani’s androgynous gaze.

admirers,²² many contemporary reviewers were largely unimpressed. Pauline Kael remarks of Rampling's "lifeless" performance that "at our first view of her sullen beauty, the sensual vibrations of her come-hither nastiness promise undreamt-of intensities," but laments that "nothing lives up to the foul promise."²³ Echoing Kael, Geoffrey Minish christens Rampling "mistress of the blank look."²⁴ Vincent Canby notes a disjunction between Rampling's "magnificent profile" and "very tiny passions," which are "like a boy's."²⁵ But these critics aren't looking closely enough. Technically exquisite, Rampling's acting captures the tension between unbridled emotionality and heroic constraint. But more importantly, Rampling's performance acts as a narrative agent, showing the arc of Lucia's personality over a formative period. Lucia begins the film at the age of fifteen and ends at the age of twenty-seven. Rampling mobilizes her whole body to demonstrate an evolution from dreamy, demure child to worldly, confident adult. On the swings at the *Prater*, her eyes are unfocused, taking in the world as it whirls by. In the processing center at the Hungarian concentration camp, she lets her arms fall to the side of her body and lowers her head to avoid eye contact (in contrast to another prisoner behind her who stands with his arms folded and his head held high). She turns her head to the side to avoid the harsh light held by Max's assistant [Fig. 26]. When we are first introduced to her in Vienna in 1957, she bends her arms casually in front of her torso,

²² Houston and Kinder laud "the extraordinary performances of Rampling and Bogarde" (Houston and Kinder, "*The Night Porter* as Daydream," 367), and Lisa Patti remarks that Lucia's varied wardrobe offers her more "mobility between positions" and access to "modes of performance" than Max's more restricted wardrobe does. (Patti, "Fascinating Fashion," 128).

²³ Kael, "Stuck in the Fun," 151.

²⁴ Minish, "Last Tango in Auschwitz," 39.

²⁵ Canby, "*The Night Porter* is Romantic Pornography."

signaling absolute comfort in her bourgeois social milieu. Rampling's use of what Vsevolod Pudovkin and James Naremore term "expressive objects"²⁶ allows her to communicate emotion and the access of memory nonverbally. In her deliberate handling of objects, Rampling aptly executes "the actor's job ... to keep objects under expressive control, letting them become signifiers of feeling."²⁷ When Lucia topples a bottle of ointment or or spills coffee on a white tablecloth, it is clear that her unexpected reunion with Max has thrown her comfortable, predictable life out of whack. When Lucia clutches a piece of fabric, we are aware that her tactile sensations have evoked eroticized memories of her relationship with Max in the *Lager*. In effect, Rampling's performance makes *The Night Porter* a "woman's film." Perhaps one of the reasons critics have focused more attention on Max can be explain by a bias toward curiosity about villains rather than victims. Director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg articulated this position in a 1980 interview:

It is unfortunately true that the most interesting aspect of a crime is the criminal, not the victim. Without a doubt, what is most interesting is the motive and psychology of the criminal ... It is easy to understand the revolt of slaves, but difficult to comprehend the evil of tyrants.²⁸

But *The Night Porter*, like many of the melodramas which preceded it, puts the victim's experience at the center of the story.

II. The Moralizers Among Us: *The Night Porter*'s Critical Reception

²⁶ Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 83-87.

²⁷ Ibid., 87.

²⁸ Wasserman, "Interview with Hans-Jürgen Syberberg," 5.

In the thick of *The Night Porter*'s initial critical reception, Andrew Sarris observed "the moralizers are out in full force."²⁹ In roughly half a century, the moralizing hasn't stopped; recent reviews and scholarly articles continue to convey unease with the film's eroticization of the Holocaust, while acknowledging that the film is marginally less exploitative than the unapologetically lurid Nazisploitation that appeared in its wake, namely Don Edmonds's *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* (1975) and Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty* (1976).³⁰ But no recent take, popular or scholarly, can match the viciousness of the initial attacks. Briefly censored in Italy for its sexually explicit content—a cover for the censors' unease with its anti-Fascist polemics, according to Cavani³¹—when the film hit U.S. screens it was dismissed as "trash" and "junk" by leading critics such as Canby, Kael, and Roger Ebert.³² Others slammed the film as "pretentious," "sensationalistic," and "phony," unfavorably comparing it with other entries from the European art cinema's emerging subgenre of films about transgressive sexuality, such as Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967) and Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1971)³³ (Pasolini's *Salò* [1975] and Barbet

²⁹ Sarris, "The Nasty Nazis," 77.

³⁰ Stiglegger, "Beyond Good and Evil?"; Dassanowsky, "Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other," 167.

³¹ "Liliana Cavani Interview," *The Night Porter*, DVD, Criterion.

³² Canby, "The Night Porter Is Romantic Pornography"; Kael, "Stuck in the Fun," 151; Ebert, "The Night Porter." Kael and Ebert had never shied away from sex and violence in film, and both had proved ardent champions of Bertolucci's controversial *Last Tango in Paris* only two years prior. Nevertheless, they couldn't see past the film's "exploitation" of the Holocaust. Dirk Bogarde may have been over-sensitive when he declared that "for savagery" Kael's review "could have felled the Empire State Building with its blows." (Bogarde, *An Orderly Man*, 192). In fact, Kael's piece is a customary take-down, unfair and arch, but mercifully free of the hand-wringing that plagues Ebert's review. One year after publishing his Pulitzer Prize-winning essay lamenting the dearth of decent leading roles for actresses, Ebert turned his head from Rampling's Lucia—one of the decade's best female performances as one of the decade's most complex female characters—to heed the siren song of Susan Sontag's deliciously overwrought warning "Fascinating Fascism." Like Sontag, Ebert was concerned that *The Night Porter*'s flirtation with "Nazi chic" may be a harbinger of Fascism's unwelcome return.

³³ Sayre, "The Night Porter," L58.

Schroeder's *Maîtresse* [1976] were still to come). But these lazy takedowns pale in comparison to Henry Giroux's blazing polemic in the pages of *Cineaste*. According to Giroux, *The Night Porter* "represents a high point in social, cultural, and political barbarism"³⁴ because it "extoll[s] fascist principles" and "attempt[s] to legitimize the death of millions of innocent victims at the hands of the Nazis."³⁵ Giroux's flames of righteous indignation forge a bizarre fantasy of collective orgiastic surrender to the Nazis, a fantasy with no basis in Cavani's film apart from a decidedly un-nuanced interpretation of Max and Lucia's intricately nuanced relationship. Giroux's militant *Zhdanovschina* yields an even more depressing conclusion:

The blatant neo-fascism of *The Night Porter* and the inability of the public to condemn it stands as a mockery of the idea of the artist/filmmaker as a freely creating individual whose work lies outside moral and political responsibilities. The bourgeois filmmaker, especially in the United States, is caught in a self-indulging fantasy that clings to the empty philosophical notion that art belongs to an ethereal realm whose existence transcends any social demands or obligations.³⁶

Although ostensibly launched at the un-gendered "bourgeois filmmaker," Giroux's accusation that Cavani neglects her "moral and political responsibilities," that her work is beholden to "social demands [and] obligations," has gendered as well as class-based implications. Giroux perpetuates a sexist trope that classical Hollywood melodrama alternately affirms and critiques: that women must subordinate their desires in order to preserve the social order. But the most disturbing aspect of Giroux's critique is its victim-blaming logic. The pleasure Lucia derives from her sexual encounters with Max

³⁴ Giroux, "The Challenge of Neo-Fascist Culture," 32.

³⁵ Ibid., 31.

³⁶ Ibid., 32.

constitutes, for Giroux, a legitimization of the Holocaust. In other words, she was asking for it. Emotional, aesthetic, and erotic engagement with the memory of the Holocaust does not *ipso facto* constitute an apology for the Holocaust.³⁷ Of course, these objections rest on one implicit idea: that there are proper and improper ways to represent the Holocaust, that the Holocaust demands of art a strict match between content and style.³⁸

The Night Porter is provocative because it violates a crucial taboo in Holocaust representation: eroticization.³⁹

³⁷ In the same issue of *Cineaste*, Ruth McCormick naively inquires, “[Lucia] promptly deserts her perfectly nice husband to share a life of beatings, chains, blood-letting, and eternal death. Why?” (McCormick, “Fascism à la Mode or Radical Chic?” 33). Naturally, she never asks why Max forfeits the good graces of the ex-Nazis to shack up with a woman who cuts his feet, steals his food, and could expose his identity to the police at any moment. But men are allowed to be complicated. Especially killers. It is not the film, but rather the film’s critics who burden the female subject with accountability.

³⁸ Discussing Marcel Hanoun’s unsettling use of *Verfremdungseffekte* in *L’Authentique procès de Carl Emmanuel Jung* (1967), a “very beautiful film” about a fictional Nazi trial, Noël Burch predicts that some “well meaning viewers ... will violently object to Hanoun’s film on the grounds that no one has the right to consider the suffering and death of millions of Jews as an aesthetic object.” Burch adds that “numerous creative artists, among them many who are far from second-rate, have made evil into an object of beauty, generally through erotic fantasy,” listing the Marquis de Sade, Comte de Lautréamont, Georges Bataille, and Leni Riefenstahl as exemplars. (Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 133).

³⁹ In one of the most shamelessly prescriptive reviews of the film, Sandy Miller declares, There are events which demand they be dealt with seriously, and to do otherwise is to be guilty of bad taste. And there are other events which, because of their monumental significance and impact, demand an even higher degree of seriousness, and not to meet that standard is to be guilty of indecency. Liliana Cavani’s film, *The Night Porter*, in its treatment of the Nazi Holocaust as a vehicle for a commercial, sexploitation film is indecent to the point of obscenity.

Miller continues: “it portrays the relationship by vague notions of sado-masochistic, sexual fulfillment and does so in a way that panders to the base needs of base audiences to be shocked and titillated.” It is telling that Miller calls the need to be “shocked and titillated” “base”—his contempt for human desire is unabashed. Miller seems to believe that when approaching the Holocaust, we need to transcend our “base needs” and ascend to the transcendent plane of abstract thought. The implication is that Lucia herself is degraded, feeding her own “base needs” by having sex with a Nazi. “*The Night Porter* pretends to deal with the questions of how former Nazis and prisoners handle their concentration camp experiences fifteen years later,” Miller writes. “These issues, when raised in the abstract, can be provocative. When raised in the context of this porno film, they become melodramatic pap.” (Miller, “The Holocaust Desecrated,” 33). Miller is anti-sex, anti-melodrama, anti-emotion, suggesting that the Holocaust be dealt with in “the abstract,” that is to say, free of the messy entanglements and contingencies of human emotion and desire. For Miller, to bring emotion and eros into the equation is too dangerous. The only permissible emotion is the most intellectualized one: guilt.

Miller’s is one of several film reviews that seeks to shame Cavani for her obscenity. While Miller disavows any attraction to the film, Marga Cottino-Jones condemns Cavani for seducing her into being turned on by Lucia’s sexual abuse in the *Lager*, into identifying with Max, and into altering her “basic beliefs about Nazism and the Holocaust.” (Cottino-Jones, “What Kind of Memory?” 107).

Saul Friedländer feared the shift from a “revocation” of the “horror and the pain” of Nazism to “voluptuous anguish and ravishing images, images one would like to see going on forever.”⁴⁰ In short, he was concerned about the aestheticization of Nazism, an aestheticization which, he implies, was more or less inevitable because of Nazism’s irresistible blend of kitsch and death. Friedländer makes no distinction between the aesthetic and the erotic—for him, the aestheticization of Nazism is borne of an erotic attraction, the same erotic attraction that lured people to join the Nazi party in the 1930s and ’40s. For Michel Foucault and Susan Sontag, the “re-eroticization of power” through *mode rétro* cinema and the consumption of S/M regalia, proves that the public is willing to be seduced by Fascism and prepared to surrender to another authoritarian regime.⁴¹ To the classical trinity of rhetorical persuasion—pathos, logos, and ethos—Foucault and Sontag add a fourth category: eros. Like Friedländer, they figure the erotic as a rhetorical tool that lures the masses to Fascism.

While it would be an act of bad faith to deny that Cavani’s intended her film as a provocation, one based in no small part on the proximity of the erotic to the horrific, the argument that the film uses the charge of Fascist aesthetics to generate visual pleasure is, however irreducibly subjective, dubious. McCormick’s anecdotal evidence that “the number of people who walked out of the showing I attended would suggest that the film is actually an erotic *turn off*”⁴² is unsurprising because the film is less concerned with the

⁴⁰ Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 21. I thank Brigitte Peucker for drawing my attention to Friedländer’s book.

⁴¹ Foucault, “Anti-Retro,” 166; Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” 98-105.

⁴² McCormick, “Fascism à la Mode or Radical Chic?” 33. Molly Haskell reiterates McCormick’s point, attributing the film’s lack of erotic appeal to Cavani’s distancing style, which employs blue-gray filters to dampen the erotic events to a “cold clamminess.” (Haskell, “Are Women Directors Different?” 431).

audience's pleasure than with Max and Lucia's. Such violent reactions to Cavani's film are symptomatic of what cultural historian Carolyn Dean identifies as widespread post-World War II anxieties about the "the failure and corruption of empathy,"⁴³ which can be traced back to a post-World War I fear that an "excessive, degraded, omnipresent, sadomasochistic, and homosexual eroticism" was a character sapping threat. The use of the term "pornographic" to describe images of the war dead emerged from a fear that these men's "sacred bodies" would be reduced to "objects of excitement, pleasure, or domination."⁴⁴ Not only critics but artists too have taken part in this reactionary desexualization of Holocaust memory.

Draining emotion, desire, and ambivalence from memorializations of the Holocaust is not a neutral act. Thirty years after American critics condemned *The Night Porter* for eroticizing the Holocaust, architect Peter Eisenman erected a monument of 2,711 slick, concrete "stelae" to commemorate "the murdered Jews of Europe" [Fig. 27]. In a chunky artist's statement, Eisenman Architects explains that the Memorial

manifests the instability inherent in what seems to be a system, here a rational grid, and its potential for dissolution in time. It suggests that when a supposedly rational and ordered system grows too large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it loses touch with human reason. It then begins to reveal the innate disturbances and potential for chaos in all systems of apparent order.⁴⁵

⁴³ Dean, "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering," 111.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵ I suspect that the statement was not written by Eisenman himself. In an affable 2005 interview with *Der Spiegel* to promote the opening of the monument, Eisenman could scarcely be less precious about the project. I think Nicola Suthor for alerting me to this interview. (Eisenman, "How Long Does One Feel Guilty?").

The statement goes on to explain that the varying heights of the pillars precipitates “a slippage in the grid structure ... causing indeterminate spaces to develop” and “provid[ing] a multilayered experience from any point.” Thus two grid “systems”—the regularized grid of the identically-proportioned bases of the structures on the ground plane, and the irregular, “undulating” heights of the stelae, which vary from zero to four meters—interact to “describe a zone of instability between them” and to create “a perceptual and conceptual divergence between the topography of the ground and the top plane of the stelae.” This perceptual and conceptual divergence “denotes a difference in time,” the registration of which “makes for a place of loss and contemplation, elements of memory.” The statement concludes:

In this monument there is no goal, no end, no working one’s way in or out. The duration of an individual’s experience of it grants no further understanding, since understanding the Holocaust is impossible. The time of the monument, its duration from top surface to ground, is disjoined from the time of experience. In this context, there is no nostalgia, no memory of the past, only the living memory of the individual experience.⁴⁶

A driving idea emerges from these deconstructivist ruminations: that sublimity—in this case, the sublime incomprehensibility of the Holocaust—throws normal perceptions of time and space into disarray. In other words, a failure of conceptualization generates a distortion of perception. While alluding to Horkheimer and Adorno’s influential argument that the Holocaust was a result of Enlightenment rationalization overtaking human reason,⁴⁷ Eisenman’s statement neglects the role of emotion in shaping—or distorting—

⁴⁶ Eisenman Architects, “Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.”

⁴⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 13-34.

the perception of reality. The minimalist monoliths stand as unintended metaphors for Eisenman's own commemorative gesture, which refined complicated memories of the Holocaust into abstract, intellectualized units. Purified of emotion—grief, guilt, fear, anger—purified of desire, Eisenman's *Memorial* implores us to bear witness not to the haunting signifiers of the death camps—the murderous guards, the cries of the bereaved, the remains of the dead—but to the disorienting relations between abstract concepts of space and time. The *Memorial*'s amplification of perceptual complexity comes at the expense of the emotional afterlives of the Shoah. Too suspicious for melodrama, too sophisticated for grand opera, Eisenman's ideal postwar subject rises from the ashes of these obsolete genres, purified of any emotional attachments and investments that would hinder a clear-eyed, tough-minded encounter with the dizzying calculus of existential overload. With his *Memorial*, Eisenman joins survivors and commentators who insist on the Holocaust's special status as an event that eludes human understanding, such as George Steiner, who claimed “the world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason,” and Eli Wiesel, who insists that “to substitute words, any words, for [the Shoah] is to distort it,” to profane and trivialize “a sacred subject.”⁴⁸ The Holocaust was particularly horrific because it happened on such a massive scale, and because so many citizens were complicit. But to argue that the Holocaust was an event whose horror was distinctive in the sense that it defies representation or understanding more so than other horrific events does not honor the victims. Rather, it testifies to the sublime power of the perpetrators. To insist that the horrors of the Holocaust lie beyond the limits of

⁴⁸ Geuens, “Pornography and the Holocaust,” 115.

comprehension does more to mystify Nazism than any piece of Third Reich propaganda. Though nominally dedicated to the Holocaust's victims, Eisenman's *Memorial*, with its emphasis on the Holocaust's sublime incomprehensibility, is in effect a 25 million Euro tribute to the disorienting power of Third Reich's murderous regime.⁴⁹

But desire got its revenge. After its inauguration in 2005, the solemn *Memorial* was swiftly repurposed by gay men as a staging ground for digital seduction [Fig. 28].⁵⁰ Even the solemnity of Eisenman's high serious and affectless architecture couldn't escape the taboo-proof, ironizing impulse of the gay camp sensibility. Indeed, these photographs display the uneasy convergence of what Susan Sontag calls "the two pioneering forces of modern sensibility ... Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony."⁵¹ There is a piquant sense of poetic justice, the idea that Eisenman's overbearing rejection of affect—his cerebral disavowal of the emotional and libidinal investments that pervade collective and individual memory of the Holocaust—was irreverently appropriated by gay men looking to get laid, looking, like Lucia, to make erotic meaning out of their lives instead of stand in awe and bewilderment at the incomprehensible atrocities of the Holocaust. Like Cavani before them, these happy hunters stage a queer

⁴⁹ Eisenman rhapsodized about how the monument simulated the experience of Auschwitz described by Primo Levi: "Just yesterday, I watched people walk into it for the first time and it is amazing how these heads disappear —like going under water. Primo Levi talks about a similar idea in his book about Auschwitz. He writes that the prisoners were no longer alive but they weren't dead either. Rather, they seemed to descend into a personal hell. I was suddenly reminded of that passage while watching these heads disappear into the monument. You don't often see people disappear into something that appears to be flat. That was amazing, seeing them disappear." (Eisenman, "How Long Does One Feel Guilty?").

⁵⁰ Artist Marc Adelman began documenting this phenomenon in 2007. His installation *Stelen (Columns)*, a collection of found photographs of gay men posing seductively on and between the columns of Eisenman's *Memorial*, was exhibited at New York's Jewish Museum in 2011, and acquired for the museum's permanent collection in 2012.

⁵¹ Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," 273.

resistance to the oppressive solemnity of the commemorative ethos, proving that memorialization can be driven by love and sexual desire instead of an anti-humanist subordination to the degrading power of evil. Cavani's film offers us an alternative to this clandestine reverence toward the Third Reich. By putting a victim at the center of the narrative, Cavani incites victims everywhere to appropriate and alchemize the enduring power of the Nazis and the devastation they wrought. In true Viennese form, Cavani celebrates Lucia's efforts to wring some joy from the apocalypse.

III. Dialectics of Victimhood

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of the misinterpretations of the film stem from an insufficient amount of attention to Rampling's performance. Nowhere is such insufficiency more evident than in the critical discussion of the film's famous Salomé scene. Unquestionably the most iconic scene in the film, its presentation of Lucia clad in black gloves, suspenders, and an SS officer's cap has dominated the film's paratextual ecology, from contemporary promotional materials [Fig. 29] to home video covers. Pop music provocateurs from Siouxsie Sioux and Madonna to Marilyn Manson and Lady Gaga have incorporated the look into licentious music videos and photo shoots. A detail of a screen-capture from the scene even graced the cover of Kriss Ravetto's 2001 study *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, condensing the antifascist auteurism of Cavani, Pasolini, and Lina Wertmüller into a representative image. But Ravetto's reading of the scene as an antifascist scenario—an undoing of the homophobic and misogynistic revivals of the Dietrich-inspired *femme fatale* in the neo-decadent cinema of Luchino

Visconti and Bob Fosse⁵²— is anomalous among a near consensus of critical readings of the scene as, at best, an exploitative exemplar of “Nazi chic,” and, at worst, as the documentation of Lucia’s initiation into evil.

The scene is framed as a flashback to the *Lager* when Lucia performed a rendition of Marlene Dietrich’s Weimar-era number, “*Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte*” (1931) for a room of SS officers and fellow prisoners. When Max recounts the event to the Countess Stein (Isa Miranda), he prefaces his telling by explaining that “It is a biblical story. It’s a story from the Bible.” Once he reveals that he rewarded Lucia’s performance with the severed head of Johann, “a prisoner who used to torment her,” Max elaborates, “she just asked to have him transferred. I don’t know why, but suddenly the story of Salomé came into my head. I couldn’t resist it.” This confession makes it eminently clear that Lucia did not demand Johann’s head and was thus unaware of any resonances of her performance with Salomé’s. The Salomé analogy was entirely Max’s idea—he devised it prior to Lucia’s performance and thrust it upon her afterward. But, in true victim-blaming fashion, several critics have read the scene as the origin point of Lucia’s complicity with the Nazi regime.

Cavani famously mentioned that her inspiration for the film came from her interviews with female camp survivors that she conducted in preparation for her 1965 RAI2 documentary *La donna nella Resistenza*. One of the interviewees, who survived internment in Auschwitz, claimed that “what disturbed her still was not the memory of this or that episode but the fact that in the camp she was able to discover her own nature

⁵² Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, 53-96.

to the depths, how much good and evil she was capable of doing: she stressed the word evil.”⁵³ Critics have taken this story as a sign that Cavani conceived Lucia as evil, one going so far as to say that her name echoes Lucifer.⁵⁴ Ralph Berets suggests that Lucia’s “moral character is seriously maligned” in the Salomé scene, adding that Lucia resembles Salomé because “she places more value on personal survival and self-indulgence, than on moral decency.”⁵⁵ Terri Gordon describes Lucia’s Salomé dance as a “ritualistic initiation into sexuality” tantamount to “an initiation into the inner circle of fascist politics.”⁵⁶ Laura Pietropaolo, Mirto Golo Stone, Gaetana Marrone, and Marguerite Valentine all concur with Gordon that Lucia’s “story is inscribed in a larger, patriarchal cultural history of female complicity.”⁵⁷

Indeed, Salomé was the quintessential *femme fatale* in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, and Vienna was no exception. The cabaret performance is a nodal point of several moments in history: the ancient time in which the Biblical story of Salomé took place; the *fin-de-siècle* moment when “Salomania” exploded in European literature, theater, and visual culture;⁵⁸ the decadent parties of Late Habsburg Vienna and Weimar Germany evoked respectively by Josef von Sternberg’s *Dishonored* (1931) and *The Blue Angel* (1930); the time of the camps at the tail end of the war, when the performance took place; and the

⁵³ Cavani, *Il portiere di notte*, viii.

⁵⁴ Pietropaolo, “Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 78.

⁵⁵ Berets, “Recent Cinematic Examples of Nazism,” 77.

⁵⁶ Gordon, “Salomé Returns with a Vengeance,” 171.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 173; Pietropaolo, “Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 72; Stone, “The Feminist Critic and Salomé,” 44; Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 97, 100; Valentine, “Those That the Gods Wish to Destroy, They First Make Mad,” 449.

⁵⁸ Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects*, 106.

film's present—Vienna, 1957—when Max recounts the story to Countess Stein. These multiple times are stitched together by a thread of decadence. The Countess herself is a figure of decadence, an aging Venus surrounded by furs, an Eve-like sinner with a golden snake around her neck, a masochistic mother figure who occasionally reduces Max to a kneeling worshipper. But the transtemporal iconography of decadence belies Lucia's resistance to the image of the *femme fatale*, a case of mistaken identity like Klimt's painting of *Judith* (1901) [Fig. 30] which was mislabeled as "Salomé" in numerous publications during the first decade of its exhibition.⁵⁹ Unlike Salomé, Lucia is no *femme fatale*. Rather than sealing Lucia's fate as a *femme fatale* complicit with Nazi evil, the scene makes it eminently clear that Lucia *resists* the homicidal decadence of the Salomé narrative that Max thrusts upon her. The contrast in Rampling's performance, from her giddy curiosity about Max's surprise gift, to her shocked, slightly nauseated recoiling in horror once the severed head of Johann is revealed [Fig. 31], signals Lucia's rejection of the sinister role. Max's sadistic smile as he anticipates—and recounts—the reveal throws

⁵⁹ Sine, "Cases of Mistaken Identity," 9.

Lucia's revulsion into stark relief. Just as the scene sets up the comparison of Lucia and the quintessential *femme fatale* Salomé, Cavani pulls the rug out from under us.⁶⁰

A common trope in critical commentary on *The Night Porter*, deployed by defenders and detractors alike, is that the film complicates the distinction between victim

⁶⁰ Even defenses of Lucia's Salomé performance have been misguided. In a sympathetic reading of the film's sexual politics, Eugenie Brinkema asks,

Can we not theorize what it would mean for a woman to be looked at and find it pleasurable?

What would it mean for a woman to revel in her to-be-looked-at-ness, to adore being a spectacle and, perhaps, to find radical political freedom in such a state? Can we read taking up the spectacle as anything other than a capitulation to the/a male gaze? And is this possible while still protecting the legacy of feminist film theory? (Brinkema, "Pleasure in/and Perversity," 421).

While I admire Brinkema's attempt to think beyond the position of the exhibitionist as one of disempowerment, of subordination to the male gaze, it's important not to lose touch with the situation on screen. My critique of Brinkema's argument is twofold: first, Brinkema's argument locates Lucia's agency in her Salomé performance, when really it inheres in her sexual liaison with Max in Vienna; and second, Brinkema argument willfully neglects the hard facts of Lucia's victimization. I wholeheartedly agree with Brinkema that Cavani's film is a celebration of female pleasure, but I disagree that such pleasure is best crystallized in the Salomé scene, which is in actuality a testament to female talent and skill under coercive, agency-constraining conditions. Lucia performs the Salomé dance under confinement, and, more likely than not, under compulsion. Brinkema takes Lucia's expressions at face value, never entertaining the idea that Lucia's performance may be just that—a *performance*. That there might be a disjunction between the emotions and desires that Lucia signals through her performance, and the emotions and desire that Lucia actually harbors. That Lucia's smile may not indicate true inner happiness, that putting her gloved hands down her pants might not indicate a masturbatory impulse. Certainly, she commands the gaze of her audience. She even moves the customarily tight-lipped Klaus (Philippe Leroy) to a state of nonplussed erotic absorption. But to argue that Lucia "find[s] radical political freedom" by performing for the SS officers is not only wrong but insulting to victims of the Holocaust. By overestimating the scope of Lucia's power within the confines of the *Lager*, Brinkema makes the same fundamental attribution error that Bruno Bettelheim observed among viewers of Wertmüller's Nazi romp *Seven Beauties* (1976):

I asked a relatively small but random sample of intelligent viewers of the film—all of them under forty—who were deeply impressed by it how they thought Pasqualino had survived. They all said he survived because of his will to live—his vitality—which is what the film wishes us to believe. Not one of these highly intelligent, college-educated, otherwise well-informed people spontaneously said that Pasqualino survived because the camps were liberated by the Allied armies. (Bettelheim, *Surviving*, 311.)

It is irresponsible to call a compulsory performance given under conditions of captivity "radically liberatory." Lucia is not liberated as a consequence of her performance. And during her performance, Lucia is not a figurative captive of the male gaze, but an *actual* captive of *actual* Nazis. There's no need to construct an elaborate theoretical apparatus in order to explain why Lucia is a victim when she is clearly depicted as a physically molested captive of a coercive, genocidal regime. I suspect that nothing felt radically liberatory for prisoners of the camps short of actually being liberated from them. Citing Lucia's "pleasure in herself that men can never know" and "her exemption from castration (she 'lacks lack' and therefore has nothing to lose)," Brinkema reaches the dubious conclusion that Lucia "is more free than men are, and she knows it." To insist that Lucia is blissfully innocent of castration anxiety is one thing. But no amount of Lacanian reasoning will persuade me that Lucia is somehow more free than the men who imprison and abuse her. Brinkema's fundamental mistake is that she confuses freedom and power. Lucia may have the performative power to captivate the SS guards, but such power scarcely translates into freedom from her oppressive confinement in the *Lager*. As Michel Foucault perceptively remarked in a *Cahiers du cinéma* interview about *The Night Porter* and Louis Malle's similarly controversial *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974), "In a regime like the Nazi regime, it's quite clear that there's no freedom. But not having freedom doesn't mean that you don't have power." (Foucault, "Anti-Rétro," 168). Therefore, having power doesn't mean that you have freedom.

and victimizer. Rebecca Scherr provides a reserved articulation of this argument, insisting that Cavani “blur[s] the line between victim and oppressor”⁶¹ by turning Max into an actual victim, imprisoned in his apartment and eventually hunted down by the ex-Nazis.⁶² Insisting that Cavani distinguishes victims as those who remember the Holocaust from victimizers as those who try to forget it, Cottino-Jones argues that Max’s shift from victimizer to victim status “leav[es] the audience with a moral dilemma which profoundly disturbs our basic beliefs about Nazism and the Holocaust.”⁶³ Similarly, Ravetto argues that Max and Lucia’s “erotic relationship serves to undermine binary understandings of purity and impurity, victim and victimizer—necessary distinctions in the manufacture of meaning and morality”⁶⁴ In a more extreme version of Cottino-Jones and Ravetto’s arguments, Gordon posits that the film effects a “collapse of the victim-victimizer position,” which “undermines the critic’s ability to locate agency and responsibility and to draw moral distinctions.”⁶⁵ Although Eugenie Brinkema is far more sympathetic to the film than most of the aforementioned commentators, she too insists that the film “open[s] up a space of subversion that suggests the elimination of difference between victim and victimizer,”⁶⁶ arguing, dubiously, that Lucia becomes a “victimizer” when she terrifies the SS guards with her provocative cabaret performance.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Scherr, “The Use of Memory and Abuses of Fiction,” 284.

⁶² Ibid., 282.

⁶³ Cottino-Jones, “What Kind of Memory?” 107.

⁶⁴ Ravetto, “Cinema, Spectacle, and the Unmaking of Sadomasochistic Aesthetics,” 266.

⁶⁵ Gordon, “Salome Returns with a Vengeance,” 175.

⁶⁶ Brinkema, “Pleasure in/and Perversity,” 431.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 428.

These interpretations rest not only on the events that unfold in the film itself, but also on Cavani's often cited claim, which she attributes to one of the aforementioned survivors of the camps, that "the victim isn't always innocent" ("*le vittime non sono sempre innocenti*").⁶⁸ Cavani's further remarks, inspired by the Marquis de Sade and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, that each of us harbors a victim-executioner dynamic in the unconscious, famously outraged Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi, who insists that he was "a guiltless victim and ... not a murderer."⁶⁹ For Levi, there is a moral imperative to maintain a strict distinction between victim and victimizer. Indeed, his celebrated concept of the "gray zone" is essentially a means to preserve victim status for inmates that aided and abetted the Nazis. Thus he condemns Cavani's "beautiful and false" film for confusing the roles, a move he equates with "a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity."⁷⁰ Levi's righteous indignation, however hard-won, nonetheless betrays a misreading of *The Night Porter*. Cavani's film does not, in fact, absolve Max of his responsibility for his crimes by turning him into a victim of his fellow ex-Nazis, nor does it implicate Lucia in complicity with murder. Further, although Cavani does not put Lucia in the position of *Kapo*, Levi's exemplary gray zone occupation, her film *does* illustrate the core idea of the gray zone: that when subjected to conditions of pure survival, victims' choices are reduced to zero.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Cavani, *The Night Porter*, viii.

⁶⁹ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

Laura Pietropaolo takes these arguments about *The Night Porter*'s treatment of victimhood to a victim-blaming extreme, concluding that Cavani's film uses paradox in order to render Max "redeemable" and "innocent," and Lucia "complicit" and "demonic."⁷² While firmly rejecting these conclusions, I nonetheless maintain that victimhood is one of *The Night Porter*'s core themes. In effect, the critical focus on the film's victim-victimizer dynamic has been misguided, and the crucial dialectic in the film is between the categories of victimhood and agency. The slice of Lucia's life provided by the film suggests that victimhood and agency are at the core of her subjectivity.

The Night Porter does not necessarily obviate the moral polarities of good and evil that are fundamental to classical melodrama: from the beginning to end, the ex-Nazis remain murderers and Lucia remains an innocent victim. But Cavani's film departs from traditional melodrama by fogging the legibility of such moral polarities, demanding that we reconsider the connotations that we associate with good and evil, with victim and victimizer. Contrary to Ravetto, Cavani is not engaged in a deconstructionist project of undoing traditional binaries; rather, Cavani's philosophical project entails exposing false *categorical correspondences*, of undermining the absolute claim of the associations that such binaries generate. For example, Cavani respects the distinction between child and adult. When Lucia is a fifteen-year-old prisoner of the *Lager*, she is presented unequivocally as a victim of Max's sexual abuse. Conversely, when she reunites with Max in Vienna as a liberated twenty-seven-year-old woman, she is presented as an agentive adult who willingly enters into a consensual—albeit adulterous—sexual

⁷² Pietropaolo, "Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*," 73, 76, 78.

relationship. However, Cavani rejects the connotations of timidity and compliance traditionally associated with girlhood, as well as the notion that an adult who takes on girlish behavior is necessarily regressing to a state of passivity or a role of subordination. Through girlish behavior, adult Lucia activates and fortifies her resolve. Flashbacks to an adolescent Lucia on a swing ride at the *Prater* and queuing up at a camp processing center show a young girl who is dreamy and demure, an unthreatening Schiele-esque youth who attracts Max's pedophilic attention. Contrary to Molly Haskell's contention that Lucia "condemns herself to remain a little girl, a half-person consigned to the shadows,"⁷³ and Gaetana Marrone's insistence that Max and Lucia's sadomasochistic play involves "regressing to infantile behavior,"⁷⁴ when the adult Lucia takes on girlish behavior in Max's Karl-Marx-Hof apartment, she does not revert to such characteristic passivity. Instead, she exhibits the type of girlish behavior that was forbidden in the camps. She is playful, mischievous, truculent, and in total command of the relationship. In one scene, she flashes a sly smile and casts a self-possessing gaze at Max as he admires her display of her secondhand "little girl" dress in the wardrobe mirror. In a subsequent scene, as Max kindly assists her by guiding her feet into a pair of white Mary-Janes, Lucia cruelly kicks him aside, locks him out of the bathroom, and breaks a perfume bottle to wound his feet. When Hans Vogler (Gabriele Ferzetti) pays Lucia a visit to persuade her to abandon Max and forget the past—the pretense for a covert abduction—she engages in the childish pastime of animal imitation, assuming a feline

⁷³ Haskell, "Are Women Directors Different?" 433.

⁷⁴ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 88.

disposition as she slinks under the table and imperiously avoids Vogler's gaze and dismisses his admonitions. After declaring, "I'm here of my own free will," Lucia retreats like a feral cat into the bathroom, hissing "Get out!" and slamming the door in Vogler's face. Without excusing the abuse Lucia suffered as a youth, Cavani nevertheless demonstrates that girlishness can be a source of strength, resistance, and self-determination.

Cavani figures her project of severing categorical correspondences in the complementary metaphors of broken glass and open wounds. The maintenance of rigid categorical correspondences is an Apollonian dream embodied by the glassy, contained forms that Max and Lucia break throughout the film:⁷⁵ in the *Lager*, Max shatters windows as he shoots at Lucia; in the Karl-Marx-Hof apartment, Lucia smashes a perfume bottle to cut Max's feet and Max breaks a jam jar to cut Lucia's cheek. In Cavani's hands, the breaking of form and the wounds that ensue assume a positive valence. Cavani champions the abject,⁷⁶ Dionysian transgression of boundaries so rigidly policed by Fascist ideology. In Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), Alma's (Bibi Andersson) surreptitious cutting of Elisabet's (Liv Ullmann) foot on a shard of broken glass signals a fracturing of their newfound intimacy which was compromised by betrayal; conversely, *The Night Porter*'s weaponized perfume bottle and jam jars bring Max and Lucia closer together, functioning as painful preludes to sexual pleasure, an

⁷⁵ On the inherently dreamlike quality of the Apollonian, see Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 46.

⁷⁶ See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

instance of masochistic priming.⁷⁷ The jam scene crystalizes the link between sexual and formal excess: a focus pull, the cinematic technique *par excellence* of the Apollonian-Dionysian dialectic, homes in on the desired object before a subsequent shot focuses on an indeterminate red substance—jam or blood? matter to consume or secrete?—glistening on Max and Lucia’s fingers as they exchange sexual positions, dissolving gender norms in an orgasmic frenzy [Fig. 32]. The shattered glass also serves as a metaphor for *The Night Porter*’s splintered narrative form, in which the traumatic past erupts menacingly, joyfully into the present, a welcome bleeding wound. Whether or not these images yield immediate pleasure in the viewer, they invite us to gain pleasure from realizing that certain traditional categorical correspondences were always already a fiction, an Apollonian dream.

The principal categorical correspondences that Cavani seeks to destabilize are those attached to “victim” and “agent.” Cavani does not obviate the category of victim: because Lucia begins the film as a victim—as a prisoner of the *Lager*—and ends the film as a victim—in the Latin sense of *victima* or the German sense of *Opfer*, a sacrificial object of the ex-Nazis—victimhood remains a viable category throughout the film. What Cavani *does* challenge is the stability of common associations with victimhood. Lucia is a victim *by definition* because she suffers imprisonment, coercion, abuse, deprivation, and murder. Indeed, Lucia takes on some of the attributes commonly associated with victims: fear, numbness, self-protection, inwardness, confusion, irritability. But she also assumes

⁷⁷ Deleuze explains that “the masochist must undergo punishment before experiencing pleasure. It would be a mistake to confuse this temporal succession with logical causality: suffering is not the cause of pleasure itself but the necessary precondition for achieving it.” (Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty,” 89).

other attributes that critics have found antithetical to a proper victim mentality: she receives erotic pleasure from memories of past torture, and she forgoes a convenient path toward revenge. Critics have taken umbrage at Lucia's failure to behave like a proper victim. Although Cavani had based the film's ex-Nazis on descriptions provided by Vienna-based Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal's memoir *The Murderers Among Us* (1967),⁷⁸ she declined to portray Lucia as an avenger in the Wiesenthal mold. Scherr laments "the absence of any acts of redemption and resistance by the victim, Lucia," adding:

we want to see a narrative of redemption through Lucia's resistance to Max's seductive power, a power she could not resist while she was his prisoner, when resistance meant a sure death. But now that she is "free" she can reject him, point a finger, and enact her/our revenge. She does not enact this revenge we so desire; rather, she causes our discomfort because of the enslaving passion she carries for her oppressor.⁷⁹

Fueled by the conviction that the film's audience is entitled to its own revenge on the film's ex-Nazis, Scherr burdens the already victimized Lucia with the charge of exacting a justice she does not desire. True to the imperatives of classical Hollywood melodrama, Scherr demands that Lucia play the role of the self-sacrificing heroine, renouncing her sexual needs and remaining co-dependently beholden to the emotional demands of an audience she will never meet. Further, by insisting that Lucia "repeat[s] her own victimization" by resuming a sexual relationship with Max,⁸⁰ Scherr engages in unfettered victim-blaming, holding Lucia responsible for her own victimhood while

⁷⁸ Dassanowsky, "Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other," 168.

⁷⁹ Scherr, "The Uses of Memory and Abuses of Fiction," 283-84.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

absolving the true agents of her victimization: the Nazis and ex-Nazis who capture, imprison, intimidate, and ultimately murder her.

Critics are often more scandalized by Lucia's desire to have sex with an ex-Nazi than by the fact that Lucia is murdered by ex-Nazis. By condemning Cavani's film for eroticizing the Holocaust—or, rather, for centering on protagonists who eroticize the Holocaust—but failing to condemn ex-Nazis for murdering the innocent Lucia, these critics imply that they would rather see Lucia dead than cohabitating with her erstwhile abuser. Further, these critics implicitly excuse the ex-Nazis' murderous behavior, tacitly resigning themselves to the inevitability that Nazis will be Nazis. Not only are these critics blithely unbothered that Lucia is murdered, they imply that she was asking for it. Pierre Klossowski claims that de Sade “identifies destruction with the purity of desire,”⁸¹ and some critics have read Max and Lucia's deaths at the end of *The Night Porter* as an act of ritual purification.⁸² Dana Regna insists that Max and Lucia's sexual tryst is a form of *Trauerarbeit* that “gets them nowhere” and consigns the lovers to a “voluntary death.”⁸³ Robert von Dassanowsky concludes that Max and Lucia's death is a “murder-suicide ... a futile attempt to escape from the past and the city's sociopolitical and cultural redefinitions.”⁸⁴ Marguerite Valentine affirms that Max and Lucia's “mutual destructiveness” results from their “symbiotic unconscious complicity.”⁸⁵ But these

⁸¹ Klossowski, “Nature as Destructive Principle,” 83.

⁸² Pietropaolo, “Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*,” 73.

⁸³ Regna, “Staging Memory and Trauma in French and Italian Holocaust Film,” 472.

⁸⁴ von Dassanowsky, “Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other,” 168.

⁸⁵ Valentine, “Those That the Gods Wish to Destroy They First Make Mad,” 449.

diagnoses are mistaken. Max and Lucia are not suicidal. They do not voluntarily end their lives out of failure or a desire to escape from the past.⁸⁶ Rather, they are sacrificed by the ex-Nazis who seek to purify their own record, to “file away” all inconvenient witnesses. To read the film as a “social allegory,”⁸⁷ to interpret the protagonists as the embodiment of a larger social death wish bred by Fascist ideology, by Fascist fantasy, is to swerve from condemning the real villains of the film: the ex-Nazis.

Are Max and Lucia undone by their own death wish? Eros and Thanatos is widely held to be the structuring dialectic *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, and, more controversially, as an engine of Fascist aesthetics. Freud’s discussion of the struggle between Eros and the death drives (*Todestriebe*), inspired by Sabina Spielrein’s 1912 paper “Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being” and developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, reached its apotheosis in his late essay, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937). Freud asserts that “only by the concurrent or mutually opposing action of the two primal instincts—Eros and the death instinct—, never by one or the other alone, can we explain the rich multiplicity of the phenomena of life (*Lebenserscheinungen*).”⁸⁸ Although Friedländer neglects to cite Freud’s essay in *Reflections of Nazism*, he could scarcely have been unaware of Freud’s formulation of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos.

⁸⁶ In an interview with Alexander Stuart, Cavani explains that Max “has a feeling of guilt, whereas the others [the other ex-Nazis] don’t. As, in fact, most war criminals, of any country, don’t” (Stuart, “Consciousness and Conscience,” 13). Max’s guilt doesn’t lead him to suicide because he wants to escape from the past. On the contrary: Max’s guilt causes him to face the past, whereas the guilt-free ex-Nazis work desperately to leave the past behind.

⁸⁷ Marcus, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, 52.

⁸⁸ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” 243.

Friedländer's articulation of kitsch and death bears an uncanny resemblance to Freud's articulation of the "primal drives" (*Urtriebe*) of Eros and destructiveness (*Destruktion*):

Freud: Eros ... endeavors to combine what exists into ever greater unities, while [destructiveness] endeavors to dissolve those combinations and to destroy the structures to which they have given rise.⁸⁹

Friedlander: But facing the kitsch aesthetic is the unfathomable world of myths; facing the visions of harmony, the lights of the apocalypse; facing the young girls crowned with flowers and the snow-capped peaks of the Bavarian Alps, the call to the dead of the *Feldherrnhalle*, the ecstasy of the *Götterdämmerung*, the visions of the end of the world.⁹⁰

Freud draws a parallel between his own conceptualization of Eros and Thanatos and the ancient formulation of the perpetual struggle between "love" (φιλία) and "strife" (νεῖκος) articulated by Empedocles of Agrigento in the fifth century BCE:

Of these two powers ... the one strives to agglomerate the primal particles of the four elements into a single unity, while the other, on the contrary, seeks to undo all those fusions and to separate the primal particles of the elements from one another."⁹¹

While Friedländer acknowledges the "psychological hold" of Nazism's "special" combination of kitsch and death, he uses the term "kitsch" in order to degrade Nazi aesthetics and the poor dupes that it continues to seduce. But his definition of kitsch is virtually identical to Empedocles and Freud's definition of Eros: a drive toward harmony and unity. The difference between Friedländer's kitsch/death dichotomy, and Empedocles's love/strife and Freud's Eros/Thanatos dichotomy is a matter of degree and not kind: Nazi kitsch is Eros on a collective scale, Nazi death is death on a collective

⁸⁹ Ibid., 246.

⁹⁰ Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 131.

⁹¹ Ibid., 246.

scale. Despite his contention that Nazim's "juxtaposition of the kitsch aesthetic and of the themes of death ... creates the surprise, that special frisson,"⁹² this "frisson" isn't "special" at all; it is, according to Friedländer's reasoning, the apocalyptic culmination of the primal struggle between love and death, an inevitable Wagnerian scaling of personal conflict into collective opera.

Max and Lucia turn their back on collective harmony. Their transgressive sexuality stages a revolt against the superego. In *Life Against Death*, Norman O. Brown offers an instructive reading of Freud's *The Id and the Ego* (1923). Brown argues that sublimation leads to desexualization, "the consequence of [the libido] passing through the crucible of the ego."⁹³ The ego resorts to sublimation because it cannot accept the reality of death. Thus, desexualization is not a process of deflection, but rather a process of negation. In the act of protecting itself from the reality of death, the ego initiates "a more active form of dying," a seemingly comforting but ultimately depleting state of death in life.⁹⁴ While Sontag and Friedländer expound on the Nazi's attraction to death, *The Night Porter's* ex-Nazis show no signs of having a death wish. They are all ego, all self-preservation, all sublimation, negation, denial. Like Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt's exemplar of "the banality of evil," *The Night Porter's* ex-Nazis will unflinchingly sacrifice human life to protect their egos and livelihoods. Similarly, Max and Lucia also have no death wish. But, unlike the other ex-Nazis, they refuse the psychic distortions—the desexualization—of self-preservation at all costs. They are not suicidal, but they

⁹² Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 26.

⁹³ Brown, *Life Against Death*, 158.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

subordinate their fear of dying to their fear of not fully living. Max and Lucia embrace what Brown terms “Dionysian consciousness”—“consciousness embracing and affirming instinctual reality.”⁹⁵ A return to the body, to reality, to danger. A rejection of the Apollonian dreams—the Apollonian delusions—of the ex-Nazis.⁹⁶ If Max and Lucia choose to live in a world of play, the ex-Nazis choose to live in a world of fantasy, what Brown describes as “that opaque shield within which the ego protects himself from reality and through which the ego sees reality; it is by living in a world of fantasy that we lead a desexualized life.”⁹⁷

Critics have been loathe to acknowledge Lucia’s agency. Chiara Bassi protests that Lucia is always subordinate to Max, that when she reunites with Max in Vienna in 1957 she is under “a delusion of achieved parity.”⁹⁸ Diagnosing Lucia with the compulsion to repeat, as one of the many “victims who incessantly recreate the initial traumatic situation in a desperate attempt to acquire control over it,”⁹⁹ Bassi argues that “in the camp, in the hotel, in Max’s apartment, Lucia has no choice but to submit and succumb,” adding that “she can nevertheless exert a unique illusory form of control over

⁹⁵ Brown, *Life Against Death*, 176.

⁹⁶ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche links the Apollonian with dreams: “The Greeks also expressed the joyous necessity of dream-experience in their Apollo: as the god of all image-making energies, Apollo is also the god of prophecy. According to the etymological root of his name, he is “the luminous now (*der Scheinende*), the god of light; as such, he also governs the lovely semblance produced by the inner world of fantasy. The higher truth, the perfection of these dream-states in contrast to the only partially ineligible reality of the daylight world, together with the profound consciousness of the helping and healing powers of nature in sleep and dream, indeed of all the arts through which life is made possible and worth living.” (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 16).

⁹⁷ Brown, *Life Against Death*, 165.

⁹⁸ Bassi, “Fathers and Daughters in the Camp,” 165.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

the erotic pulsion of the couple.”¹⁰⁰ Bassi’s interpretation, which reduces Lucia’s agency to a “delusion,” is based on a blunt understanding of relations between the sexes within a patriarchal system as static, when in fact Cavani’s film explores the mutability of power relations. *The Night Porter* presents a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of personal agency within varying social contexts. Whereas Bassi flattens Lucia’s experiences in the camp, the hotel, and Max’s apartment, Cavani’s film demonstrates how her victimhood and agency change across time and space. Over the course of the film, we witness Lucia proceed through four phases of victimhood and agency: in the *Lager*, she is a victim with virtually no agency; twelve years later when she reunited with Max at the *Hotel zur Oper*, she is a non-victim with full agency; confined to the Karl-Marx-Hof, she is once again a victim whose agency is limited by the ex-Nazis who cut off her food supply and electricity; and when she is murdered in the final scene, she becomes a total victim—a sacrificial *victima*—wholly deprived of agency. Contrary to what many critics have asserted, Cavani does not blur the line between victim and victimizer. She does not destabilize the distinction between victim and victimizer. Rather, she reminds us how expansive and elastic the category of victim can be.

In her analysis of anti-victim rhetoric in the neoliberal era, feminist philosopher Rebecca Stringer argues that when we conceive of victimhood as a subjective mentality rather than an objective state of social conditions, we generate a false dichotomy between victimhood and agency.¹⁰¹ Provocatively reevaluating Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 170.

¹⁰¹ Stringer, *Knowing Victims*, 3-6.

as articulated in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Stringer argues that state of victimhood provides the epistemic conditions for a reimagining of the social world, a vision of a victimless future.¹⁰² While Cavani's film, produced at the dawn of the neoliberal era and set in the Keynesian moment of postwar economic expansion, does not share Stringer's call for collective political action in the face of "neoliberal hegemony,"¹⁰³ *The Night Porter* shares with Stringer's analysis a desire to complicate the victim-agent dichotomy, and to re-conceptualize victimhood as a site of transformative agency. Further, many critics have fallen into the trap that Stringer describes of downplaying the objective circumstances of Lucia's victimhood and focusing too intently on her subjective victim mentality, a mistake which has led to multiple victim-blaming accusations of Lucia's "complicity" and, concurrently, to letting the murderous ex-Nazis off the hook.

Cavani's interest in women who gain a sense of agency when confronted by victimization is evident in *La donna nella Resistenza*. The documentary's narrator explains:

In the Resistance, women became protagonists of a historical moment right alongside the men. They accepted the war as individuals who participated in it responsibly and in person. They accepted war with its rules of violence, and the war would not show them any mercy ... In the mountains, women discovered a new strength in themselves. The circumstances proved to them that if necessary they could take control.

Cavani was well aware that under extreme circumstances women can prove themselves to be both victims and agents. But this is not to say that she is blind to the limitations

¹⁰² Ibid., 15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.

victimhood can impose on agency. *The Night Porter* does not deny that women are victims—far from it. But it does suggest that women can be empowered despite their victimhood, that they can reclaim the site of their victimization by alchemizing it into a source of gratifying erotic power. Building on recent interpretations that have acknowledged Lucia’s assertion of agency in her reunion with Max,¹⁰⁴ I will argue that Lucia’s agency manifests as a process of erotic transformation. *The Night Porter* demonstrates that agency is not necessarily a means of *transcending* victimhood, but it can be a means of *transforming* victimhood.

Like many late-nineteenth-century Viennese intellectuals, Cavani admires Nietzsche’s relentless critique of the ideological foundations of the German Empire; indeed, her follow-up to *The Night Porter* was the Nietzsche biopic *Beyond Good and Evil*. However, *The Night Porter* disentangles the theme of victimhood from the problem of *ressentiment*. Uninterested in revenge, Lucia doesn’t begrudge the Nazis their strength. She merely wants to be left alone. Hers is a victimless search for erotic satisfaction. By returning to her traumatic past as a locus of such erotic satisfaction, Lucia forgoes the “slave morality” generated through the creative force of *ressentiment*,¹⁰⁵ developing instead an equally creative mode of amoral (but not immoral) sexuality from the same source of victimhood.

A common trope of *Night Porter* criticism is that Lucia is a victim of the past. Apparently, it’s not enough for Lucia to be a victim of the Third Reich and, subsequently,

¹⁰⁴ Mailänder, “Meshes of Power,” 175-98; Dassanowsky, “Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other,” 173.

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 473.

of murderous ex-Nazis. She must also be victim of Stockholm Syndrome and of psychic enthrallment to past trauma. Annette Insdorf describes *The Night Porter* as a variation on the common Holocaust film “theme of imprisonment by the past,”¹⁰⁶ a past with a “psychological grip” that “locks characters into repetition compulsion.”¹⁰⁷ Marguerite Valentine interprets Cavani’s generous use of flashbacks as evidence that “the two protagonists are possessed by their history.”¹⁰⁸ And Griselda Pollock affirms that the “concentrationary imaginary” is, for Max and Lucia, a “determining fantasy,” “terrifying in its power to reclaim the couple.”¹⁰⁹ These interpretations are inflected by Freud’s idea—developed in observation of his grandson’s “*fort-da*” game detailed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*¹¹⁰—that sadomasochistic play offers compensatory pleasures in response to trauma. But why do we conceive of the erotic as a compensatory means to an end rather than as a gratifying end in itself? Cavani’s film asks us to reverse this conceptualization. Erotic pleasure is not a symptom of the past taking hold of Lucia; rather, erotic pleasure is the means by which Lucia takes hold of the past. Dana Renga and Pietropaolo insist that Max and Lucia’s erotic rituals are failed attempts to properly mourn and exorcise the past.¹¹¹ But Max and Lucia’s erotic bliss in the *Hotel zur Oper*

¹⁰⁶ Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 125.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰⁸ Valentine, “Those That the Gods Wish to Destroy, They First Make Mad,” 447.

¹⁰⁹ Pollock, “Redemption or Transformation,” 124.

¹¹⁰ Terri Gordon argues that “in accordance with Freudian notions of trauma, in which victims repeatedly return to and replay the traumatic event, the compulsion to repeat takes hold of Max and Lucia.” (Gordon, “Salome Returns with a Vengeance,” 163).

¹¹¹ Renga, “Staging Memory and Trauma in French and Italian Holocaust Film,” 472; Pietropaolo, “Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 73.

and the *Karl-Marx-Hof*, however short-lived, is no failure. It is, by all appearances, the apotheosis of satisfaction for both of them. Their sadomasochistic play is not figured as a futile coping mechanism but as privileged modality of life.¹¹² Lucia does not fail to take control of her past. Her newfound bliss was thwarted by ex-Nazis who murdered her in cold blood. To hold Max and Lucia responsible for their own “failure” for having their lives extinguished by the ex-Nazis before they could fully heal the wounds of the past, is tantamount to insisting that the children who perished in the Holocaust “failed” to live long, fulfilling lives.

Scherr condemns Cavani for transforming the Lager into a site of a “‘sexy memory’ which, through the depiction of eroticism and the sexualized female body, elicits a reaction of pleasure in the spectator, completely warping the historical facts of the Holocaust: in particular, the fact that the Holocaust was by no means, in any way, sexy.”¹¹³ Scherr’s apparent reaction formation—her insistence that “the Holocaust was by no means, in any way, sexy,” coupled with her confession that the sight of Lucia’s sexualized, abused body “elicit[ed] a reaction of pleasure”—has blinded her to the agent of erotic transformation; it is not Cavani who eroticizes memories of the Holocaust, but Lucia. In lieu of *Trauerarbeit*, the work of mourning expected of the “good” Holocaust survivor, Lucia chooses an alternative: an erotic processing of the past. If, as Freud and Josef Breuer contend, “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences,” then we must shift our evaluation of Lucia’s sexual excitement from the paradigm of hysteria to that of

¹¹² For a compensatory view of sado-masochism, see White, “Sado Machismo,” 64.

¹¹³ Scherr, “The Uses of Memory and Abuses of Fiction,” 282.

jouissance. Far from suffering from reminiscences, Lucia gains more pleasure from them than she did in the heat of experience.

Cavani uses narrative duration to make an argument, to demonstrate how the relationship between victimhood and agency is dialectical and transforms over time. Cavani conceptualizes cinema as a medium of transformation. Interpreting the intermittent flashback sequences as establishing a link between the past and the present, between the Hungarian concentration camp of 1945 and Vienna in 1957, critics have stressed the sense of continuity conveyed through Cavani's cross-cutting. This mode of reading has led critics to neglect how Cavani's cross-cutting not only draws analogies between the past and the present, but also magnifies the *differences* between the past and the present. By juxtaposing scenes of the past and the present, Cavani illustrates Lucia's development over the course of twelve years. Just because her rekindled sexual liaison with Max is inflected by memories of the past does not mean that she has regressed to a passive state. Outlining correspondences between past and present—"the two moments of witnessing (opera and copulation); the two dance scenes (Bert then, Bert now); the two films (Max's, Cavani's); the two love affairs (Max and Lucia then, Max and Lucia now)"—Brinkema insists that Cavani emphasizes "repetition with small changes" in order to assert "the impossibility of pure repetition, the suggestion that the comfort of true sameness is an impossible fantasy."¹¹⁴ However, the film suggests that neither Max nor Lucia harbors this "impossible fantasy" of sameness. In fact, it is the very changes themselves, however apparently small, that constitute the source of Max and Lucia's

¹¹⁴ Brinkema, "Pleasure in/and Perversity," 426-27.

pleasure. Each of these differences indicates Lucia's accrual of agency, a source of pleasure for both Lucia and Max.

In an early scene, Lucia wakes up in the *Hotel zur Oper* and recalls a memory of Max shooting at her in the *Lager*. In the memory, she seems genuinely frightened, scurrying across a floor of shattered glass and cowering in the corner to avoid a fatal bullet. But in the present, she is clearly turned on. As she jumps in excitement, the camera zooms out, conveying her titillation by energizing cinematic space. With a smile on her face, she excitedly grabs a pack of cigarettes and licks her lips, seeking to intensify the memory's erotic charge. Equipped with what aesthetic philosopher Edward Bullough famously called "psychical distance,"¹¹⁵ Lucia is able to enjoy the violent event safely and erotically.

A later pair of scenes employ a common gesture to demonstrate Lucia's assumption of sexual agency. After spotting Max at the performance of *The Magic Flute*, Lucia remembers him chaining her to a bedpost in the *Lager* and forcing his fingers in and out of her mouth as she was frozen in terror. Part phallus, part gun, Max's fingers point at Lucia in a gesture of accusation. Max's sadistic scenario, both restrictive and invasive, later supplies material for Lucia's erotic reversal. Having moved into Max's apartment, Lucia persuades him to switch from the role of domineering father to nurturing mother. As he feeds her hot chocolate with a spoon, Lucia entreats him with a voracious stare, forcibly gripping Max's fingers with her teeth before lowering her head to perform oral sex. By enacting simulated violence on Max's substitute phallus, Lucia

¹¹⁵ Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," 88-108.

completes her transition from fear to desire, a development Cavani emphasizes by cross-cutting to a frightened Lucia forced to perform oral sex on Max in the *Lager*, swastika armband plainly in view.

Analytic psychology has long maintained that transformation is a constitutive feature of the feminine. In this respect, *The Night Porter* is a feminist film insofar as it celebrates the feminine-coded process of transformation in the face of patriarchal resistance. Erich Neumann argues that “authorities in the form of the father archetype, the patriarchal culture canon, and the super-ego” strive to ensure cultural stability by “excluding the unsettling, transformative character of the anima.” This “fear of the feminine,” which is synonymous with a fear of transformation, is thus “shoved off on those who live on the fringes, the creative persons, who compromise culture’s outsiders.”¹¹⁶ Although Cavani does not absolve Max of his crimes, she does celebrate his willingness to embrace Lucia’s transformative character, her ability to rebalance the radical asymmetries of their relationship in the *Lager* and generate a mutually violent and mutually nurturing tryst through creative play. Contrasting Max favorably with the narcissistic, homosexually-coded ex-Nazis for surrendering to Lucia’s transformative

¹¹⁶ Neumann, “The Fear of the Feminine,” 255.

femininity,¹¹⁷ Cavani produces an ideal spectator-model for a viewer receptive to her own transformative auteurist practice.

IV. *Mode rétro* or Anti-Historicist?

Though Andrew Sarris doubted the very possibility of the female auteur in 1963,¹¹⁸ by 1974 he became Cavani's best advocate. In his modest review, he claimed, "I can understand not admiring nor enjoying *The Night Porter*, but I cannot understand not respecting it ... Liliana Cavani's visual style is so seductive and so obsessive that one has to be willfully blind to ignore it."¹¹⁹ Sarris hit on what so many feminist champions of the film missed: that Cavani's film is not primarily a feminist film because of its treatment of women or its critique of sexual politics—it is a feminist film, first and foremost, because it is a showcase for a female auteur to make provocative thematic and stylistic decisions. Feminist critics, desperate to claim Cavani as a feminist filmmaker in their own idealized mode, insist that Cavani's intertextual references to the Western canon—particularly her incorporation of *The Magic Flute*—serve to denounce the grand tradition of European

¹¹⁷ In a 1975 interview, Cavani relayed, "When I researched into the Nazi period, I came to the conclusion that the SS was a homosexual cult—either consciously or unconsciously, realized or unrealized. It was a very narcissistic corps" (Stuart, "Consciousness and Conscience," 13). Later in her career, the trope of the degenerate gay man would recur in the hedonistic revelers of *The Skin* (1981) and the cold-hearted mob boss Reeves (Ray Winstone) in *Ripley's Game* (2002). *The Berlin Affair* shows a much more sympathetic representation of lesbian romance—the gorgeous sex scenes between Louise (Gudrun Landgrebe) and Mitsuko (Mio Takaki) rival Max and Lucia's in tenderness and scintillation—which is consistent with Cavani's gendered bias, which celebrates all varieties of female sexuality but only condones male sexuality's masochistic variant. Cavani is particularly suspicious of men in groups. In Cavani's films, such homosocial collectives manifest as oppressive institutions (the police in *I cannibali*, 1970), rape-happy gangs (the soldiers in *The Skin*), or smooth underground criminal networks (the ex-Nazis in *The Night Porter*, the thugs in *Ripley's Game*).

¹¹⁸ Jonas Mekas alleged that Sarris told him, "I don't believe in women directors." Mekas, "Movie Journal," 13.

¹¹⁹ Sarris, "The Nasty Nazis," 77.

heteropatriarchy which lead inexorably to the Third Reich.¹²⁰ But in the introduction to the published screenplay of *The Night Porter*, Cavani cheerfully enumerates her male influences: de Sade, Dostoyevsky, Klimt, Mann, Musil.¹²¹ Just as Cavani claimed to feel “perfectly at home” with her fellow male filmmakers, she seems equally at home in a long tradition of male artists. This is not to say, however, that she shows solemn respect for their work, a desire to preserve and honor the integrity of their texts. Rather, in the mode of T. S. Eliot, she seeks to alter the tradition by engaging with it.¹²² There is no anxiety of influence here. What we have instead is an erotics of influence, a desire for transformative engagement with the past. Cavani opens the art of the past up and transfigures it, an Ovidian confluence of eros and metamorphosis. For Cavani, intertextuality as a fundamentally erotic relation, marked by ambivalent sentiments of admiration and aggression, of deep love and and a desire for violent transformation. Cavani’s film makes an argument—that we should be able to engage with the past erotically. In this sense, the film aligns itself firmly with its heroine, Lucia. Cavani doesn’t merely subvert other genres of artistic expression that preceded cinema: opera, ballet, architecture, theater, painting, sculpture. Rather, she engages with them sadomasochistically, oscillating between homage and humiliation. Cavani acknowledges that we are all, inevitably, subjects of history. But we can assert our agency by alchemizing the past into erotic and aesthetic satisfaction in the present.

¹²⁰ Pietropaolo, Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*,” 74-76; Pollock, “Redemption or Transformation,” 150.

¹²¹ Cavani, *Il portiere di notte*, vii-xiv, 5-7.

¹²² Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 90-97.

Cavani's engagement with history is distinctly anti-Historicist, if we understand Historicism in its nineteenth-century architectural sense. As a reader of Albert Speer's best-selling memoir *Inside the Third Reich* (1970),¹²³ Cavani would have been aware of Hitler's affection for Vienna's nineteenth-century historicist architecture, particularly the work of Gottfried Semper and Theophile Hansen. Although Speer insists that Hitler was too "pragmatic" to endorse an "ideologically based architectural style" consistent with his "mentality,"¹²⁴ Speer nonetheless provides insight into Hitler's resolutely Historicist imagination. Maintaining that "in the realm of architecture ... Hitler remained arrested in the world of his youth: the world of 1880 to 1910,"¹²⁵ Speer reports that the *Führer*

had carefully studied the plans of Vienna and Paris, and he revealed an amazing memory for these. In Vienna, he admired the architectural complex of the *Ringstraße* with its great buildings, the *Rathaus*, the Parliament, the Concert Hall, or the *Hofburg* and the twin museums. He could draw this part of the city in correct proportions.¹²⁶

Speer adds that Hitler appreciated the neoclassicism of Paul Ludwig Troost because "he thought he had found certain points of relationship between the Dorians and his own Germanic world,"¹²⁷ a quintessentially Historicist sentiment.

In his discussion of the *Ringstraße*'s Historicist architecture, Carl Schorske describes how four major buildings appropriated visual idioms of the past in order to link historical associations to contemporary functions: Friedrich Schmidt designed his

¹²³ Stuart, "Consciousness and Conscience," 13.

¹²⁴ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 43.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

Rathaus (1872-1873) [Fig. 33] in the Gothic style in order “to evoke its origins as a free medieval commune”¹²⁸; Semper and Hasenauer conceived their *Hofburgtheater* (1874-1888) [Fig. 34] in the Baroque style, “commemorating the era in which theater first joined together cleric, courtier, and commoner in a shared aesthetic enthusiasm”¹²⁹; for his University (1873-1884) [Fig. 35], Heinrich von Ferstel opted for a Renaissance style that would stand as “an unequivocal symbol of liberal culture”¹³⁰; and Hansen selected the classical Greek style for his Parliament building (1874-1883) [Fig. 36], symbolizing “the hoped-for parliamentary integration of peers and people.”¹³¹ In Historicism, style is reduced a signifier of particular values, its goal is to assert transtemporal ideological continuity.

Conversely, Cavani’s attitude toward history is firmly Nietzschean. In “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), Nietzsche implores his readers to “learn better how to employ history for the purpose of life.”¹³² Contending that “a historical phenomenon, known clearly and completely and resolved into a phenomenon of knowledge, is, for him who has perceived it, dead,”¹³³ Nietzsche outlines three “species of history”: the monumental (*monumentalische*), which uses admiration for the past to conceal hatred of the present;¹³⁴ the antiquarian (*antiquarische*), whose

¹²⁸ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 37.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹³¹ Ibid., 42.

¹³² Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 59.

¹³³ Ibid., 67.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 72.

undiscriminating reverence for the past precludes all other metrics of value;¹³⁵ and the critical (*kristische*), a historical mode “in the service of life,” which acknowledges the injustices of the past in order to generate a “second nature” that will obliterate the first:

For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain. If we condemn these aberrations and regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them. The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.¹³⁶

Cavani’s anti-historicism is a mode of critical history insofar as it assumes that acknowledging that we have been shaped by the horrors of the past is an essential step in the process of transforming our present.

Despite its condescension toward the masses, Clement Greenberg’s anti-totalitarian essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939) does make a crucial point that where avant-garde art demands reflection from its spectator to have “recognizable,” “miraculous,” and “sympathetic” effects, kitsch tends to “predigest” such effects for the spectator prior to the encounter.¹³⁷ The association of Nazism with kitsch has a long history, thanks in no small part to Greenberg’s pioneering essay. For Friedländer, “harmony” constitutes the essence of kitsch, and its success as Nazi propaganda resulted from a mass desire for social harmony with the will of an authoritarian dictator.¹³⁸ *The*

¹³⁵ Ibid., 74-75.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 75-76.

¹³⁷ Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 15.

¹³⁸ Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 19.

Night Porter conceptualizes kitsch beyond the synchronic desire for social harmony in the present by figuring Historicism as a diachronic kitsch mode. Historicism is a kitsch phenomenon because it insists on corresponding harmonies between transtemporal style and transtemporal ideology. In other words, it demands uncritical, unreflective, and uncreative acceptance of a fixed correspondence between style and ideology. Historicism relies on a received interpretation of the past, the reduction of a past style to the expression of a cultural ideal. Cavani's film complicates these received ideas, ultimately unmooring style from context so that it can enter into the realm of play. Cavani's revolt against historicism offers a guide for interpreting her own use of past styles.

It's Cavani's fundamentally transformative mode of historical engagement that contemporary critics of the *mode rétro* misunderstood. In the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana classified *The Night Porter* with *Lacombe, Lucien* as examples of the *mode rétro*, which they described as "the snobbish fetishism of period effects ... with little concern for history."¹³⁹ Though a vocal dismantler of Freud's theories, Foucault nonetheless presents a textbook return-of-the-repressed argument for the emergence of *mode rétro* Holocaust films in the 1970s. According to Foucault, in the immediate decades after World War II Europeans and Americans were embarrassed to worship power. But by the 1970s, the taboo on power-worship had expired.¹⁴⁰ Sontag, writing the same year in which Foucault's interview was published and Cavani's film was released, insists that Fascist ideals never went out of style—they merely operated under

¹³⁹ Foucault, Bonitzer, and Toubiana, "Anti-Rétro," 159.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 166.

“other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders).” Sontag is suspicious of anyone who claims to appreciate Leni Riefenstahl’s films purely as a manifestation of her “genius”; instead, Sontag accuses Riefenstahl’s admirers of harboring the “longings” and “romantic ideals” on which Riefenstahl’s films are based.¹⁴¹ In effect, Sontag takes a Historicist view of Fascist aesthetics, insisting that whenever the aesthetics crop up the ideology cannot be far behind. As I have tried to demonstrate through my engagement with criticism of Cavani’s film—and with commentary on representations of the Holocaust more broadly—many of these prescriptive critics harbor a Historicist imagination, unable or unwilling to conceptualize art beyond an unyielding correspondence between style and ideology. It is this Historicist imagination that Cavani—through her treatment of art, architecture, and theater—seeks to disrupt.

Departing from the popular trope of beginning with Vienna-based films with establishing shots of the city skyline prominently featuring the tower of St. Stephen’s Cathedral, Cavani opts for low-angle shots which dwarf Max with architecture. The daughter of an architect who provided her with artistic instruction from childhood,¹⁴² Cavani’s treatment of built space—from the cavernous operating room of *Galileo* (1968) to the Brutalist edifices of *I cannibali* (1970)—has a graphic boldness rivaling the Antonioni of *La notte* (1961) and *Red Desert* (1964). By subordinating her protagonist to

¹⁴¹ Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” 96.

¹⁴² Maronne, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, xiv.

monumental buildings in the film's opening shots, Cavani alerts us to the importance of architecture in her auteurist mode of cinematic storytelling. By commencing with a shot of Semper and Hausenauer's *Kunsthistorisches Museum* (1871-1891) and Kaspar von Zumbusch's monument to Maria Theresia (1888) [Fig. 37]—two icons of the Historicist era—Cavani asserts her engagement with the Historicist mode.

While the canted angles recall the eccentric framings of Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949)—a film that has indelibly coupled postwar Vienna with film noir stylistics—the wide-angle lenses harken back to an even earlier stylistic period: Mannerism. This sixteenth-century Italian painting style connects the film's first and second shots. In the second shot [Fig. 38], Max walks next to the St. Michael's Wing of the *Hofburg* (1889-1893). The wide angle lens curves the architecture on the right side of the frame, recalling the distortions of Parmigianino's *Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c. 1523-1524) [Fig. 39], a jewel of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna's museums not only housed some of the most famous Mannerist works in the world, but its art historians, particularly Max Dvořák, were instrumental in reviving Mannerism's critical reputation during the interwar period.¹⁴³ Mannerist painting was echoed in Viennese modernism, another “decadent” period in the history of European art: with their taste for stylized artifice, Secessionists like Klimt and Koloman Moser appropriated the harsh metallic colors and serpentine lines of Bronzino, and the elongated figures of Parmigianino and Pontormo,¹⁴⁴ while Expressionists like Egon Schiele, Richard Gerstl, and especially Oskar Kokoschka

¹⁴³ Bousquet, *Mannerism*, 24.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

sought to emulate the febrile brushwork and evocative nonlocal coloring of El Greco.¹⁴⁵ While Cavani has acknowledged the influence of German Expressionism on the look of *The Night Porter*,¹⁴⁶ it is the genre's indebtedness to Mannerism that most brightly burns through. Like Michael Haneke after her, Cavani turns Fascism's cruel, disciplined aesthetics against Fascism. Cavani knows that although Fascism strives toward classical clarity, it yielded Mannerist distortions of the world. In the *Lager*, Cavani gives Fascism a Mannerist treatment, souring the atmosphere of the camps with an acidic green sickliness; emaciating and costuming Lucia's body in order to create an illusion of elongation; and shrouding perverse and sadistic sexual acts in Mannerist shadow.¹⁴⁷ Cavani's Mannerism is inextricable from her auteurism. Her Mannerist distortions of space and time are an auteurist stamp, a reminder of a consciousness behind the camera generating atmosphere.

The credit sequence ends with a pan down the curved corner of Otto Wagner's *18 Wienzeile* (1898), rechristened the *Hotel zur Oper*. By ending on a modernist building by Wagner—an architect who launched his own revolt against Historicism, both in print and in practice¹⁴⁸—Cavani reinforces her own break with historicism. By shooting the scaffolding-laden facade of *18 Wienzeile*, Cavani not only reminds us that Vienna was under reconstruction only two years after the restoration of the Second Republic in 1955;

¹⁴⁵ Lotte Eisner claims that El Greco's "flamboyant outlines and disjointed movement" influenced Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), a major German Expressionist film. (Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 58-59).

¹⁴⁶ Lichtenstein, "In Liliana Cavani's Love Story, Love Means Always Having to Say Ouch," D19.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of these themes—coloration, elongation, perversion, sadism, and the illumination of darkness—in a survey of Mannerist painting, see Bousquet, *Mannerism*, 27, 109-11, 124-28, 134-39, 190-202, and 205-12.

¹⁴⁸ Wagner, *Modern Architecture*, 73-80. See also Le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity*, 25.

she also implies that the past is in constant need of renovation. But the glimpse of *18 Wienzeile* comes only a few shots after Cavani irreverently decapitates the iconic “golden cabbage” of Joseph Maria Olbrich’s *Secessionhaus* (1898) [Figs. 40-41], the headquarters of the resolutely anti-Historicist Secession movement. In Cavani’s film, nothing, not even a temple to her own ideals, is sacrosanct.

Later in the film, after Max and Lucia have reunited and accessed memories of their relations in the *Lager*, Lucia visits another icon of Viennese modernism: Adolf Loos’s American Bar (1907) on *Kärntner Straße*. Like Wagner, Loos was an outspoken critic of Historicism.¹⁴⁹ Atavistically returning to the humbler, less ornamentally encrusted forms of the Biedermeier period (1815-1848) which preceded the advent of historicism, Loos was integral to the development of unadorned modern architecture—both domestic and public—in Vienna and beyond. In his famous polemic “The Potemkin City,” published in the July 1898 issue of the Secessionist magazine *Ver Sacrum* [Fig. 42], Loos inveighed against the Historicist architecture of the *Ringstraße*. According to Loos, historicist architecture was fraudulent on two counts: first, it obscured the class status of the “simple man” (*der einfache Mann*) who occupied a palace that left him “overwhelmed with a feeling of feudal splendor (*feudaler Pracht*) and lordly greatness (*Herrengrosse*) when he looked at the building he lived in from the outside”¹⁵⁰; and second, these historical styles deceive the public into thinking that the buildings are made of stone and stucco rather than cement. To counter this trend, Loos calls for a truth to

¹⁴⁹ Wipplinger, *Vienna 1900*, 404-08.

¹⁵⁰ Loos, “Potemkin City,” 77.

materials, tasking the artist to find “a new formal language (*Formensprache*) for the new material.”¹⁵¹ For the socially progressive Loos,¹⁵² who assured his readers that “Poverty is not a disgrace” (*Armut ist keine Schande*),¹⁵³ a turn toward an unadorned formal language that embraces modern efficiency of production and materials was a crucial step in recognizing—and ameliorating—the devastating consequences of inegalitarian social relations. Loos’s emphasis on truth to materials was more ethical than aesthetic, indicating what he termed a “fine-tuned sense of justice” (*sensitive Rechtsgefühl*).¹⁵⁴

While she shares with Loos a commitment to truth as articulated through form, Cavani subverts Loosian ideology in her presentation of his American Bar. The initial shot of the bar, positioned at a low angle, glides toward the mirrors above the liquor shelves, which reflect the coffered ceilings and provide the illusion that the small room—a mere 304 square feet—is larger than it is [Fig. 43].¹⁵⁵ The camera pans left to a grid of opaque onyx panels, indulging, momentarily, in the attention to surfaces that Loos found integral to modern *Bequemlichkeit* or comfort, a value he placed ahead of functionality [Fig. 44]. As architectural historian Christopher Long demonstrates, Loos and his fellow architects Josef Frank and Oskar Strnad sought to develop an architecture that would “embrace . . . the cozy here and now.”¹⁵⁶ But as the camera pulls back to reveal Lucia

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵² See Loos’s “Ornament and Crime,” 20-23.

¹⁵³ Loos, “Potemkin City,” 79.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 75.

¹⁵⁵ Borngässer, “Architecture from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present Day,” 312.

¹⁵⁶ Long, *The New Space*, xiii.

reminiscing about the camps, we find her less than dazzled by Loosian atmosphere, absorbed instead in her own memories.

Suddenly, the film flashes back to a scene of Max and Lucia in the *Lager*, the swastika on Max's red armband prominently displayed. A reader of *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933), Cavani would have been familiar with William Reich's morphologically-informed analysis of the swastika's erotic origins. Citing the symbol's Semitic, Greek, and Indian heritage, Reich posits that "the swastika was originally a sexual symbol."¹⁵⁷

If we now have another look at the swastikas on the preceding page, we see that they are the schematic but nonetheless clearly recognizable representations of two interlocked human figures. The swastika on the left represents a *sexual act* lying down; the one on the right, a sexual act in standing position.¹⁵⁸

Further, as an architect's daughter who repeatedly featured the American Bar in her films, Cavani would likely have picked up on Reich's echoes of Loos's infamous polemic "Ornament and Crime" (1908):

The first ornament that was born, the cross, was erotic in origin. The first work of art, the first artistic act which the first artist, in order to rid himself of his surplus energy (*Überschüssigkeiten*), smeared on the wall. A horizontal dash: the prone woman. A vertical dash: the man penetrating her.¹⁵⁹

Building on the connection between the ornamental and the erotic, Loos denounces ornament as a symptom of degeneracy and a threat to the progress of modern European man, not least because the production of ornament yields unnecessary, exploitative

¹⁵⁷ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 102.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 19.

labor.¹⁶⁰ That his bar would evoke a memory blighted by a symbol that straddles ancient erotic-aesthetic origins and modern crimes of extreme human degeneracy could hardly have been Loos's intention.

Beatriz Colomina identifies a contradiction between Loos's writings and his architecture. Whereas his writings affirm a strict separation between the masculine-coded exterior and the feminine-coded interior, his designs frequently undermine this division, employing mirrors, windows, and architectural passages that facilitate the interpenetration of public and private space.¹⁶¹ But long before Colomina's feminist deconstruction of Loos's work, Cavani was already beginning to excavate the obsessions with the feminine lodged in the unconscious of his architecture, a contrast with the outward-facing, Anglophilic masculinity of his lectures and articles. In *The Night Porter*, she presents the American Bar as a temenos, a darkened womb of female memory and contemplation. Though the bar was modeled on the English gentleman's club, there is no masculine fraternizing here. And eleven years later, Cavani would undermine Loos'—and her own—homophobia¹⁶² by turning it into a site of trans-ethnic lesbian desire in *The Berlin Affair*.

In the second half of the film, Cavani amplifies the Loosian tension between exterior and interior, between the public and the private. In the wake of a post-1968 resurgence of critical interest in Austro-Marxism,¹⁶³ Cavani installed her protagonists in

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 20-22.

¹⁶¹ Colimina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 253-55, 272.

¹⁶² On Loos's homophobia and anti-effeminacy in his essays "Underclothes" (1898) and "Ornament and Crime" (1908), see Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 38.

¹⁶³ Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, 10.

the crown jewel of Red Vienna's *Gemeindebauten* program of the 1920s and '30s: Karl Ehn's *Karl-Marx-Hof* (1926-1930) [Fig. 45]. In 1974, the same year in which *The Night Porter* was released, a photo-negative of the *Karl-Marx-Hof* graced the cover of the second edition of Vincent Scully's *Modern Architecture* [Fig. 46]. The book's subtitle—"The Architecture of Democracy"—along with Scully's brief but glowing description of "the most eloquent masterpiece" of the *Gemeindebauten*, which celebrates Red Vienna's reduced infant mortality rates and workers' rents,¹⁶⁴ emphasizes the salutary side of Vienna's Social Democratic building program. When publicizing the erection of the monumental complex, Ehn proclaimed: "Public enterprise alone, based upon considerations of national health, can and must give such full consideration to the hygienic requirements of architecture."¹⁶⁵ In addition to improvements in sanitation and light exposure, Ehn's complex boasted both dental and maternity clinics and a pharmacy.¹⁶⁶ Ironically, Max and Lucia's sequestration in their apartment is far from salutary. Over the course of their confinement, as their food supplies deplete and unwashed dishes pile up, they grow pale, thin, and weak.

Another objective of the design of the *Karl-Marx-Hof* was to promote public, communal life, particularly for women who performed domestic labor.¹⁶⁷ By expanding individual apartments with a street- or courtyard-facing balcony, and supplying the units with communal bathing facilities, *Waschsalons*, and a large garden courtyard, Ehn's

¹⁶⁴ Scully, *Modern Architecture*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Ehn, "Karl-Marx-Hof," 180.

¹⁶⁶ Brooke, "The Karl-Marx-Hof, Vienna," 674.

¹⁶⁷ Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, 205-15.

design encouraged inhabitants to engage with their neighbors. Donald Brooke exclaimed, “It has been possible to provide open spaces of such dimensions as to satisfy that desire for openness which is so characteristic of modern life.”¹⁶⁸ Max and Lucia, however, shut the world out. Permanently abandoning any hopes for a collective Socialist utopia, Lucia and Max repurpose the *Karl-Marx-Hof* as a site for their own private *apocalypse joyeuse*, shunning the collectivist fantasies Red Vienna and atavistically reverting to a *fin-de-siècle* ethos.¹⁶⁹

Upon completion of the building, Eve Blau points out that the *Karl-Marx-Hof*’s “spatial order is characterized by a subtle interpenetration of public, private, and communal space that not only allows for the fluid passage between city and Hof but also put special emphasis on the points of intersection between them.”¹⁷⁰ While Cavani’s film cross-cuts between interior and exterior, the feeling her film generates is less one of a welcome “fluid passage” and more one of vulnerability. Further, as Helmut Gruber explains, Red Vienna’s Socialist “cultural experiment”¹⁷¹ had its authoritarian side even before the Fascists came on the scene in 1933. The *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*’s (SDAP) municipal housing projects were never utopian. Instead, they were characterized by paternalistic surveillance and rigid regulation of their dwellers’ activities, all in the

¹⁶⁸ Brooke, “Karl-Marx-Hof, Vienna” 674.

¹⁶⁹ By contrast, Paul Fejös’s 1933 comedy *Sonnenstrahl* (1933) celebrates Red Vienna’s communal apartments. The film climaxes in the *Friedrich-Engels-Platz-Hof* (1930-1933), where generous neighbors shower the protagonists with coins so they can pay off the taxi they have acquired to survive during the financial crisis. The facade of the *Friedrich-Engels-Platz-Hof*, with its massed balconies, lends itself to a such collective solidarity, whereas the balconies of the *Karl-Marx-Hof* are much more alienated from one another. I thank Katie Trumpener for drawing my attention to this film.

¹⁷⁰ Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, 326.

¹⁷¹ Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 13.

name of shaping orderly, socialized “neue Menschen” for the Austrian Republic.¹⁷² The *Karl-Marx-Hof* was no exception. Due to Cavani’s familiarity with the confluence of politics and architecture (her architect father was a fervent anti-Fascist¹⁷³), she may have been well aware of this gap between ideal and reality.

Dassanowsky notes that the Nazis surveillance of the *Karl-Marx-Hof* is an instance of history repeating: in 1934, the building was a socialist stronghold during Vienna’s civil war, and during the *Anschluss* (1938-1945) it was “anathema to the Nazi regime.”¹⁷⁴ Since the film’s release, critics have described the apartment as “a kind of concentration camp in miniature”¹⁷⁵ and “the new *Lager*.”¹⁷⁶ But no critic has ventured to suggest that the recreation of a concentration camp within a Social Democratic edifice may elide differences between Social Democracy and National Socialism. By the 1970s, commonalities between National Socialism and Soviet Communism has been long established by advocates of Liberalism on both the left and the right. Even if Cavani hadn’t directly read the Vienna-born and educated economist F. A. Hayek, whose bestseller *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), “a noir classic drenched in anxiety”¹⁷⁷ that sought

¹⁷² Ibid., 62-65.

¹⁷³ Lichtenstein, “In Liliana Cavani’s Love Story, Love Means Always Having to Say Ouch,” D19.

¹⁷⁴ Dassanowsky, *World Film Locations: Vienna*, 64.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, “Anti-Rétro,” 168.

¹⁷⁶ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 90. Marguerite Valentine concurs, insisting that “within the confines of a locked apartment, [Max and Lucia] recreate the claustrophobia of the concentration camp” (“The That the Gods Wish to Destroy, They First Make Mad,” 446).

¹⁷⁷ Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 274.

to expose “the socialist roots of Nazism,”¹⁷⁸ she would have encountered similar arguments in Wilhelm Reich, who claimed that “the German freedom movement prior to Hitler was inspired by Karl Marx’s economic and social theory. Hence, an understanding of German fascism must proceed from an understanding of Marxism.”¹⁷⁹ Cavani was well aware that what Griselda Pollock has termed “the concentrationary imaginary”¹⁸⁰ was not exclusive to the Third Reich, explaining, “my victim belongs to any *Lager*. Indeed the most horrific were the Nazis, but there were also *Lager* in the Soviet Union and in Brazil. I believe that is essential to remember.”¹⁸¹ Despite the prevalence of Nazi regalia in the flashback sequences—black boots, Hugo Boss suits, swastika armbands—the hermetically presented camp scenes,¹⁸² shot in an abandoned Roman tuberculosis sanatorium,¹⁸³ stand for any-*Lager*-whatever. Further, *The Night Porter*’s narrative suggests that distinctions between Socialism and Fascism are less than firm. Over *Punschkräpfen* and *Marillenknödel* with Max, the Nazi collaborator Mario (Ugo Cardea) confirms that Lucia is “the daughter of a Socialist,” inquiring, “She was Viennese, right?” Because we never see Lucia’s father in the film, Max’s assumption of the paternal role blurs the line between Socialist and Fascist. Later in the film, when Max and the other ex-

¹⁷⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 181-92. On the left, Hannah Arendt made a similar argument about Fascism and Communism’s shared totalitarian ideology in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), a book that brought more general attention to an already decades-long discourse in print.

¹⁷⁹ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Pollock, “Redemption or Transformation,” 121-62.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 97.

¹⁸² *The Night Porter* features no exterior footage of its *Lager*, unusual for a Holocaust film.

¹⁸³ Bogarde, *An Orderly Man*, 164.

Nazis congregate on a rooftop overlooking St. Stephen's, Dobson (Manfred Freiburger) inquires,

Max, answer me honestly. It will simplify everything. Have you become a Communist?

Max: Oh God. The usual accusation, even for the newly born.

Kurt (Goeffrey Copleston): I know you're not a Communist. You're not a defeatist. You're one of us!

This exchange implies that, for the ex-Nazis, identification as a Communist or as a Fascist has less to do with deep-seated ideological convictions than with a tribalist mentality.

Cavani makes another reference to Social Democracy's devolving into National Socialism through her depiction of the *Zentralfriedhof* Crematorium (1921-1923). In the heyday of Red Vienna, architect Clemens Holzmeister designed the medieval-inspired, Expressionist crematorium for the city's *Arbeiterbestattungsverein* (Worker's Funerary Society), which boasted the motto: "A proletarian life, a proletarian death, and culturally-progressive cremation!"¹⁸⁴ With the advent of the *Anschluss*, Holzmeister's Austrofascist-era commissions would be appropriated by the Nazis. In 1939, his *Radiokulturhaus* became the home base of the *Reichssender Wien*, the Viennese subsidiary of the Nazi government's Berlin-based *Großdeutscher Rundfunk*. Accordingly, Holzmeister's building, with its blend of "moderate modernism and emotion," was celebrated as an icon of Fascist architecture.¹⁸⁵ An exterior shot of the cabal of ex-Nazis congregating outside of the crematorium with plumes of black smoke rising from the chimney—a visual

¹⁸⁴ Borngässer, "Architecture from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present Day," 318.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

reference to the death camps—drives the Social Democracy—National Socialism analogy home [Fig. 47].

In addition to art and architecture, Cavani turns to theater as a medium for anti-Historicist transformation, interrogating Vienna's long held reputation for theatricality in the process. Gordon argues that "the film is constructed as a series of performances and repeat performances, rendering theatricality ... its dominant mode."¹⁸⁶ While performance, ritual, and spectatorship are prominent and recurring themes within the film, Max and Lucia's sexual liaison grows increasingly anti-theatrical as the film progresses. In an interview with Alexander Stuart, Cavani explains that the figure of Bert (Amedeo Amodio) was meant to convey the narcissism of the Nazis as reported by Speer in his memoir. Cavani insists "The SS wanted to impress."¹⁸⁷ *The Night Porter* celebrates Max and Lucia because they don't want to impress. Lucia's anti-theatricality unmoors her sadomasochist impulses from Fascism. Sontag posits that theater is the "natural link" between sadomasochism and fascism: "'Fascism is theater,' as Genet said. As is sadomasochistic sexuality: to be involved in sadomasochism is to take part in a sexual theater, a staging of sexuality."¹⁸⁸ In the *Lager*, Max—by way of desire—and Lucia—by way of coercion—put their sexuality on display for fellow guards and inmates: Max spreads Lucia's legs before an audience of female prisoners, Lucia performs a licentious cabaret routine for the guards and their favorite detainees. But when they reunite in Vienna, the show is over. They retreat to the private rooms of the *Hotel zur Oper* and

¹⁸⁶ Gordon, "Salomé Returns with a Vengeance," 162.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Stuart, "Consciousness and Conscience" 13.

¹⁸⁸ Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," 103.

Max's apartment where they can carry out their sadomasochistic play away from the prying eyes of the victimizers and the vacant stares of the victims. Max and Lucia's transition from theatricality to absorption situates Cavani's film in a tradition outlined by Michael Fried, spanning from French narrative painting of the 1750s to American post-painterly abstraction of 1960s, which cultivated a disregard for the viewer.¹⁸⁹ Following Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century art criticism, Fried champions the absorptive mode because it demonstrates "virtuosity" on behalf of the painter¹⁹⁰ and because it yields a "difficult," but ultimately rewarding, experience for the viewer.¹⁹¹

By retreating from the public realm, Max and Lucia dispense with *Selbstdarstellung*, "the public and theatricalize representation of the self" endemic to Viennese urban experience in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.¹⁹² In keeping with her practice of recoding the popular imaginary of Vienna's heritage, Cavani chooses *The Magic Flute*—what music historian Charles Rosen describes as the "supposedly most Viennese of Viennese operas¹⁹³—to crystallize Max and Lucia's pivot from public to private. When Max and Lucia attend the inaugural performance of *The Magic Flute* at the Volksoper—a production conducted by Lucia's husband Anthony Atherton (Mario Masé)—Cavani's camera captures the stage action only obliquely. The scene focuses squarely on Max and Lucia, largely reducing the theatrical spectacle of the opera to Mozart's

¹⁸⁹ Fried, *Theatricality and Absorption*, 5.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁹² Gronberg, *Vienna, City of Modernity*, 37.

¹⁹³ Rosen, *The Classical Style*, 317.

music: Pamina and Papageno's duet "*Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen*" and Tamino's aria "*Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton*." As the camera glides between Max and Lucia, Cavani captures their cautious glances with focus pulls that suggest the past is clarifying into high resolution. Cavani intersperses the event with flashbacks to shared memories of the *Lager*.

Several critics have read *The Magic Flute* as an ironic counterpoint to Cavani's narrative. Labeling the opera "heteronormative and conservative," Griselda Pollock insists that *The Magic Flute* represents the "bourgeois patriarchal order" that cannot accommodate Max and Lucia's love.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Cavani's editing suggests such a counterpoint, shuttling between two types of spectatorship, two types of relationships, two types of performance. But beneath this contrast is a deeper affinity for Mozart's opera, an eclectic, synthetic work that, like Cavani's film, fused classical and baroque aesthetics, popular and "learned" forms of art,¹⁹⁵ masculine and feminine symbolism.¹⁹⁶ For Dassanowsky, Cavani's juxtaposition of *The Magic Flute* with scenes of sexual violence in the *Lager* reminds us that Mozart's opera is not only associated with Enlightenment ideals and Austria's "idealized self-image," but also with the Nazis' appropriation of Austrian art.¹⁹⁷ But Cavani performs her own act of appropriation. While critics have overstated the case that her inclusion of *The Magic Flute* is an indictment of

¹⁹⁴ Pollock, "Redemption or Transformation," 150. For a detailed reading of the *Magic Flute* scene, see Pietropaolo, "Sexuality as Exorcism in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*," 74-76.

¹⁹⁵ Rosen, *The Classical Style*, 318-19.

¹⁹⁶ Neumann, "On Mozart's 'Magic Flute,'" 164.

¹⁹⁷ Dassanowsky, "Critical (Self-)reflections in the Elusive Other," 170. Ravetto sees Cavani's incorporation of *The Magic Flute* as "implicating the opera, an emblem of German high culture, in the cultural production of Nazism." (Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, 154).

the heteropatriarchal Western tradition—in a 2014 interview, Cavani reports that she'd "loved Mozart" since childhood¹⁹⁸—the scene nevertheless challenges certain Enlightenment ideals of aesthetic autonomy and disinterestedness. By shuttling between Max and Lucia's present viewing experience and their memories of the past, Cavani negates the idea that high culture masterpieces offer a privileged mode of transcendence. Watching *The Magic Flute* does not cause Max and Lucia an escape into the realm of the fantastic and the aesthetic. Rather, it stimulates traumatic memories of the *Lager*. Cavani draws an analogy between the heightened aesthetic experience of witnessing Mozart's opera and the heightened emotional experiences of witnessing a rape in the *Lager*, of being sexually abused, and of perpetrating sexual abuse. Thus aesthetic, emotional, and erotic experiences are transcendent in the same way—they have the potential to lift us out over the everyday. Watching *The Magic Flute*, Max and Lucia realize that although their lives apart from one another are safer, they are much less satisfying.

In the film's final scene, Max and Lucia, starved and deprived of electricity, transition back from the private realm of absorptive sexual union to the public realm of theatrical display. Max once again dolls up Lucia, now too weak from malnourishment to support her own weight, in the "little girl" dress reminiscent of the *Lager*. Max, too, dons his Nazi uniform, possibly for the first time since he fled the camps. But now there are no flashbacks to the *Lager*. Instead, an instrumental reprise of "*Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte*" plays on the soundtrack, a song that was previously associated with Lucia's performance for the SS guards. The repetition of the Dietrich song suggests that the two

¹⁹⁸ "Interview with Liliana Cavani," *The Night Porter*, DVD.

moments are bound by their theatricality, indicating that Lucia and Max are preparing to take the stage, to perform a parody of their exclusive sex play. The irony of this public performance preserves the integrity of their private relationship. Driven from their home, they cling proudly to their last flickers of agency before they are extinguished.

In a 1990 interview with Lietta Tornabuoni, Cavani declared, “I am not provocative but free. I am not repressed, nor autocensorial: I am spontaneous ... the gusto for transgression is probably in my nature.”¹⁹⁹ For a film about entrapments—architectural, psychological, political—for a film that demonstrates the futility of seeking freedom from the past through denial, *The Night Porter* shares in Ludwig Hevisi’s gilded sentiments that front the Secessionhaus: “*Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit*”—“To the Age Its Art. To Art Its Freedom,” a declaration that, because Cavani crops it out of frame, haunts the film from offscreen space. The first sentence depends on the second: for an age to have its art requires artistic freedom. Freedom, in this sense, is not a forgetting of the past, but, as Carl Schorske claims, a rejection of the certainties of the past.²⁰⁰ When art transforms our vision of the past, it transforms the present. Whether or not *The Night Porter* changes anyone’s perception of the Holocaust or of Vienna, a dubious charge for a work of fiction, the film suggests that the erotic and the aesthetic have the transformative power to disrupt and rearrange historically rooted categorical correspondences, to help us realize the extent of our own imaginative agency. The film is also aware that such agency is far from absolute. *The Night Porter* shows the promise of

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 3.

²⁰⁰ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 219.

artistic freedom—demonstrated through its transgressive content and aesthetics—and shows that freedom being thwarted. It is both a model and a cautionary tale. Resistant to censors and critics alike, nearly half a century later Cavani's film has succeeded in making provocative cinema's most legitimate political demand: for its very freedom to exist.

**CHAPTER THREE: Myth Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Ahistorical
Modernism and the Citational Mode in Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980)**

The Vienna of the past was integral for the time-traveling films of Ophuls and Cavani. Alternatively, in *Bad Timing* (1980), another foray into the trope of the doomed romance, Nicolas Roeg opted for the Vienna of the present: the Cold-War Vienna of 1979.¹ Although it foregoes a historical setting, *Bad Timing* brims with references to the city's artistic, cultural, and intellectual heritage: *Fidelio*, Café Landtmann, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and, most notably, the paintings of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. Since the film's release, critics and scholars alike have almost invariably mentioned its *fin-de-siècle* resonances. While some critics have dismissed these "tony cultural allusions" as "pseudo-intellectual"² and "pretentious"³ distractions from a deficient story about the tempestuous relationship between American expatriates Alex Linden (Art Garfunkel) and Milena Flaherty (Theresa Russell), other commentators have insisted that such references are integral to the film's atmosphere and "emotional texture."⁴ Where Barry Langford detects a strained effort "to overlay the allure of *fin-de-siècle* sexual perversity onto the comparatively bland streets of the modern Austrian capital,"⁵ and Timothy Conley suggests that "Vienna's erotic mysticism ... seems more like an enactment of the desires of the protagonists than a quality of the city itself,"⁶ Neil Sinyard

¹ A scene in the film presents Alex Linden's datebook open to March 29, 1979.

² Coleman, "Times Have Changed," 599-600.

³ Denby, "Robert Redford's 'Interiors'," 54-59.

⁴ Combs, "*Bad Timing*."

⁵ Langford, "Strangers (to) Themselves," 149-50.

⁶ Conley, *Screening Vienna*, 173.

insists that “*Bad Timing* is a story that could only take place in Vienna” because the city had retained “the scent of neurotic romanticism and the lure of decadence”⁷ into the Cold-War era. Vienna, according to Dean Billanti, provides “a physical landscape that reflects the spiritual and psychological state of [Alex and Milena’s] relationship,”⁸ and the film’s themes of espionage, medicine, and suicide resonate with Vienna’s unique history.⁹ Franz Grafl summarizes this common interpretation of the city’s role in relation to the film’s narrative: “The love story finds in the semantic basin of Vienna its metaphorical correlative.”¹⁰ However, the film relishes the particularity of its Viennese locale only to undermine it. In the following chapter, I will argue that the thematic resonances of Vienna 1900 in *Bad Timing*—and, in particular, the towering figures of Freud, Klimt, and Schiele—are undergirded by a distinct ideological resonance: a privileging of the realm of myth over the realm of history. Ultimately, *Bad Timing* incorporates historical citations in order to de-historicize itself. By unmooring Secessionstil, Expressionism, and psychoanalysis from their historical context, *Bad Timing* implies that what matters about Klimt, Freud, and Schiele is not their historical and cultural specificity, but rather their timelessness and universality, conditions to which their work aspired.

The concept of Viennese ahistorical modernism was introduced by Carl E. Schorske in a series of essays published between 1961 and 1979 and collected in his

⁷ Sinyard, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 72.

⁸ Billanti, “*Bad Timing*,” 568.

⁹ Conley, *Screening Vienna*, 311.

¹⁰ “Die Liebesgeschichte findet im semantischen Bassin Wiens ihre metaphorische Entsprechung.” (Grafl, *Imaginiertes Österreich*, 293).

Pulitzer Prize-winning volume *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* in 1980.¹¹

According to Schorske, the collapse of *Hochgründerzeit* liberalism after the stock market crash of 1873 precipitated a shift in Viennese art, literature, architecture, music, politics, and psychological inquiry away from an engaged, positivist historicism to an aestheticized, irrational inwardness, rendering the city “one of the most fertile breeding grounds of our century’s a-historical culture.”¹² Enormously influential in the field of Viennese cultural studies, Schorske’s ahistorical modernist “paradigm” has nonetheless been sharply criticized by scholars, such as Allan Janik and Steven Beller, who are eager to establish the contemporaneous trend of “critical modernism” as Vienna 1900’s principal legacy.¹³ But even Beller concedes that Schorske’s paradigm is “fairly convincing” in the case of Gustav Klimt.¹⁴ The cases of Schiele and Freud are somewhat more complicated. According to art historian Robert Jensen, the narcissistic psychologism of Schiele’s portraits was less a symptom of political defeatism than a strategic means of self-positioning in a rapidly changing art market.¹⁵ Alfred Pfabigan suggests that the “universalistic attitude” of Freud’s psychoanalytic writings was not

¹¹ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*.

¹² *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹³ Articulating the distinction between Schorske’s “failure of liberalism” paradigm and his own “critical modernism” paradigm, Janik explains that the latter “turns on the hypothesis that the most important contribution of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna to our culture is a peculiarly skeptical healthy reaction against the spellbinding power that modernity exerts upon us,” a reaction fostered by the work of critical modernists such as Karl Kraus, Adolf Loos, Otto Weininger, Arnold Schoenberg, Egon Schiele, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Georg Trakl, Herman Broch, Theodor Adorno, Erwin Chagraff, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler, Robert Musil, and Rosa Mayreder. (Janik, “Vienna 1900 Revisited,” 40-41). In the introduction to this edited volume, Beller endorses Janik’s contention, insisting that ““critical modernism,” ... has stood the Western intellectual world in good stead ever since,” which “if nothing else, makes Vienna 1900 eminently worthy of our study.” (Beller, “Introduction,” 24).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ Jensen, “A Matter of Professionalism,” 195-219. It should be noted that Schiele’s name never appears in Schorske’s book.

spurred by troubling political developments in the 1890s, but rather by the culmination of his long-held preference for the wide scope of German *Bildung* over Austrian provincialism.¹⁶ In short, while these scholars have reevaluated the *causes* of the ahistorical character of Klimt, Schiele, and Freud's work, the *presence* of such ahistorical character remains undisputed. Similarly, I offer no hypotheses about the cause of *Bad Timing*'s ahistoricizing dimension, aside from a noted decline of political modernism among many—though certainly not all—"mainstream" auteurist filmmakers in the late 1970s.¹⁷ Although my argument about *Bad Timing*'s privileging of the realm of myth over the realm of history is indebted to Roland Barthes's characterization of myth as an eternalizing "form of depoliticized speech,"¹⁸ and although the film advocates the dignity of petit-bourgeois professions, the pleasures of capitalist production, and the genius of the auteur, I hesitate to ascribe the film's mythologizing impulse to a particular political development, such as the inauguration of Margaret Thatcher's decade-long Prime Ministership, effected during the film's production. That is not to say I will ignore the historical context of *Bad Timing*'s production entirely; indeed, I consider *Bad Timing* as a feature of the broader landscape of the postmodern reception of Vienna 1900. Returning to Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon's foundational work on the "cultural logic" and "politics" of postmodernism, I hope to demonstrate how *Bad Timing* can help us rethink postmodern citationality, in particular its capacity to reimagine the connection between

¹⁶ Pfabigan, "Freud's 'Middle Vienna'," 155.

¹⁷ For an account of political modernism's cinematic heyday from 1967 to 1975, and subsequent decline, see Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, 349-82.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.

myth and melodrama, which Jameson's description of postmodern "metageneric cinema" and Linda Hutcheon's appraisal of postmodern "parody" do not adequately accommodate.

I will begin the following chapter by examining *Bad Timing*'s ambivalent attitude toward psychoanalysis, which favors its transhistorical, universalizing tendencies over the historical contingencies sought out by its method. Arguing that the film endorses a hermeneutics of suspicion—essential to the professions of both detection and psychoanalysis that the film explores—I will then suggest that the film advocates careful attention to its protagonists' interactions with their material environments. As aesthetic experience constitutes a crucial type of such engagements, I will discuss the film's citational mode, arguing that, unlike in other conspicuously intermedial films, it works primarily to collapse rather than emphasize differences in time and medium. After a general discussion of the film's citational mode, I will consider more specifically the film's engagement with Klimt's work, interrogating the ubiquitous "mosaic" analogy between Klimt's surface decoration and Roeg's disruption of linear narrative structure. The following section will shift focus to the film's engagement with Schiele, particularly in terms of its idiosyncratic aesthetics of the encounter. Finally, I will return to the question of genre and the context of the postmodern cinema of the 1970s and 1980s in order to delineate the the film's politics and its implications for a melodramatic unconscious.

I: Psychoanalysis: Selective Affinities

Released during the heyday of Grand Theory in academic film studies, *Bad Timing* was subjected to Foucaudian, Girardian, and Derridean interpretations.¹⁹ Curiously, despite its Viennese setting and its “research psychoanalyst” protagonist, the film has never received a sustained Freudian reading.²⁰ Stuart Cunningham offers a plausible explanation for this scholarly lacuna: “the film already ‘knows’ about the applicability of psychoanalysis to filmic signification, particularly in its ‘foregrounding’ of the problematics of the look.”²¹ In other words, the film precludes psychoanalytic interpretations by demonstrating its awareness of psychoanalytic film theory, fending off potential identifications of its own unconscious drives, or declarations of its status as a symptomatic text that merely reflects a contemporary social mentality. While I agree with Cunningham that *Bad Timing* “thematizes a critique of psychoanalytic practice,” it is crucial to recognize that the film does not reject psychoanalysis *tout court*. Its attitude toward psychoanalysis alternates between satire and deference, between skepticism and sympathy.

Bad Timing does not fit the profile of a typical psychoanalytic film. Unlike the psychiatric films that flourished in Hollywood during the 1940s and 1950s, *Bad Timing*

¹⁹ Teresa de Lauretis offers a Foucaudian reading in “Now and Nowhere,” 84-201; Cunningham enlists Girard’s theory of violence and the sacred in “Good Timing,” 101-12; for a Derridian perspective, see Olivier, “Identity and Difference in Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing*,” 26-33; and Toni Ross interprets the film’s presentation of authorship in relation to the Kantian sublime in “Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing*,” 180-220. Toby Miller discusses these critical interventions in terms of wider developments in the field of film theory in “*Psycho’s Bad Timing*,” 323-32.

²⁰ John Izod does, however, provide a Jungian interpretation of the film in *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 104-24.

²¹ Cunningham, “Good Timing,” 105.

features no mental institutions, no dream sequences, and, most importantly, no recovered memories of childhood trauma.²² The film rejects popular psychoanalytic explanations for the behavior of its protagonists. Yale Udoff's screenplay provides no accounts of Milena and Alex's childhoods that explain Alex's predilection for sexual violence, or Milena's alcoholism and suicidal impulses.²³ Our impressions of Alex and Milena are determined entirely by their present behavior rather than by their recollection of formative childhood experiences. On the rare occasions in which Alex and Milena recall events from their past, their disclosures establish the continuity of their personality traits over time rather than provide novel insights into the genesis of their current pathologies. For instance, in one scene Milena informs Alex that she had two prior abortions. Instead of generating a moment of dramatic confession, the scene conveys Milena's desire to live in the here and now. She casually explains, "Both times I thought I wanted a child, but ... last minute I changed my mind," betraying her impulsivity. Breaking up her lines by intermittently giggling, sipping liqueur, and licking her lips, Russell's performance signals that even when Milena speaks about the past, she remains emotionally immersed in the present. Framed in a tight close-up, Russell's mundane gestures assume a monumental scale, and her leisurely responses to Alex's questions illustrate her imperious

²² Glen O. Gabbard and Krin Gabbard provide a comprehensive survey of the cinematic representations of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in American films of the 1940s and 1950s in *Psychiatry and the Cinema*, 35-106. Recently, David Bordwell has illustrated how psychoanalytic theory served as a resource for narrative innovation in *Reinventing Hollywood*, 297-326.

²³ The film does suggest that alcoholism runs in Milena's family, as Milena discloses that her brother died in a car accident because "he could hardly get himself together." But there is no suggestion that her brother's accident resulted from a childhood trauma; the disease may have been hereditary. Additionally, the film intimates that Milena's suicide attempt may be a consequence of her alcoholism rather than a co-morbid illness. On one scene, she confesses to Alex, "I do things when I drink too much."

devotion to sensual pleasures. Indeed, throughout the film Milena is constantly shown drinking, eating, and remarking on Alex's body temperature.

As Neil Sinyard observes, Milena's dedication to the vitality of the here and now clashes with Alex's neurotic anxiety about the future and his nostalgic attachment to the past. Sinyard convincingly argues that "the notion of 'bad timing' informs the whole relationship between Alex and Milena, whose senses of time are out of synchronization with each other and whose different attitudes to time define their personalities."²⁴ Similar to the film's treatment of Milena, scenes in which Alex discusses his past emphasize his anti-presentist mentality. By recounting the sudden disappearance of the "beautiful old mansion" that he cherished as a child, Alex reinforces his desire for permanence and reliability, a desire he attempts, vainly, to impose upon Milena during his thwarted marriage proposal.²⁵ As Alex rhapsodizes about his New York-upbringing, oblivious to his luxurious surroundings in an Ouarzazate hotel suite, Milena feigns interest as she concentrates on the sensuous activity of mixing pigments. By de-emphasizing causality, the film implies that the minds of its protagonists were not shaped by the accidents of personal history, but instead possess enduring traits that would have manifested regardless of circumstances.

In addition to foregoing psychoanalytic explanations for its protagonists' behavior, *Bad Timing* lampoons Alex's psychoanalytic pontifications. The film deviates from the template of what David Bordwell calls "clinical psychoanalytic investigation

²⁴ Sinyard, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 71.

²⁵ On a rooftop restaurant in Marrakesh, Alex hands Milena a pair of airline tickets from Vienna to New York, explaining: "I say we go back, we get married, we build something solid together," to which Milena replies: "But what about now? ... Here, right now, this minute, this second. Look where we are!"

films”²⁶ by putting the psychoanalyst himself under investigation. While critic Nigel Andrews describes Alex as “the etiolated, wanly cerebral scion of ... Sigmund Freud,”²⁷ several commentators have proposed that Alex is an ironic figure: a psychoanalyst lacking personal insight.²⁸ Despite having achieved minor celebrity status,²⁹ Alex’s misunderstanding of Freudian theory is thrown into stark relief as he subjects his students to a lecture on “secrecy and spying.” Transforming a drab classroom into an immersive media environment, Alex projects facing images of a nonplussed child (“the first spy”) and a copulating duo (“the first to be spied on”) on either side of the lecture hall. A clear misinterpretation of the primal scene as articulated in Freud’s case history of Sergei Pankejeff, a.k.a. *der Wolfsmann*—whose traumatic witnessing of his parents’s “*coitus a tergo*” was entirely accidental³⁰—the scene reveals more about Alex through his behavior than through his speech: while he disavows his own agency by claiming the passive label of “observer” in lieu of the active label of “spy,” his domination of the space through narrativized images indicates his desire for environmental and interpersonal control. Further, Alex demonstrates an interest in the developmental branch of psychology that the film pointedly disregards: in one scene, Alex lies beside a professional periodical open to

²⁶ Bordwell, *Reinventing Hollywood*, 303.

²⁷ Andrews, “Worth the Aching Lungs,” 17.

²⁸ Jan Dawson insists that Alex preaches to Milena “as if he had no unconscious,” and that “in contradiction of the basic tenets of his profession ... he denies, in his own case, the gap between dream and reality, self and other.” (Dawson, “*Bad Timing*,” 227); Sinyard reduces *Bad Timing* to “a film about a lecturer in psychoanalysis who cannot acknowledge the dark forces in himself.” (Sinyard, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 75); Izod writes that Alex “lacks all insight into the mind—whether that of Milena or his own.” (Izod, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 24).

²⁹ In the film, a poster of Alex’s face adorns the walls of the legendary Café Landtmann.

³⁰ Freud, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” 37.

an article headed, “*Ziegeuner-Kinder Lernen Anders*”—“gypsy children learn differently.” One reviewer found the film’s depiction of Alex so unsympathetic that he called the film “another one in the eye for the psychiatric profession,” counting him among the “misbehaving shrinks” of *Dressed to Kill* (1980, dir. Brian De Palma), *Schizoid* (1980, dir. David Paulsen), and *Coast to Coast* (1980, dir. Joseph Sargent).³¹

Milena’s visit to Freud’s former office at *Berggasse 19* crystalizes the film’s ambivalence toward psychoanalysis. As the couple transgresses the velvet rope to make love on Freud’s waiting room sofa, the film cuts to photographs of Freud and Otto Rank [Figs. 48-49]. The ironic contrast between Milena’s mischievous cries of pleasure and Freud and Rank’s stern gazes seems, initially, to privilege Milena’s uncomplicated attitude toward sexual ecstasy over the psychoanalytic perspective, which understands erotic experience as inherently and ineradicably fraught. But the joke is ultimately on her; in the course of the narrative, carefree romantic encounters give way to violent sexual confrontations. Further, *Bad Timing* undermines Milena’s resistance to interpretation. In her relationship with Alex, Milena embodies the spirit of Susan Sontag’s classic polemic “Against Interpretation.”³² In her essay, Sontag bemoans the influence of Marxist and Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion, which has enabled a generation of critics to “deplete” the work of art by reducing its manifest complexity to its “manageable” latent content.³³ Likewise, throughout the film, Milena resists Alex’s efforts to tame her impulsivity and spontaneity. After Milena’s suicide attempt, an associate of Inspector

³¹ Gary Arnold, “Twisted Timing.”

³² Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” 10-20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Netusil (Harvey Keitel)—the police detective assigned to investigate her case—finds an unfinished note that Milena addressed to Alex: “I wish you would understand me less and love me more.” Her plea to be loved rather than understood bears uncanny resemblance to the famous call to action with which Sontag concludes her essay: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”³⁴ For Sontag and Milena, the project of interpretation conceals both a fear of and an aggression toward its object; the cure for such pathology is an unquestioning acceptance—even an erotic embrace—of an object’s or a person’s surface qualities.

However, the film suggests that Milena, like Alex, is not to be trusted. *Bad Timing* constructs its narrative around the interrogation of a lie: that Alex did not rape Milena and endanger her life by delaying her rescue. Within this conceit, the film embeds a series of additional lies.³⁵ On their first date, Alex assures Milena, “You tell the truth about a lie beautifully.” Later, Milena returns the favor by asking Alex, “Why are you lying to yourself all the time?” Alex lies to the authorities about the nature of his relationship with Milena, spies on Milena and her abandoned husband Stefan Vodnik (Denholm Elliott), and professes to be alone while in bed with his girlfriend Amy (Dana Gillespie). Conversely, Milena lies to Alex about her marriage as well as her dalliances with other men. When confronted by Alex, she responds dismissively: “I don’t think it was a lie. It’s words. It’s not important.” Throughout the film, Milena embodies the stereotype of the

³⁴ Ibid., 20.

³⁵ At one point, Milena asks Alex, “Why are you lying to yourself all the time?” pointing out a crucial difference between them: Milena only lies to others, while Alex lies both to others and to himself.

femme fatale as masquerader.³⁶ She manipulates her appearance, posture, and tone of voice to achieve her objectives. A scene of her publicly embracing Alex, decked out in a leather jacket with hair cascading over her face, quickly gives way to a scene in which she visits the Sigmund Freud Museum, primly suited, hair tied up, presenting herself as “Miss Flaherty.” Later in the film, Milena parodies the imperative for feminine performance, pushing the feminine mask to a grotesque extreme at the “wake” for the “death” of the intractable version of Milena that Alex can’t handle, a cheeky feminist twist on Scottie’s (James Stewart) makeover of Judy (Kim Novak) in *Vertigo* (1958, dir. Alfred Hitchcock). The film’s decor reinforces the theme of Milena’s feminine masquerade: an ever-present Venetian mask stares out from the corner of Milena’s apartment. Further, a diegetic inclusion of Beethoven’s *Fidelio* (1805)—an opera about a woman who cross-dresses in order to rescue her husband—sonically reinforces the theme of gendered deception.

In addition to willful acts of deceit, the film focuses on gestures that betray unconscious energies which are at odds with the protagonists’ efforts at impression management. As Mark Cousins notes, Alex and Milena’s first encounter is edited to betray their “unconscious lives”: they “act cool with each other, but their hands, filmed in close-up, suggest twitchy mental energy.”³⁷ Citing Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Liz Watkins elaborates that these “nervous saccadic movements ... mark the ‘idle play’ which ‘regularly conceals a sense and meaning which are denied other forms

³⁶ For a classic account of the cinematic relationship between femininity and masquerade following the psychoanalytic theory of Joan Riviere, see Doane, “Film and the Masquerade,” 17-32.

³⁷ Cousins, *The Story of Film*.

of expression.”³⁸ Over the course of the film, Alex’s nervous twirling of his hair becomes a recurring motif, often punctuating moments of tense interpersonal conflict, such as Netusil’s relentless interrogations. Despite his placid demeanor, Alex’s compulsive smoking indicates his desire for consistent mood regulation, and his jealousy and desire for control slip up when, for instance, he shields Milena’s breasts from the lascivious gaze of an EMT (Gertan Klauber). This recurring focus on gesture suggests that *Bad Timing* shares with psychoanalysis the conviction that surface effects are motivated by unconscious drives, that there is a meaningful relationship between manifest and latent content.

The motivated relationship between manifest and latent content is articulated not only via dialogue and gesture, but also through visual style. Among the most forcible strategies of such articulation is the film’s conspicuous use of color. *Bad Timing* gestures toward the connection between color and psychology by including Alex’s purchase of the *Lüscher Color Test*, which so visibly excites Milena that it throws her anti-hermeneutic protests into question.³⁹ Following Deleuze, Andrew Patch distinguishes between verisimilitudinous “molar” color and destabilizing “molecular” color within the film.⁴⁰

³⁸ Watkins, “The Disquiet of the Everyday,” 59.

³⁹ Milena: “I want it, Alex! I want it! How does it work? ... No, I don’t want to go. We have to do it now...”

Alex: “Slow down.”

Milena: “Now, I already know which ones I want. Here they are...”

Alex: “Slow down.”

Milena: “There, there. What does it mean?”

Alex: “Hang on.”

Milena: “Tell me, I wanna know, right now Alex.”

Alex: “Just a second.”

Milena: “Tell me. Tell me. What does it say?”

Alex: “Hang on, hang on.”

⁴⁰ Patch, “Chromatic Borders, Cosmetic Bodies,” 72.

Patch interprets the bright hues that decorate Milena's "cosmetic body" as a feminist transgression of the hegemonic "chromatic borders" epitomized by Alex's drab domestic aesthetic, an act of resistance against Alex's possessive inclinations.⁴¹ While I agree with Patch that Roeg and costume designer Marit Allen—who also assisted with the decoration of Milena's apartment⁴²—customarily dress Milena in vibrant shades of red, violet, and orange in order to distinguish her volatility from Alex's desire for control, I hesitate to endorse his feminist interpretation. On the contrary, the film does not present Milena's preference for bright colors as a threat that Alex seeks to eradicate. Rather, the film implies that Alex's attraction to Milena is inextricable from such chromatic excess. When presenting Alex's first memory of Milena, cinematographer Anthony Richmond employs a bokeh effect, allowing Milena's face to emerge from an abstract melange of red, violet, and green, emphasizing the affinity of color and formlessness that Brian Price associates with the erotic.⁴³ Dressed in a glittering, polychromatic tube top [Fig. 50], Milena entices Alex with a matchbox, framed in close-up, bearing her phone number and a bright red Ace of Hearts. While Alex spends most of the film dressed in modest neutrals that match his bloodless decor,⁴⁴ his bold red Lancia Beta Spyder indicates the erotic instincts simmering below his placid bourgeois comportment. In fact, when Milena attempts to adapt to Alex's chromatic restraint, her effort backfires. Seeking to impress

⁴¹ Ibid., 79.

⁴² Russell, interview, *Bad Timing*.

⁴³ Price, "Color, the Formless, and Cinematic Eros," 22-35.

⁴⁴ Patch elaborates: "Alex's reality is a molar-chromatic bordered one encapsulating beiges, dark blues, blacks and greys, an aesthetic that reflects Alex's need for clarity and coherence, depicted by the precise decor of his flat and his costume consisting principally of monochromatic tailored suits, accentuating constraint and containment." (Patch, "Chromatic Borders, Cosmetic Bodies," 78.)

Alex with her freshly tidied apartment, she points out that she has replaced her signature violet sheets for Alex's "favorite"—white—sheets, only to be disappointed by Alex's desire to leave. Alex's association of Milena with bright colors holds unto the bitter end, when he rapes her, unconscious, on her violet sheets.

I would like to amend Patch's argument by proposing that rather than using color to allow cosmetic bodies to transgress chromatic borders within the *mise-en-scène*, *Bad Timing* deploys color in order to establish connections between otherwise discordant scenes. Roeg's penchant for dialectical montage shines through in *Bad Timing*'s recurring cross-cutting between scenes of Alex and Milena's courtship and footage of Milena's grotesque tracheotomy, what Harlan Kennedy calls "a running concatenation between Eros and Thanatos" that finds an unholy synthesis in the eventual rape.⁴⁵ The jarring effects of the film's edits are due as much to style as content; they shift between different visual and aural registers, different tones and atmospheres. While color may operate as a disruptive element within a scene, it may also serve as a link of continuity between scenes.⁴⁶ Bright red, for instance, punctuates the film's generally subdued color palette in scenes of resignation, celebration, and emergency. During Milena's farewell to Stefan on the *Hainburger Donaubrücke*, Milena's red scarf and red car match the red elements of the Bratislava and *Republik Österreich* signage, all conspicuously vibrant against the somber grey drizzle. In the following scene, however, the film abruptly cuts to a jarring

⁴⁵ Kennedy, "The Illusions of Nicolas Roeg," 25.

⁴⁶ Watkins attributes to gesture the function I attribute to color: "gestures, as parentheses, sketch threads of connection across the temporal and spatial disorder of the images, in which these ellipses manifest the affectivity of material that is otherwise illegible to the system in which it occurs. In this sense, gesture signals something beyond material that is directly represented or comprehensible according to the textual system of the film." (Watkins, "The Disquiet of the Everyday," 59.)

zoom-out of the back of an ambulance, which, like the signage on the Hainburger Donaubrücke is also red and white. In several scenes, Milena dresses in shades of red that match the decor of erotically-charged spaces, such as Freud's waiting room and an upscale strip club, reiterating her comfort with her own sexuality and with her environment. But in Milena's case, the colors red is not exclusively cosmetic; the blood that gushes from her throat during her tracheotomy, to which the film incessantly cross-cuts, implies a correspondence between inside and outside. Although *Bad Timing* acknowledges the theatricality of Milena's self-presentation, its relational use of color suggests her self-expression corresponds to an essential rather than performative dimension of her being.

Like much of art cinema, *Bad Timing* encourages viewers to infer character information from details of costume and *mise-en-scène* in addition to dialogue, gesture, and more traditional forms of cinematic exposition.⁴⁷ Aggression, in particular, is often signaled by Alex and Milena's use and abuse of objects, from Milena's leaving a cigarette burning on the passenger seat of Alex's car to Alex's sadistically yanking the the phone cord from Milena's wall when she tries to phone for help after overdosing on amphetamines. By consistently drawing attention to how Alex and Milena engage with their material environments, this "object-obsessed"⁴⁸ film encourages viewers to emulate

⁴⁷ David Bordwell notes that "even if a character remains unaware or inarticulate about his or her mental state, the viewer must be prepared to notice how behavior and setting can give the character away. The art cinema developed a range of *mise-en-scène* cues for expressing character mood: static postures, covert glances, smiles that fade, emotion-filled landscapes, and associated objects." (Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film*, 208).

⁴⁸ Billanti, "*Bad Timing*," 568.

Inspector Netusil, to read *mise-en-scène* for insights into Alex and Milena, like a detective.

Critics often reduce Netusil to Alex's *Doppelgänger*.⁴⁹ The film hints at such doubling with the brief inclusion of a photograph of Otto Rank who famously examined the *Doppelgänger*'s literary, psychoanalytic, and anthropological manifestations;⁵⁰ with myriad visual references to Bergman's *Persona* (1966),⁵¹ another film about blurred identities and dangerous intimacy; with the acknowledgement of Alex and Netusil's mutual affection for *Fidelio*; and, least ambiguously, with Netusil's statement that he and Alex "are not unlike." Commentators have suggested that Alex and Netusil's *Doppelgänger* status implies a similarity between the professions of detection and psychoanalysis, a connection that, as Naomi Schor notes, was already established in Nicholas Meyer's Sherlock Holmes-Sigmund Freud novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974), which was adapted to film by Herbert Ross in 1976. According to Schor, Mayer's novel suggested "that the boundaries between sciences (psychoanalysis and criminology) ... are not impermeable ... [and] that both share a common epistemological framework, linking heightened attention to details with the quest for truth."⁵² As Netusil inspects the objects that index Alex and Milena's desires, adventures, and transgressions—the plates

⁴⁹ This interpretation is articulated by David Ansen, "Nasty Habits," 72; Tony Crawley, "The Last British Film Maker," 391; Susan Barber, "Review: *Bad Timing/A Sensual Obsession*," 46. See also: Combs, "*Bad Timing*,"; Cunningham, "Good Timing," 105; Denby, "Robert Redford's 'Interiors,'" 59; Salwolke, *Nicolas Roeg*, 79.

⁵⁰ Rank, *The Double*; "The Double as Immortal Self," 62-101.

⁵¹ Roeg had already drawn upon *Persona*'s themes in order to fluidity of male identity in *Performance* (1970). In *Bad Timing*, he revives this project with the figures of Alex and Netusil, who replicate Elisabet (Liv Ullmann) and Alma's (Bibi Andersson) fraught relationship in scenes characterized by long conversations, maddening reticence, and recurring close-ups of hands.

⁵² Schor, *Reading in Detail*, 76.

excised from Milena's beloved Schiele catalogue, a hollowed out rock filled with sand from the couple's Moroccan excursion, the violet sheets stained with semen from the rape—we can infer that Netusil seeks not only evidence of criminal activity, but also insight into Alex and Milena's psyches; Netusil is just as interested in personality and motivation as he is in behavior. Against the prevailing agreement that *Bad Timing* casts the professions of psychoanalysis and detection in a bad light, I believe that the film fundamentally—if critically—endorses their similar methods of investigation, even promoting them as a model for attentive spectatorship. The ubiquitous gazes of the spectators-in-the-text are not merely thematic, but instructive.

In addition to endorsing its methods, *Bad Timing* betrays a deep affinity with psychoanalysis's timeless and universalizing dimensions. Multiple commentators have concurred with director Danny Boyle's remark that in Roeg's films, "all time is present."⁵³ Nigel Andrews recognizes the psychoanalytic dimension of the film's treatment of time, claiming that "*Bad Timing* slips between past and present like a shuttle service of the subconscious."⁵⁴ Indeed, Tony Lawson's time-traveling editing aligns with Freud's insights about the time-distorting and time-transcending properties of the Unconscious. In 1899's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud concluded that dreams collapse past, present, and future: "by representing a wish as fulfilled, a dream does indeed take us into the future; but this future, taken by the dreamer to be in the present, is shaped by the

⁵³ Boyle, interview, "Nicolas Roeg." Kennedy writes that Roeg "intercuts past, present, and future into an all-encompassing now," adding "the effect is to show that human experience is never shackled to the merely chronological or geographic. Different times, different places intersect in human thought, and it is that existential mobility that is the impulse behind Roeg's work." (Kennedy, "The Illusions of Nicolas Roeg," 27); Dean Billanti claims, "In each of his pictures, the past and the present are intricately and irretrievably interwoven." (Billanti, "*Bad Timing*," 568.)

⁵⁴ Andrews, "Worth the Aching Lungs," 17.

indestructible wish into the image of the past”⁵⁵ Sixteen years later, in “The Unconscious,” Freud insisted that “the processes of the [Unconscious system] are timeless [*zeitlos*]; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference [*Beziehung*] to time at all. Reference to time is bound up ... with the work of the [Conscious system].”⁵⁶ While the development of the mind over time was crucial to Freud’s psychological model throughout his career, his bent toward timelessness, ahistoricity, and universalism has struck numerous commentators. In his memoir *The World of Yesterday*, Stefan Zweig fondly recounts his meetings with Freud during the psychoanalyst’s last year, when he was living in exile in London due to the *Anschluss*:

As soon as you entered his room, it was as if the lunacy of the outside world had vanished. All that was particularly cruel became abstract, confusions were clarified, the present meekly took its place in the great cyclical phases of transient time. I truly felt, at last, that I really knew that genuinely wise man who rose above himself, regarding pain and death not as a personal experience but an impersonal subject for study and observation.⁵⁷

Zweig’s captivation by Freud’s ability to transform brutal actualities into timeless abstractions [*“das Grausamste wurde abstrakt”*] indicates one reason why his psychoanalytic theories may have persisted over time, despite vociferous—and by no means unreasonable—attempts to debunk them. While some may dispute the application of Freud’s findings beyond the socio-historic milieu of bourgeois Central Europe at the turn of the century, neuroscientist Eric R. Kandel insists that

⁵⁵ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 412.

⁵⁶ Freud, “The Unconscious,” 187.

⁵⁷ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 448-49.

three of Freud's key ideas have held up well and are now central to modern neural science: ... that most of our mental life, including most of our emotional life, is unconscious at any given moment ... that the instincts for aggressive and for sexual strivings ... are built into the human psyche ... [and] that normal mental life and mental illness form a continuum and that mental illnesses often represent exaggerated forms of normal mental processes.⁵⁸

Universalism is thus an integral component of Freudian psychoanalysis in its continuing reception. According to Schorske, such universalism was not merely projected onto Freud's theories by his acquaintances and adherents; it was built into Freud's own mode of thinking, particularly at the most influential points in his career. In a chapter on Freud's "psycho-archaeology of cultures," Schorske summarizes the development the psychoanalyst's universalism:

To use past cultures ... as reservoirs of human models and symbols is not the same as exploring cultures as historically specific collective constructions. In his youth Freud shared the deep interest in history characteristic of his time, and in his reading he explored in close detail the histories of both ancient and modern cultures to which he was particularly drawn. In his mature work, however, despite his enormous historical and cultural erudition, Freud interested himself principally in the exploration of the universal nature and dynamics of the individual psyche, from whatever culture it may have sprung.⁵⁹

While *Bad Timing* returns to the birthplace of psychoanalysis, its interest in the historical genesis of the field is all but eclipsed by the supposedly universal and ahistorical insights into human nature that it yielded. *Bad Timing* adopts a Freudian sensibility in order to stress the timeless dimension of the Unconscious. Like much of the ahistorical modernist art and thought that characterized Vienna 1900, *Bad Timing* seeks to transcend history, to

⁵⁸ Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 47.

⁵⁹ Schorske, "To the Egyptian Dig: Freud's Psycho-Archaeology of Cultures," 193.

offer viewers a glimpse of timelessness. Schorske's characterization of the *Interpretation of Dreams*'s "mythic layer" provides a fitting description for *Bad Timing*, for in both works, "personal history joins the a-historical collective."⁶⁰ Key to *Bad Timing*'s intimations of timelessness is its use of the citational mode.

II. The Citational Mode: A Matter of Time

Bad Timing announces its citational mode in the opening credits sequence, which serves as a "cinematic overture"⁶¹ for the entire film. This sequence—and the two following scenes, which substitute a network of glances and conspicuous objects for expository dialogue—is "opening" in two senses: not only does it open the film, but it also invites viewers to open themselves up to the film's unconventional narrative strategies. Among these strategies is the film's disclosure of character not only through plot, dialogue, and body language, but also by repeatedly drawing attention to its protagonists' aesthetic experiences of art and their visual and tactile engagement with their material environments. In the film's first shot, Tom Waits's piano ballad "An Invitation to the Blues" (1976) plays over a detail of Klimt's *Kiss* (1908), an icon of frozen eros [Fig. 51]. Within seconds, the words "A NICOLAS ROEG FILM" appear on screen, establishing this intermedial matrix—comprising film, music, and painting—as part and parcel of Roeg's auteurist practice. Sinyard calls *Bad Timing* "the most densely allusive of all Roeg's films,"⁶² and no review or essay I have encountered has neglected

⁶⁰ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 199.

⁶¹ I adopt this term from Annette Insdorf, who claims that "a great movie tends to provide in the first few minutes the keys by which to unlock the rest of the film. Gifted directors know how to layer the first shots in a way that prepares for their thematic concerns and stylistic approach." (Insdorf, *Cinematic Overtures*, ix).

⁶² Sinyard, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 70.

to mention its incorporation of Klimt and Schiele's paintings, a testament to how effectively the film foregrounds its citational mode.⁶³ The film's detractors have dismissed these "tony cultural allusions"⁶⁴ as pretentious distractions from a flimsy story, desperate attempts to embellish the film with "a cultural tone [that] is rather too exquisite for the trashy business being conducted."⁶⁵ Reducing the film's "plethora of camera swipes at chichi cultural items" to "false fodder for those who rejoice in making pseudo-intellectual connections of no relevance to anything," critic John Coleman bemoans the citational trend in contemporary cinema:

With a certain wistfulness, one recalls the days when it was possible to take in a movie and leave, contentedly or not, feeling one had got the meat of it. The sensation begins to seem positively medieval. See a film just *once*? You'll only have skimmed the surface. What about those books lying about, those paintings or posters glimpsed on the wall? What about the sub-texts?⁶⁶

More sympathetic critics have treated these citations as integral to the film's meaning, particularly in terms of thematic parallels. David Silverman remarks that the opening shot of *The Kiss* "seems to prepare the spectator for a story of a passionate, enveloping relationship turning on the themes of possessiveness and possession,"⁶⁷ and Manuel Koch contends that "the exhibited paintings function as images of inner desire, which reflect

⁶³ It also testifies to the fact that Klimt and Schiele—whose names never appear in the film, either in writing or speech—were relatively well-known in 1980, at least among European and American film critics.

⁶⁴ Ansen, "Nasty Habits," 72.

⁶⁵ Arnold, "Twisted 'Timing.'"

⁶⁶ Coleman, "Times Have Changed," 599.

⁶⁷ Silverman, "Unfixing the Subject: Viewing Bad Timing," 21.

the mental states of both spectators.”⁶⁸ Speaking more generally, David Robinson calls the film Roeg’s “new curiosity shop,” a succession of rooms overflowing with “baroque clutters” of citational objects which “invite us to make associations and assumptions,”⁶⁹ and Scott Salwolke declares that all of Roeg’s films “are filled with references to other mediums which help to expand on the film’s central theme.”⁷⁰ I do not disagree that, on one level, Roeg’s citations encourage thematic associations, but the reduction of each reference to a vehicle of thematic content neglects a crucial function of *Bad Timing*’s citational mode: its relationship to time.

Although the film is cluttered with historical artifacts, it harbors a profoundly anti-historicizing impulse. Through its intermedial references, *Bad Timing* strives to collapse the intervals of time that separate discrete aesthetic expressions, seeking a convergence in what Brigitte Peucker calls “the atemporal present of art.”⁷¹ *Bad Timing* embeds Klimt and Schiele’s *Jahrhundertwende* paintings in a network of citations that span centuries, from Pachelbel and William Blake to Harold Pinter and The Who. Although each of these references independently provides specific thematic emphases—Milena’s possession of Pinter’s *No Man’s Land* (1974) cements her penchant for theatricality; The Who’s “Who Are You” (1978) expresses Alex’s obsessive quest to uncover Milena’s romantic past—the film’s intermedial layering of multiple citations intimates a profound affinity between discrete works. The recurring use of Keith Jarrett’s

⁶⁸ “Die ausgestellten Malerien wirken wie Abbilder innern Begehrens, sie reflektieren die Befindlichkeit der beiden Betrachter.” (Koch, “Keine Versöhnung,” 87).

⁶⁹ Robinson, “Roeg’s New Curiosity Shop,” 10.

⁷⁰ Salwolke, *Nicolas Roeg, Film by Film*, vii.

⁷¹ Peucker, *The Material Image*, 71.

Köln Concert (1975) demonstrates the connective fluidity of *Bad Timing*'s intermedial mode. A live recording of a famously improvised piano set, the *Köln Concert*'s jagged spontaneity epitomizes an expressive strain in postwar American music and visual art. *Bad Timing* highlights this analogy with Schiele's own seemingly expressive—but, according to some scholars, shrewdly calculated⁷²—painterly approach by scoring his gloomy *Death and the Maiden* (1915) [Fig. 52] with a series of Jarrett's rapidly descending notes. Excerpts from the *Köln Concert* recur three additional times during the course of the film, always at moments of heightened stylization when the pro-filmic world is manipulated to resemble Klimt and Schiele's compositions and surface qualities: when Alex and Milena fornicate in her apartment stairwell, the jagged orientation of their limbs, the high-angle perspective, and their state of partial undress recalls Schiele's eroticized couples [Figs. 53-55]; when Alex confronts Milena in the University of Vienna's courtyard, lens adjustments gradually blur the passersby into an abstract ground reminiscent of Klimt's radical spatial compressions [Figs. 56-57]; and when Netusil returns home from his thwarted investigation, his reflection in a vertically-oriented golden-framed mirror recalls Alex's encounter with Klimt's *Judith I* (1901) [Figs. 58-59].

The psychological force of *Bad Timing*'s emphasis on similarities rather than differences between media, its absorption of heterogeneity into a thick matrix of commonality, embodies art historian Aby Warburg's concept of the *Pathosformel*, a term coined by in his 1905 essay "Dürer and Classical Antiquity." Often translated as the "emotive" or "pathetic formula," the *Pathosformel* refers to "extremes of gestural and

⁷² See Jensen, "A Matter of Professionalism," 195-219, and Blackshaw, "The Pathological Body," 379-401.

physiognomic expression, stylized in tragic sublimity” that emerged in the art of antiquity, a turbulent complement to the “quiet grandeur” championed a century and a half earlier by Winckelmann and his Neoclassicist disciples.⁷³ According to Gertrud Bing, Warburg was concerned with “the intrinsic nature of ... symbols” from pagan culture, which he believed persisted in the Renaissance because “it was pagan culture, both in religious ritual and in imagery, that supplied the most telling expression of elemental impulses,” for which “pictorial forms” operate as “mnemonics.”⁷⁴ Christopher S. Wood defines the *Pathosformel* as “that most untimely of hieroglyphs wrenched from a primal matrix of pain and suffering and hurdling across time and space through media, impervious to medial translation, and always, according to Warburg, arriving on time.”⁷⁵ Although only a fraction of *Bad Timing*’s citations express pain or suffering, the film’s citational mode nonetheless conveys a sense that symbolically-charged, emotive formulae can traverse time, space, and media. *Bad Timing* exploits the hybridity of its own medium, turning the cinematic image into a field of emotive transfers across incorporated media. These transhistorical intermedial gestures contribute to the film’s ahistorical, mythical attitude.

Brigitte Peucker has demonstrated how various filmmakers have developed intermedial strategies that interrogate the nature and expand the boundaries of the cinematic medium, particularly through the production of dissonance.⁷⁶ However, *Bad*

⁷³ Warburg, “Dürer and Italian Antiquity,” 552-58.

⁷⁴ Bing, “Introduction,” 82.

⁷⁵ Wood, “Crimes of Passion.”

⁷⁶ Dissonance is central to her most recent contribution to the discourse on intermediality. (Peucker, *Aesthetic Spaces*).

Timing downplays the discourse of medium specificity by emphasizing the commonality between the emotions and insights expressed in diverse media. The film's catholic attitude toward media—its suggestion that a diverse range of media can serve as vehicles for common emotional or symbolic content—is evident in its attention to technical reproductions. Walter Benjamin famously declared that “what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura.”⁷⁷ According to Benjamin, the liberation of the work of art from the condition of a unique, ritualistic cult object to an image for mass consumption went hand-in-hand with a public shift from a desire for concentration to a desire for distraction.⁷⁸ Contemplation, for Benjamin, entails the absorption of the beholder into the work of art, whereas “by contrast, the distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves.”⁷⁹ Milena straddles both of these modes of relation to works of art. We first encounter her in rapt contemplation of Klimt's portrait of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907). As the camera frames Milena in a silhouette which effectively diminishes her identity in relation to Klimt's monumental canvas, the soundtrack eliminates all ambient noise, allowing Waits's ballad to convey a sense of meditative intimacy. In the following shot, however, things begin to turn: Milena, now gazing up at *The Kiss*, is presented holding a cardboard tube containing a poster with which she will eventually decorate her apartment [Figs. 60-61]. In a later scene, Milena watches on as Alex meditates on a shimmering reproduction of the *Unicorn in Captivity Tapestry* (1495-1505) in his own apartment, suggesting that even reproductions provide

⁷⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” 19-55.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 38-41.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 40.

the opportunity for reflective engagement. These kitsch reproductions are presented as objects capable of stimulating memories and generating affective charges, and by celebrating them, *Bad Timing* legitimates its own medium, suggesting that film does not impoverish works of art by wresting them from their ritualistic contexts, but rather amplifies their affective possibilities through incorporation. If, in *Bad Timing*, Benjamin's dichotomy of contemplation and distraction does not map neatly onto his dichotomy of original and reproduction, the film does share with Benjamin's essay a mutual sense of optimism about the triumph of technical reproduction.

If, for Benjamin, technological reproductions liberate works of art from their ritualistic milieux, in *Bad Timing*, citational incorporations extricate works of art from their historical contexts, implying that the most salient qualities of these works were always timeless. *Bad Timing* does not treat Klimt and Schiele's paintings as historical artifacts, as agents of nostalgic longing for the cultural hothouse of Vienna 1900.⁸⁰ Instead, the film emphasizes the presentness of these paintings. During their visit to the Belvedere, Alex and Milena stare at paintings, not gallery labels, and they discuss the figures depicted in *The Kiss* and *Death and the Maiden* in the present tense.⁸¹ The exhibition catalogue of Schiele's paintings laid out on Milena's bed opens to the reveal a plate, not an essay [Fig. 53]. If Alex and Milena have any historical interest in these

⁸⁰ I take the term from Schorske's 1975 review article. I have found no evidence that Roeg or Udoff were familiar with Schorske's work before filming *Bad Timing*, but it is more likely that they would have encountered this article in *The New York Review of Books* than any of Schorske's articles published in specialized historical journals, which were not collected in one prizewinning volume until 1980, after *Bad Timing* had finished post-production. (Schorske, "Cultural Hothouse").

⁸¹ Gesturing toward the lovers in *The Kiss*, Milena remarks, "Like them. They're happy," to which Alex retorts, "That's because they don't know each other well enough yet." Subsequently, Alex pauses before *Death and the Maiden*, ironically proclaiming, "Definitely happy. At least I hope so."

paintings, it is not disclosed in the film. Indeed, the Klimt and Schiele paintings presented in the film already suggest a sense of timelessness themselves because they exclude historical markers, such as contemporary fashions or urban locales.

III. The Klimt Connection: Interrogating the Mosaic Analogy

As I mentioned in my introduction, critical challenges to Schorske's thesis that *fin-de-siècle* Vienna's ahistorical modernism emerged as a nihilistic reaction to the failure of liberalism have nonetheless left Klimt's reputation as an ahistorical modernist intact. According to Schorske, Klimt's disappointment at the institutional rejection of his University of Vienna *Faculty Paintings* (1894-1905) led to a "crisis" in 1901, and a shift in his art "from public ethos to private pathos"⁸² conveyed by "a static, crystalline ornamentation."⁸³ Schorske contends that in these paintings of Klimt's so-called "Golden Period" of 1901-1909, "in stance and style, transcendence replaced engagement."⁸⁴ This phase of Klimt's development is particularly relevant to *Bad Timing*, for all three of Klimt's paintings featured in the film date from this period. Klimt's painterly approach during this phase was described by his contemporary Ludwig Hevisi as *Malmosaik*, or "painted mosaic."⁸⁵ Similarly, the term "mosaic" has been used so frequently to describe

⁸² Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 252.

⁸³ Ibid., 264.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Hevisi, "Gustav Klimt und die Malmosaik," 547-49.

Roeg's non-linear editing style that it has become a critical *cliché*.⁸⁶ While critics have insinuated a connection between Klimt's "mosaic"-style paintings and Roeg's "mosaic"-style editing, no critic I have encountered has elaborated on this analogy; in Roeg's case, the label "mosaic" has remained more rhetorical than illuminating. I would like to tease out the implications of this analogy, particularly in light of a recently developing discourse on the place of ornament in film. In this section, I will examine three dimensions to *Bad Timing*'s "mosaic" mode that square with the discourse around the ornamental, and that connect it to Klimt's aesthetics: fragmentation, contamination, and superficiality.

Although Harlan Kennedy never uses the term "mosaic" when describing *Bad Timing*, he does draw an analogy between Klimt and Roeg's visual styles based on the fragment. Kennedy argues that "the fragmented style of Gustav Klimt ... marks a taking off point for the film's style,"⁸⁷ elaborating, "Klimt was a painter who broke up the classical contours of oil painting into rainbow-hued fragments. In much the same way,

⁸⁶ Tom Milne speaks of "Roeg's usual, achronological mosaic manner." (Milne, "Review: *Bad Timing*," 43); David Robinson explains that "*Bad Timing* is composed of a mosaic of small pieces, flitting backwards and forwards in time and place." (Robinson, "Roeg's New Curiosity Shop," 10.); Tony Crawley finds Roeg's "signature" imprinted "upon every last frame in his time-scale mosaics." (Crawley, "The Last British Film Maker," 392); Sinyard notes the "striking" and "arresting" quality of Roeg's "mosaic-like use of montage." (Sinyard, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 1); Combs detects in *Bad Timing* "a mysterious logic in the nature of things, which the film seems to be following in the way it breaks up and rearranges everything in mosaic patterns." (Combs, "*Bad Timing*: The Men Who Didn't Know Something"); and Keyvan Sarkhosh attributes the film's novelty and deviation from classical form to its "achronological, mosaic-like, and above all nonlinear narrative" (*achronologische, mosaikartige, und das heißt vor allem nichtlineare Erzählen*). (Sarkhosh, *Kino der Unordnung*, 300). Roeg himself has drawn an analogy between his filmmaking practice and Islamic mosaics, but his analogy has nothing to do with editing: "One always wants to make another film, just to get it better. But like the Islamic mosaic, there's always a little tile to one side, or crooked. It's an offense against Allah to make it absolutely perfect. Only God is perfect." (Roeg quoted in Crawley, "The Last British Film Maker," 396).

⁸⁷ Kennedy, "The Illusions of Nicolas Roeg," 23. Similarly, Robert Hatch explains that "Roeg composes the work in fragments, adding bits here and there to a slowly emerging mosaic," but does not make an explicit link to Klimt's style. (Hatch, "*Stardust Memories, Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures, Bad Timing/A Sensual Obsession*," 420.)

Roeg has splintered and rearranged the linearity of orthodox movie storytelling.”⁸⁸ Joseph Lanza also recognizes this analogy, insisting that both Klimt’s paintings and *Bad Timing* are “visually stunning, fragmented, and emotionally cold.”⁸⁹ But Klimt and Roeg’s attitude toward fragments and fragmentation goes beyond a desire to dazzle their audiences via disruptions of representational conventions.

The “mosaic” quality of Klimt’s Golden Period paintings was not merely a label affixed by Ludwig Hevisi. Klimt himself had gained practice with the “tesserae technique” during his training at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (1876-1883),⁹⁰ and was later inspired by the mosaics that he encountered on a trip to Ravenna in 1903.⁹¹ While Klimt was fascinated by the color and texture of the Byzantine mosaics at San Vitale and Sant’Appolinare in Classe, he drew most of the symbols that populated his canvases from other sources. In an essay detailing Klimt’s debts to German Romantic *Naturphilosophie* and the discoveries of Charles Darwin and Ernst Haeckel, Emily Braun traces many of the biological forms that Klimt incorporated into his canvases to the *Illustrated Natural History of Animals* (*Illustrierte Naturgeschichte der Thiere*) (1882-1884) that he kept in his personal library.⁹² Building on Braun’s findings, Kandel insists that Klimt appropriated such “iconic sexual symbols”⁹³ from the *Illustrierte Naturgeschichte*—

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁹ Lanza, *Fragile Geometry*, 56.

⁹⁰ Comini, *Gustav Klimt*, 16-17.

⁹¹ Borchhardt-Birdbaumer, “Eros statt stiller Größe,” 37.

⁹² Braun, “Ornament as Evolution: Gustav Klimt and Berta Zuckermandl,” 151.

⁹³ Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 114-15.

sperm, eggs, and embryos—in order “to suggest the forms underlying all human life”⁹⁴ as well as the “instinctual drives” of his sitters.⁹⁵ More recently, Brigitte Borchhardt-Birdbaumer has stressed the archeological dimension of Klimt’s style, noting his attention to contemporary excavations presented in the *Illustrated London News* and the influence of Aloïs Riegl’s 1893 publication of his lectures on the history of ornament, with their precise drawings of spirals, palmettes, and arabesques from ancient Mycenae, Egypt, and the Near East.⁹⁶

But Klimt’s relationship to the fragment is complex. While he incorporated archaeological findings into his paintings, he does not represent them *as* archaeological fragments. Rather, he incorporates ancient motifs and symbols into his paintings, which transcend the fragmentary condition of the materials on which they were found. These incorporations of “archetypal symbols of instinctual energies”⁹⁷ do not betray a desire to reconstruct a past object, but rather a desire to show how fragments of the past have an enduring character that survives into the future. However, while Klimt’s paintings do not strive to *reconstruct* the past, they do attempt to *recover* some of its latent forms. As Kirk Varnedoe explains, Klimt’s repertoire of ancient motifs “bore evidence of a primal human love of proteiform brilliance,” and testified to “a tradition of spiritually charged art he sought to recover.”⁹⁸ While Klimt does not fragment preexisting wholes in his paintings,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁹⁶ Borchhardt-Birdbaumer, “Eros statt stiller Größe,” 37.

⁹⁷ Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 221.

⁹⁸ Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 159.

his canvases nonetheless betray the longing that accompanies the essentially fragmentary nature of the symbol as characterized by Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁹⁹ In “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” Gadamer traces the origins of the word symbol to the ancient practice of the *tessera hospitalis*, whereby one half a broken object offered to a guest could later be made whole by the recipient’s descendant in an act of recognition.¹⁰⁰ Ruminating on the implications of this practice, Gadamer argues that symbols always entail a desire for wholeness and recognition, and that “in an encounter with a work of art, it is not the particular, but rather the totality of the experienceable world ... that is brought to experience.”¹⁰¹

For Gadamer, *mimesis* is less a matter of representation than of recognition, of re-experiencing what is already known. Whereas fragmentation, in its cinematic variant, may be understood as a fracturing of the mimetic realism of the classical mode, in *Bad Timing*, fragmentation works to present a form of *mimesis* as recognition in Gadamer’s sense, not least of all through Alex and Milena’s aesthetic encounters, and through the eruption of symbolic content in their memories. Roeg’s filmmaking practice is more fragmentary than Klimt’s art,¹⁰² but equally archeological—it teases us with a reconstruction of the past, while really presenting us with affectively-charged fragments that propel us into the realm of symbolism, myth, and the eternal. With his preference for montage over long takes and shallow over deep space, *Bad Timing* fits squarely in the

⁹⁹ I thank Nicola Suthor for bringing Gadamer’s relevance to my attention.

¹⁰⁰ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol, and Festival,” 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 32-33.

¹⁰² One could argue that *Bad Timing* fragments itself—splintering a potentially hitherto linear narrative—in a way that Klimt’s paintings do not.

“formative” rather than the “realistic” tradition, as distinguished by Siegfried Kracauer in his *Theory of Film* (1960).¹⁰³ The film strains against cinema’s “ontological” realism and “redemptive” indexicality in order to resist the temporal specificity of the medium’s documentary mode. *Bad Timing* seeks to transform the appearance of the pro-filmic world into a transcendent image, to convey the metaphysical truths that are indicated but ultimately concealed by the visible. Whereas Sergei Eisenstein’s version of dialectical montage sought to communicate social truths, Roeg uses montage to convey psychological truths. Both Klimt and Roeg’s “mosaic” modes thus aid in their retreat from the realm of historical contingency to the transcendence of myth.

As numerous commentators have observed, *Bad Timing* associates Klimt’s aesthetic more closely with Milena than with Alex. If the Belvedere scenes establish the contrast between Milena’s affection for Klimt (her purchasing of the *Kiss* poster, her exclamation that its sitters “look happy”) and Alex’s cynical unease with Klimt (his fixation on the “castrating and vengeful”¹⁰⁴ Judith, his remark that the couple in *The Kiss* only looks happy “because they don’t know each other well enough yet”), Milena’s clothing and domestic decor reinforce her affiliation with the painter.¹⁰⁵ As Toni Ross

¹⁰³ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 33-37.

¹⁰⁴ Ross, “Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing*,” 192. Ross claims that “memories of Judith as a biblical figure of female heroism ... vibrate in the final sequence of *Bad Timing* where Alex is again frozen out of the picture by a woman’s defiant silence. (Ibid.). John Izod takes a slightly different view, suggesting that all visual associations between Milena and Judith—such as Milena’s “proud stance” in the final sequence—can be ascribed to Alex’s projection onto her of “the devouring woman.” (Izod, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 114, 122).

¹⁰⁵ John Pym speculates that if Milena’s party outfit had “been in fashion in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Klimt, one feels sure, would have approved.” (Pym, “Ungratified Desire,” 111); Andrews claims that “Russell seems to have jumped out raw-nerved and rainbow-hued from the decorative imprisonment of a Klimt painting.” (Andrews, “Worth the Aching Lungs,” 17); Izod agrees that the “multicolored mosaic” of Milena’s bodice “reinforces the link between her and Klimt’s paintings.” (Izod, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 109); and Carrie Rickey sees Milena’s apartment cluttered with “an array of bric-a-brac achieving the decorative and decadent density that Klimt and fellow Secessionists aspired to.” (Rickey, “Tic, Tic,” 52).

observes, the “ornamental abundance” of Klimt’s paintings and of *Bad Timing*’s own visual style “is presented as coterminous with femininity,” an association consistent with classical aesthetics.¹⁰⁶ While critics frequently remark that the film draws a gendered distinction between the clutter of Milena’s apartment [Fig. 62] and the order of Alex’s [Fig. 63], no one has remarked on how this contrast engenders a theme of contamination. In her account of film theory’s unexamined bias against the “decorative image,” Rosalind Galt acknowledges that there is a substantial history of modern aesthetics—stemming from Adolf Loos’s polemic “Ornament and Crime” (1908)—that associates the ornamental with the degenerate and the diseased.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, one can detect a Loosian impulse in critics who descry *Bad Timing*’s excessive ornamentality. But such revulsion is already thematized in the film itself: both Alex and Netusil detect in Milena’s chaotic apartment the threat of contamination. A brief comedic shot shows Alex doing push-ups in Milena’s apartment, a futile gesture of Apollonian athleticism in a decadent Dionysian milieu. Moments later, Alex complains, “I can’t find anything around here anymore. I put something down, I go to look for it and it’s gone.” Milena replies, “We could spend more time at your place.” Alex responds, “My place is getting to look exactly like your place.” The film confirms Alex’s remark by alternating between earlier scenes of Alex’s office, in which his books are arranged in an orderly manner in their bookcases, to later scenes where they are piled sloppily on the floor. Further, Netusil explicitly connects Milena

¹⁰⁶ Ross, “*Bad Timing*,” 190.

¹⁰⁷ Galt, *Pretty*, 109-14.

with the threat of contamination. During his inspection of Milena's apartment, Netusil comments:

People who live in this sort of disorder, sort of moral and physical sewer, they spread it around them like an infectious disease. Dangerous creatures, to themselves and others. They envy our strength, our capacity to fight, or will to master reality. What do they do? They try to drag us into their confusion, their chaos.

Although Netusil uses the gender-neutral term "people" to describe those who live in chaos, Susan Barber reads this tirade as unequivocally misogynistic, insisting that the inspector's use of "they" merely substitutes for "women."¹⁰⁸ The film provides the framework for such an interpretation in the earlier scene in which Netusil's fellow police inspector (Stefan Gryff) enters Milena's thrashed apartment exclaiming, "What a mess. Just like my sister's." And it is no stretch to claim "strength," a "capacity to fight," and a "will to master reality" as traditionally masculine qualities, or as least qualities associated with a Nietzschean *Übermensch*.¹⁰⁹ Even as Alex and Netusil renounce the "willed decorative disorientation"¹¹⁰ of Klimt and Milena's mutual aesthetic, *Bad Timing* folds them into its own disorienting form.

In addition to the threat of contamination, *Bad Timing* associates Milena with Klimt's attention to sensual surfaces. In the opening sequence when Milena gazes at Klimt's portrait of *Adele Bloch Bauer I*, Anthony Richmond's camera supplies a fluid,

¹⁰⁸ Barber, "Review: *Bad Timing/A Sensual Obsession*," 48. On the other hand, it's not entirely clear that Netusil believes what he's saying. He may simply be trying to get a confession out of Linden, by telling him what he needs to hear. Even if this is the case, Netusil *detects* Alex's aversion to chaos, whether or not he shares it.

¹⁰⁹ Salwolke does not hesitate to collapse all of the film's male characters into a single entity, insisting that "the entire film seems to be a condemnation of men." (Scott Salwolke, *Nicolas Roeg*, 89.)

¹¹⁰ Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 158.

low-angle close-up of the painting that captures the play of light over its shimmering surface, obscuring the canvas's representational content in favor of its material qualities: its flatness, its reflective ornamentation, and its frame [Fig. 64].¹¹¹ While this focus on surface is consistent with Milena's sensual preoccupations, *Bad Timing* betrays an awareness that "in Viennese painting, insight and overlay, matters of depth and matters of surface, were complexly intertwined."¹¹² Although the character of the relation between surface and depth in Klimt's work has been debated—Kandel proposes that Klimt's paintings are analogous with psychoanalysis because they "convey truth beneath the surface,"¹¹³ whereas Comini holds that Klimt's paintings reverse Freud's analytical method by "methodically *masking* explicit sexual detail in symbolic and cumulative ornament"¹¹⁴—critics agree that Klimt's paintings were organized by a depth model, the very types of depth models that Fredric Jameson claims fell out of favor among critical theorists of the postmodern 1970s and 1980s.¹¹⁵ While David Silverman and Gerrit Olivier detect a deconstructionist impulse in *Bad Timing*,¹¹⁶ the film seeks to illustrate that surface reality is charged with meaning. Herein lies the film's strongest point of identification with Alex, and, consequently, its most pointed critique of Milena. Like

¹¹¹ Frank Whitford argues that the painting already deemphasizes its representation qualities, regardless of how it is presented: "The sitter's body and the gown that adorn it have been virtually eclipsed beneath an impenetrable, enameled surface which repeatedly draws attention to itself and away from the sitter. In the witty words of Eduard Pötzl, a contemporary critic, the portrait is *mehr Blech als Bloch*—more brass than Bloch." (Whitford, *Klimt*, 9).

¹¹² Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 149.

¹¹³ Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 34.

¹¹⁴ Comini, *Gustav Klimt*, i.

¹¹⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Silverman, "Unfixing the Subject," 9-31, and Olivier "Identity and Difference in Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing*," 26-33.

Alex, who chastises Milena for believing “that ‘cause [she’s] got on something pretty it changes who [she is],” the film itself is wary of surfaces and of Milena’s superficiality. Even during scenes of aesthetic absorption in visual art, non-diegetic soundtracks remind viewers that film is more than a surface medium, that it can focus its capacities on conveying depth and interiority. Further, during Milena’s tracheotomy, the boundary between outside and inside is continuously crossed as her eyes open and close, her tongue pops out of her mouth, and blood gushes from the incision on her neck. Throughout the film, the recurrent motif of breath—Alex and Milena’s incessant smoking, Milena’s labored breathing during her surgery—highlights the permeability of the boundary between inside and outside. *Bad Timing*’s emphasis on surface and depth accords with András Bálint Kovács characterization of the ornamental mode of European modernist film, which “represent[s] the world of traditional mythologies as a hidden or unconscious mental structure underlying the cool, alienated, and technological surface of the modern world.”¹¹⁷

Like the paintings of Klimt’s Golden Period, *Bad Timing* holds the illusionistic and the ornamental in tension, particularly through its representation of space. Gabriele Bösch and Sylvie Steiner insist that the Secession’s 1900 exhibition of Japanese art had a profound influence on Klimt and his contemporaries, who negated spatial forms and looked to “the two-dimensionality of surface and line as a moving force of expression.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, *Bad Timing* frequently eschews the type of deep space

¹¹⁷ Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, 182.

¹¹⁸ Bösch and Steiner, “Painting and Sculpture in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” 11.

compositions that Roeg himself had produced as the cinematographer on Richard Lester's *Petulia* (1968), an oft-noted influence on *Bad Timing*. Roeg and Anthony Richmond push the illusion of shallow space to an extreme with the scene in which Alex confronts Milena in the University of Vienna courtyard. As Alex and Milena grow more emotional during their heated discussion about the dissolution of their relationship, the background becomes blurred to the point of abstraction, generating an intimate decorative ground that contrasts with their legible faces, *à la* Klimt [Figs. 56-57]. With a delicious sense of irony, Roeg sets the scene in the arcade of the Renaissance-revival courtyard, designed by Heinrich von Ferstel (1877-1884), whose colonnades served to emphasize perspectival depth [Fig. 65]. Just as Secessionist experimentation displaced historicist traditionalism, here modernist spatial compression obscures Renaissance perspectivalism.

IV. Schiele and the Aesthetics of the Encounter

In a 1975 review essay on then recent scholarship on *fin-de-siècle* art, Schorske divides Austrian modernism into two phases: the aesthetic (c. 1898-1908) and the expressionist (c. 1908-1918).¹¹⁹ If Klimt presided over the first phase, Schiele exemplified the second. Whereas Schiele's early paintings bear compositional and decorative similarities to Klimt's style, during the years of 1908-1909 the young artist began to reject his mentor's "suggestive, symbolic ornamentation and shimmering veneers"¹²⁰ in favor of "the frank, uncompromising representation of sexual reality."¹²¹ Where Klimt's paintings displace erotic content onto symbolic ornament, Schiele's

¹¹⁹ Schorske, "Cultural Hothouse."

¹²⁰ Comini, *Gustav Klimt*, i.

¹²¹ Bösch and Steiner, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," 388.

paintings concentrate eroticism entirely in the bodies of their figures. *Bad Timing* straddles both representational modes. Whereas critics have consistently drawn formal connections between Klimt and *Bad Timing*'s visual styles, the analogies they have drawn between the film and Schiele's paintings tend to be more thematic than formal. For instance, Harlan Kennedy proposes, "If Klimt is a taking-off point for the film's style, the paintings of his pupil Egon Schiele add force and meaning to its content."¹²² But *Bad Timing*'s form is deeply informed by the "fusion of eroticism, aggression, and anxiety" that, according to Kandel, characterizes Schiele's art.¹²³ As noted in the previous section, Roeg's auteurist style is frequently reduced to the "mosaic-like" quality of his editing. In this section, I would like to propose that *Bad Timing*'s dynamic editing works in tandem with another device that has been curiously overlooked in Roeg scholarship: the zoom. Emerging at moments of high tension, cinematographer Anthony Richmond's use of the zoom adds a sense of urgency within the frames that amplifies the dynamism of Tony Lawson's manic editing, which rapidly cross-cuts between scenes without apparent causal links. By coupling this effect with decadent pro-filmic imagery, *Bad Timing* translates Schiele's aggressive painterly style into a cinematic aesthetics of the encounter.

In his history of the zoom shot in American cinema and television, Nick Hall explains that although zoom effects grew increasingly popular in high-profile Hollywood films and television series of the 1960s, it has since become "synonymous with 1970s

¹²² Kennedy, "The Illusions of Nicolas Roeg," 25. Jensen has attributed this shift in "sensibility" to changes in the Austrian art market, which was becoming increasingly dominated by galleries and was facing intense competition from the international avant-garde. (Jensen, "A Matter of Professionalism," 195-219).

¹²³ Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 160-81.

film style”¹²⁴ Popular among amateur filmmakers and television camera operators for offering the convenience of “drama at the touch of a lever”—a convenient alternative to the onerous labor of producing a tracking shot—the zoom eventually gained approval from a reluctant film establishment, as evinced by John Alcott’s Best Cinematography Oscar for Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon* (1975), in which the zoom played a prominent role.¹²⁵ Although, like Alcott, Richmond occasionally employs a slow zoom in or out to add subtle movement to an otherwise static shot, he punctuates *Bad Timing*’s with twenty-one rapid zooms. In addition to erotic encounters, these zooms often occur during moments of tense confrontation or psychological distress, typically focusing on faces or objects: Alex’s interrogation by medical and law enforcement authorities after Milena’s admission to the intensive care unit; Alex and Milena’s spiteful copulation in the stairwell, where the repetition of shots suggests traumatic recurrence, and Jarrett’s percussive music contributes to the sense of aggression [Figs. 66-67]; and Alex’s rape of Milena, where close-ups on objects suggest Alex’s heightened awareness of his environment, an awareness of details he customarily tries to filter out. Whereas Schiele’s austere compositions aggressively focus viewers’ attention on details of gesture, facial expression, and clothing, *Bad Timing* achieves a similar degree of focus through its use of the zoom. The film does not allow the viewer’s eye much time to wander each frame, so as not to dilute the affective charge of the encounter.

¹²⁴ Hall, *The Zoom*, 148.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 193-52.

By privileging the vitality of the moment over duration, *Bad Timing*'s aesthetics of the encounter reflect Milena's sensibility. While Milena's home decor is closer to Klimt's ornamentalism than to Schiele's compositional austerity, she shares with Schiele an appreciation for the charged moment. Although some critics insist that the film neatly aligns Milena with Klimt and Alex with Schiele, this interpretation ignores several indications of Milena's affinity with Schiele's portraits embedded in the film. While, as Toni Ross observes, Milena ignores *Death and the Maiden* in the Belvedere,¹²⁶ in a later scene Alex discovers that she has slipped photographs of Stefan and her brother between pages of a catalogue displaying the same painting [Fig. 68]. Additionally, we can glimpse a reproduction of Schiele's *Self-Portrait with Lowered Head* (1912) propped up against a wall in Milena's apartment during the "wake." Finally, when Netusil inspects Milena's apartment, he finds a pile of Schiele plates that have been excised from their catalogue with a kitchen knife, implying that Milena had planned to display them [Fig. 69]. While Scott Salwolke and Franz Grafl point out that Netusil's discovery of these plates prompts his fragmented visions of Alex's body, looking "strikingly similar to the forms Schiele created,"¹²⁷ they neglect to mention that Milena is also frequently presented in foreshortened, contorted poses that replicate the plates of female models displayed in the film [Fig. 70].

Although Alex and Schiele share much in common—narcissistic personalities, criminal behavior, and an agonizing conflict between their attraction to promiscuous

¹²⁶ Ross, "Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing*," 194.

¹²⁷ Salwolke, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 83. See also Grafl, *Imaginiertes Österreich*, 292-93.

women and their desire to maintain bourgeois respectability¹²⁸—their personalities diverge in the sense that Schiele was engaged in an ongoing process of self-examination, whereas Alex remains stubbornly in denial about his true character.¹²⁹ While *Bad Timing*'s aesthetics of the encounter capture Milena's appreciation for the fleeting moment, they also convey Alex's anxiety about the threat that immediate experiences pose to his desire to remain a cool "observer." *Bad Timing*'s zooms produce "arresting images," which Barbra Klinger asserts are characteristic of art cinema.¹³⁰ These images arrest Alex's attention, taking him out of the flow of time. Alex tries to resist the lure of the moment. He is preoccupied with the past, the future, and what could have been as opposed to what is. His rejection of Milena's attitude toward time suggests a gendered disavowal of identification. In the 1970s, androgynous rock stars—such as Mick Jagger and David Bowie—were a staple of Roeg's films. But Art Garfunkel's Alex breaks this pattern, actively resisting identification with Milena. As a prelude to his rape of Milena, Alex plays her beloved Jean Jenkin's-compiled *Music in the World of Islam* (1973) album, only to interrupt the record abruptly with the penknife he then uses to disrobe her. Whereas in the scene of their first meeting, Alex's idle tapping of the penknife on his thumb illustrates the commonality between his and Milena's unconscious energies [Figs. 71-72], here Alex uses the knife consciously to disavow mutual identification.

¹²⁸ *Death and the Maiden* famously depicts Schiele's grief at abandoning the working class Wally Neuzil for the bourgeois Edith Harms. (Kandel, *The Age of Insight*, 177).

¹²⁹ Bruno Bettelheim proposes, "One important precept of Freud's that seems to have influenced Schiele is that self-analysis must precede the analysis of others; in order to understand the unconscious fully, one must study one's own unconscious first. In his self portraits Schiele analyzed his own personality as penetratingly and as mercilessly as Freud had analyzed himself." (Bettelheim, "Freud's Vienna," 15).

¹³⁰ Klinger, "The Art Film, Affect, and the Female Viewer," 24.

In *Bad Timing*'s aesthetics of the encounter, editing and the zoom work in tandem and in tension. While the zoom conveys the presentness of experience, the editing introduces the process of memory, which hints at transcendence of the present moment. The film revels in the texture of experience, while at the same time suggesting that it indicates something deeper. The time-traveling of the film—and the mythological elements of the film—undermine sheer presentness. Although in the past two decades scholars have emphasized how crucially Schiele's market-savvy determined his self-presentation in art, Gemma Blackshaw notes that "Schiele's self-portraits have tended to occupy a space outside of culture, accessible only through a form of retrospective psychoanalysis."¹³¹ While his most famous paintings eschew Klimt's symbolic ornamentation, his paintings nonetheless retained a mythic quality, a sense of timelessness that, according to Robert Jensen, manifested the eternal theme of "lack of human agency."¹³² Jensen concludes that, like the stylistically progressive but politically conservative Secessionists before him, Schiele's "work sustained rather than fundamentally criticized the social order."¹³³ Herein lies another fundamental analogy between Schiele and *Bad Timing*.

V. Beyond History, Beyond Politics

¹³¹ Blackshaw, "The Pathological Body: Modernist Strategizing in Egon Schiele's Self-Portraiture," 379.

¹³² Jensen, "A Matter of Professionalism," 213. Jensen is not the only scholar who has acknowledged the Secession's political conservatism. Gottfried Fliedl writes "the alliance of Secessionstil artists and state politics ... was politically conservative" and "cannot be viewed as progressive in character except in a very limited sense" (i.e., "artistic change"). (Fliedl, *Gustav Klimt 1862-1918*, 10); Bösch and Steiner insist that while the Secession urged "social responsibility," this "consciousness" was displaced by the aestheticism that overtook the movement after the Japanese art exhibition of 1900. (Bösch and Steiner, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," 360).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 214.

Bad Timing shares with Klimt, Freud, and Schiele the ideological stance that the aesthetic and the psychological precede the political. The film ascribes conflict to personal desire, rather than suggesting that such conflict results from certain political arrangements. Unlike Roeg's earlier films *Performance* (1970) and *Walkabout* (1971), which critiqued the restrictive nature of bourgeois culture, *Bad Timing* tacitly endorses bourgeois and petite-bourgeois institutions. Medical professionals save Milena's life; the Czechoslovakian consulate is populated with eminently reasonable employees, who throw Alex's neuroses into stark relief; and even law enforcement officials are depicted as perceptive, efficient, and persistent. Netusil fails to wring a proper confession out of Alex not because of a lack of evidence or competence on his part, but because of the "bad timing" of Stefan's arrival at the apartment, when he announces that Milena survived the overdose. The film never calls for systemic social change, nor does it propose a political solution to Alex and Milena's problems.

Some critics have insisted that the film is inherently political due to its progressive sexual politics.¹³⁴ Although the film ultimately celebrates Milena's resistance

¹³⁴ Teresa de Lauretis famously praised the film as a feminist antidote to the patriarchal stronghold of classical Hollywood narrative cinema, one which properly addresses "historical" female spectators like herself. (de Lauretis, "Now and Nowhere," 102). De Lauretis's feminist interpretation relies on two of the film's modernist strategies: its blockage of identification with its protagonists, and its disruption of realist narrative structure. Patch and Watkins echo de Lauretis's argument that *Bad Timing*'s visual style effects a resistance to patriarchal control. (Patch, "Chromatic Borders, Cosmetic Bodies," and Watkins, "The Disquiet of the Everyday"). Jan Dawson also reads the film as "a homage to the woman's power of resistance." (Dawson, "*Bad Timing*," 229). Salwolke's contention that "the entire film seems to be a condemnation of men" because "Roeg seems to be saying that men can only relate to women through sex" (Salwolke, *Nicolas Roeg*, 89-90) rests on narrative rather than stylistic evidence. Izod suggests that the film reverses the gendered logic of Jungian archetypes, and that Milena emerges as the archetypal hero. (Izod, *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, 121-24). Susan Barber offers a more ambivalent account of the film's politics. Acknowledging that some of Roeg's fans "have tended to associate his experimental filmmaking with enlightened consciousness," *Bad Timing* puts viewers in an "uncomfortable" position because "its camerawork, associative editing, and narrative structure restlessly reinforce and participate in [Alex and Netusil's] sensual obsession with Milena ... compelling us in the audience to identify with this assault on the female victim." (Barber, "Review: *Bad Timing/A Sensual Obsession*," 46).

to Alex's control, this supposedly feminist gesture seeks to transcend—rather than perpetuate—the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s that enabled it. *Bad Timing* uses gendered aesthetics and experiences not to effect an immediate feminist agenda, but rather to gesture toward enduring realities that transcend the moment. In this sense, the film is out of step with more politically-oriented ornamental cinema, and with recent critical attempts to recuperate feminine-coded aesthetics. Galt has declared that “categories such as the decorative and the ornamental must be refigured and even redeemed for political transformation”¹³⁵; but *Bad Timing*'s ornamentalism—like Klimt's—is resolutely apolitical and non-transformative. In this sense, Roeg deviates from the political cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini who, according to Kovács, also employs an ornamental style due to his interest in myth and interpersonal psychology.¹³⁶ Pasolini appeals to myth through ornament in order to effect an anti-modernity, anti-capitalist agenda. *Bad Timing*, on the other hand, harbors no animosity toward the contemporary world. It appeals to myth not as something that is lost, but as something that will persist regardless of historical developments. The film absorbs counter-cultural energies not to encourage political action, but to expand conservative conceptions of selfhood. Manny Farber speculates that Roeg—along with fellow Englishmen Joseph Losey and John Boorman—was influenced by the “princely craftsmanship and Leftist fervor” of Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1963).¹³⁷ If Resnais's princely craftsmanship lingers in *Bad Timing*, the Leftist fervor has all but evaporated.

¹³⁵ Galt, *Pretty*, 138.

¹³⁶ Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, 183-87.

¹³⁷ Farber, “Nicolas Roeg,” 733.

Whereas *The Night Porter* charges Viennese landmarks with political significance, *Bad Timing* neutralizes contemporary Cold-War conflicts. In an interview with Tom Buckley, Russell disclosed that when shooting on location, she was disturbed by her first visit to Bratislava, remarking, “You could feel the oppression. No one on the street seemed excited. They were hardly even talking.”¹³⁸ Although Roeg was reportedly open to much of Russell’s input during the improvisatory shoot,¹³⁹ her sense of “oppression” never registers in the film, which abstracts the antagonism between East and West so that it serves primarily to illustrate transhistorical principles of the human condition. Nowhere is this more evident than in the film’s treatment of Milena’s relationship with the Czechoslovakian Stefan, whom we first glimpse on the *Hainburger Donaubrücke* linking Czechoslovakia and Austria. In her canonical essay “Now and Nowhere,” Teresa de Lauretis proposes that the bridge is a crucial site for Milena because it represents the “nowhere” which the film figures as “the place ... of feminine desire.”¹⁴⁰ De Lauretis elaborates that borders, such as the Danube,

are not gaps ... that can be filled, overtaken, and thus negated. Borders stand for the potentially conflictual copresence of different cultures, desires, contradictions, which they articulate or simply delineate. Like the river between two cities, two countries, two histories, in the surprising last shot of the film, borders mark difference itself; a difference that is not just in one or in the other, but between them and in both. Radical difference cannot perhaps be represented except as an experiencing of borders.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Buckley, “The Man Behind *Bad Timing*,” C6.

¹³⁹ Russell, interview, *Bad Timing*, DVD.

¹⁴⁰ de Lauretis, “Now and Nowhere,” 99.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Alternatively, Nigel Andrews suggests that the film ultimately negates the significance of the border: “Leaving her Czech husband behind in Prague ... Miss Russell has closed the Iron Curtain behind her. But in the Free World the same tyrannies, the same repressions rule, under other names, and in other, more individualized forms.”¹⁴² These opposing perspectives—border as site of irreconcilable difference, border as an agent in the illusion of difference—have one thing in common: they both suggest that the film subordinates the ideological and experiential specificities of Eastern and Western Europe to the abstract concept of the border. De Lauretis implies that “nowhere” could really be anywhere.¹⁴³

While the film emphasizes the permeability of the boundary between Eastern and Western Europe to establish its universalism, the film’s engagement with the Near East reiterates this universalism. By documenting Alex and Milena’s brief but consequential sojourn in Morocco, the film straddles the First, Second, and Third Worlds. While acknowledging that he “chose Morocco to show Alex and Milena against a completely alien culture,” Roeg rejects the Cold-War nomenclature of “what we call the Third World,” adding, “I personally don’t call it that.”¹⁴⁴ Filmed within months of the November 1978 publication of Edward Said’s landmark study *Orientalism*, which articulates the distortions about the Middle East that have circulated in the Western imaginary for centuries, *Bad Timing* shares Said’s skepticism about the accuracy of such

¹⁴² Andrews, “Worth the Aching Lungs,” 17.

¹⁴³ Even in the film’s form. Among the “cinematic figures of non-coherence” that the film “inscribes,” de Lauretis numbers: “non sequiturs in the dialogue, visual and aural split ends, a running over of the sound beyond ‘its’ image, a bleeding of one image into another, the cuts which articulate narrative and shot, and mismatch them.” (de Lauretis, “Now and Nowhere,” 99).

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Padroff, “The Effects of International Locations on the Films of Nicolas Roeg,” 171.

Euro-American perceptions. But Roeg and Udoff's insight into cultural misunderstanding likely comes from Paul Bowles, whom Said curiously omits from his study. *Bad Timing* establishes the orientalist theme in an early scene, in which Alex finds Milena in her thrashed apartment, nearly paralyzed in a drunken stupor, with a copy of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) in her lap and *The Music in the World of Islam* playing on her turntable. I agree with critics who interpret the inclusion of Bowles's novel—which details the disintegration of an American marriage against an unforgiving North African desert landscape—as an ominous foreboding of the unraveling of Alex and Milena's relationship during their forthcoming vacation to Ouarzazate. Milena's selection of a compilation record that features recordings from across the “world of Islam,” but none from Morocco specifically,¹⁴⁵ indicates that individual Middle Eastern locales are, in her mind, interchangeable. For the first-time viewer, the scene establishes Milena's romanticized interest in the Middle East; for the repeat viewer, aware of what will transpire after Alex and Milena's fateful trip, the scene illustrates Milena's *naïveté*.

While this early scene takes a gently ironic position *vis-a-vis* Milena's lazy romanticization of the Middle East, as the film progresses, its narrative form and visual style endorse Milena's affinity with the region. In effect, the film deploys the figure of Milena in order to disavow its own exoticism of the Middle East through a series of universalizing gestures. The Moroccan interlude is introduced as a flashback, halfway through the film's running time. A close-up of Netusil's hand, filling up with sand that was stored inside a souvenir rock in Milena's apartment, dissolves into a panoramic view

¹⁴⁵ Eugene Chadbourne, review of *Music in the World of Islam*, Vol. 3: *Strings*.

of a North African desert landscape, a contrast between the intimate and the expansive that alludes to the famous “match” cut in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), on which Roeg served as a second unit photographer. The visual contrast between the widely photographed, empty desert and the more claustrophobically presented urban milieu of Vienna is promptly negated by an appeal to the cross-cultural phenomenon of erotic desire. Stranded with a broken down vehicle, Alex and Milena hail a passing truck occupied by two locals. Although the drivers are initially reluctant to offer Alex a lift to Ouarzazate, Milena persuades them by drawing attention to her precariously concealed breasts. An allusion to the iconic hitchhiking scene in Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* (1934), in which Ellie (Claudette Colbert) expertly secures a ride after Peter’s (Clark Gable) multiple failed attempts, the interaction affirms a continuity of sensibility between both classical Hollywood and European art cinema, and between Occident and Orient.

Acknowledging the international spread of interest in Vienna 1900 during the postmodern 1970s and 1980s, several scholars have noted affinities between turn-of-the-century ahistorical modernism, and late-twentieth-century postmodern culture.¹⁴⁶ During this period, other scholars debated the character of postmodernism’s relationship to history. In a series of essays later collected in the canonical volumes *The Signatures of the Visible* (1990) and *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson insisted that postmodern culture had “forgotten how to think

¹⁴⁶ See Beller, “Introduction,” 5-6, and Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 17.

historically”¹⁴⁷; in the arts, this void of historicity was filled with a mode of nostalgic pastiche, which uncritically appropriated styles from the past, divorcing them from the “real” substance of their historical contexts (i.e., the social relations that enable, structure, and sustain such styles).¹⁴⁸ Jameson laments how postmodernism reduces history to a succession of aesthetic styles, flattening out history by distributing time across the image-saturated, hyperspatialized landscape of late capitalist culture.¹⁴⁹ Contra Jameson, Linda Hutcheon offers a more generous appraisal of postmodernism’s politics, substituting Jameson’s idea of “pastiche” for her concept of “parody,” which is “always critical.”¹⁵⁰ *Bad Timing* seems to fit Hutcheon’s positive model of postmodern parody: its fractured narrative structure could be interpreted as a critique of master narratives; its incorporation of popular and official cultural materials seems to blur aesthetic distinctions of high and low; its profusion of high art reproductions in the form of posters, exhibition catalogues, and kitsch souvenirs calls into question “the notion of the original as rare, single, and valuable (in aesthetic or commercial terms)”¹⁵¹; and its use of all-American types—a spunky California-bred ingenue and an established folk hero channeling his fame into an acting career—in a film that gleefully fractures Hollywood conventions—while pursuing distribution in the American market—could be seen as an act of complicit critique, postmodernism’s paradigmatic ethical strategy, according to Hutcheon. But, in effect,

¹⁴⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, ix.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 307.

¹⁵⁰ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 89.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

neither Jameson's nor Hutcheon's characterizations of postmodernism can account for *Bad Timing*'s relationship to the past. If *Bad Timing*'s ahistorical modernism embraces postmodernity's catholicity, it is merely because it provides more points of access (both high and popular culture, both avant-garde and kitsch) to transcendent insights. Unlike Jameson, Roeg does not see the relentless aestheticization of daily life wrought by postmodern consumer culture as a threat to an accurate, historically informed understanding of the real substance of history. Rather, his film adopts postmodernism's saturation of the aesthetic because it harbors a belief that such saturation ensures perpetual access to the realm of myth, which transcends history. Further, Roeg's film may seem, on the surface, to be suspicious of linear narrative because of its fracturing storytelling mode. But in fact, the film endorses meta-narratives; it intimates that there is continuity underlying surface reality, and it also believes that in the past artists have been able to access and express that truth. Hutcheon explains that "when [Sherrie Levine] photographs Egon Schiele's self-portraits, she parodically cites not only the work of a specific artist, but the conventions and myths of art-as-expression and points to the politics of that particular view of representation."¹⁵² Conversely, *Bad Timing*'s quotations of Schiele sustain such mythology.

Annette Insdorf suggests that films told in flashbacks embody Mircea Eliade's perspective that "history and progress are perceived as a fall implying the loss of the paradise of archetypes and of repetition, and longing for the *axis mundi* that might offer

¹⁵² Ibid., 95.

resistance to concrete historic time.”¹⁵³ The final shot of *Bad Timing* shows a view of the Danube unobstructed by any signs of human construction, elevating the elemental over the social, nature over history. Billie Holiday’s “It’s the Same Old Story” plays over the closing credits, suggesting that this film is not about modern love, not about emotions that could only flourish under late capitalism, but rather about an inevitable fact of life. This ending suggests that *Bad Timing* constitutes “a revolt against historical *time*, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite.”¹⁵⁴

VI. Roeg’s Melodramatic Unconscious

In her survey of the first fifteen years of work on melodrama in the field of film and television studies, Christine Gledhill proposes that melodrama, realism, and modernism constitute three interdependent yet distinct modes of influence on the development of film. Amending Peter Brooks’s field-defining study of the rise of the melodramatic mode in the late eighteenth century and its influence on realist fiction,¹⁵⁵ Gledhill identifies a divergence in “epistemological projects” between melodrama and realism, arguing that “if realism’s relentless search for renewed truth and authentication pushes it towards stylistic innovation and the future, melodrama’s search for something lost, inadmissible, repressed, ties it to an atavistic past.”¹⁵⁶ As I have already argued, *Bad Timing*’s citational mode emphasizes such affinities with the atavistic past. I will

¹⁵³ Insdorf, *Cinematic Overtures*, 151.

¹⁵⁴ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 153.

¹⁵⁵ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

¹⁵⁶ Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field,” 31-32.

conclude this chapter by arguing that *Bad Timing*'s melodramatic content and sensibility is also atavistic, presenting a melodramatic vision of history as a series of recurring and inevitable forces that diminish individual human agency. Because these forces emanate from within its characters, *Bad Timing*'s version of the melodramatic unconscious entails a regressive notion of tragic inevitability, rather than a progressive notion that melodramatic suffering can be relieved through a rectification of social ills.¹⁵⁷

In his account of melodrama's impact on postwar European art cinema, András Bálint Kovács provides a definition of melodrama that describes *Bad Timing* well¹⁵⁸:

Melodrama is commonly identified with stories provoking intense emotional responses from the viewer. This emotional intensity is a consequence of a special narrative scheme. Melodrama is a dramatic form in which the conflict explodes between incommensurable forces ... melodrama has always been about the suffering of an innocent victim, even when the fault of the suffering lies with the victim herself ... This is why a happy ending in melodrama comes always unexpectedly, by chance or miracle.¹⁵⁹

Both Alex and Milena are subject to the inner irresistible forces that drive their relationship to a sordid denouement, which is only resolved by the miracle of Milena's successful tracheotomy. As Toni Ross remarks, *Bad Timing* downplays Alex and Milena's agency, by subjecting them to "the disorganized but inexorable passage of events."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ For an analysis of the paradox of the tragic incompatibility and mutual dependence of individual subjectivity and cultural objectivity, see Simmel, "On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture," 27-46. I thank Nicola Suthor for alerting me to this essay.

¹⁵⁸ Several critics have made passing references to *Bad Timing*'s melodramatic dimension. John Pym claims that "What distinguishes this melodramatic 'love story,' however, is the singularly compelling manner of its telling" (Pym, "Ungratified Desire," 112), and James McCourt argues that Roeg's "mannerist" approach to film grammar transforms "a slice of kitsch pathology into a work of lyric melodrama." (McCourt, "British Film Now and Retrospectives," 69).

¹⁵⁹ Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, 84-85.

¹⁶⁰ Ross, "Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing*," 187-88.

With its modernist focus on the subjective states of its protagonists, rendered through arresting visuals, *Bad Timing* joins company with other modernist melodramas. But unlike other European art cinema directors who inflects their modernist films with melodrama—Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Michael Haneke, Lars von Trier, Pedro Almodovar—Roeg uses modernism to neutralize rather than revitalize melodrama's political commitments. *Bad Timing* does not treat historical circumstances and political arrangements as determining factors in the fate of individuals, but rather as ever-shifting conditions in which such archetypes continue to re-emerge. Although "bad timing" seems to refer to the chance occurrences and arbitrary reversals of fortune that have characterized melodrama since its eighteenth-century origins, the film's ideology of inevitability suggests that "bad timing" refers to tragic fate, not random occurrence. For *Bad Timing*, melodrama's unconscious is not an accurate understanding of the nature of the social world which is obscured by false consciousness; rather, melodrama's unconscious is the permanently, cosmically tragic. Far from a mode that "animates ... goals of justice,"¹⁶¹ *Bad Timing*'s melodramatic variant dismisses such teleological optimism as misguided. Although the film is not kind to Alex,¹⁶² it nonetheless perversely maintains an ideological position that echoes his sinister conviction, uttered during his rape of Milena, "It's better this way. Believe me. There was no other way."

¹⁶¹ Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 82.

¹⁶² Russell reports, "Nic says it ends hopefully. That's right. For Milena. Not for Alex—or not as far as Milena is concerned." (Quoted in Crawley, "The Last British Film Maker," 396).

**CHAPTER FOUR: Kubrick's *Kunstwollen*: Seductive Style in Stanley Kubrick's
Eyes Wide Shut (1999)**

Kubrick's films never take place in Vienna, but Vienna takes place in his films. Whereas *Bad Timing* (1980) wears its citations on the image's surface, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) embeds them in its cinematic fabric. Beyond its obvious intertextual engagement with its source text, Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (*Dream Novel*, 1925), commentators have touched upon the film's myriad allusions to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: its visual references to Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele's art,¹ its evocation of the Freudian uncanny,² its stylistic homage to the films of Max Ophuls,³ and its decidedly Jewish subtext.⁴ *Eyes Wide Shut* is the culmination of a near lifelong engagement with *fin-de-siècle* Vienna inspired by Kubrick's Central European heritage and intensified by encounters with Freud's work under the guidance of Lionel Trilling in the 1940s, his introduction to Ophuls's films in the 1950s, and his brief yet impactful marriage to the Viennese expatriate Ruth Sobotka from 1955 to 1957.⁵ The direct influence of late-Habsburg Vienna on Kubrick's films dates back to his early World War I drama *Paths of*

¹ Mielke, "Stanley Kubrick at the Fin de Siècle"; Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 19, 55, 174.

² Peucker, *The Material Image*, 104-15; Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 231; Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, vii.

³ Kolker and Abrams point out that the title of first draft of Frederic Raphael's script, "Woman Unknown," was a likely a reference to Ophuls's 1948 film adaptation of Stefan Zweig's 1922 Viennese novella *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 47). See also McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again*, 177-99.

⁴ Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick*, 239-64.

⁵ For a comprehensive account of this period in Kubrick's life and how it brought him to Schnitzler, see Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 13-40.

Glory (1957), in which he first implemented an ironic use of the waltz.⁶ *Paths of Glory* was also the film which introduced Kubrick's signature wide angle tracking shots that snake menacingly through hallways, mazes, trenches, and other delimited spaces. This is not a coincidence: the development of Kubrick's auteurist style was deeply informed by a distinctly Viennese sensibility that revels in a complex erotics of form.

It is no wonder that critics think Kubrick is hostile to melodrama. Known for his cool, ironic style and his affinity for film genres that have traditionally targeted a male viewership—war, sci-fi, horror—Kubrick is often regarded as masculine auteur who eschews the tear-jerking sentimentality commonly associated with “women's pictures.”⁷ Additionally, both Kubrick and his collaborators have testified to the director's deliberate avoidance of melodramatic narrative and stylistic conventions.⁸ Further, in Kubrick's films, heightened emotionality—a staple of the melodramatic mode since its emergence in the late eighteenth century⁹—is typically exaggerated to the point of parody. Such excessive affect may evoke laughter or fear, but rarely sympathy. If, as Peter Brooks argues, the melodramatic mode aspires to complete expressivity,¹⁰ then Kubrick rejects traditional melodrama's strategy of engaging audiences through surface-level emotions.

⁶ Christine Gengaro argues that in the film, “the Johann Strauss waltz *Künstlerleben* (“Artist's Life”), from 1867, forms a stark contrast between the cruel percussion of the battlefield and the opulent surroundings of the commanding officers.” (Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick*, 26).

⁷ Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 25; Mikics, *Stanley Kubrick*, 2.

⁸ Special effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull claims that Kubrick deliberately avoided “conventional melodramatic editing” and “talked openly ... a lot about breaking through the conventions of melodramatic moviemaking.” Trumbull adds that from pre-production it was clear that 2001 “wouldn't be just a regular 35 mm melodrama like *War of the Worlds*.” (Quoted in Halstead, *Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*). See also Kubrick quoted in Ciment, *Kubrick*, 170.

⁹ Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury,” 44-46.

¹⁰ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 11-20.

In a series of interviews given in the late 1960s, Kubrick repeatedly linked viewers' emotions to their "subconscious."¹¹ Thus, Kubrick's films are *deeply* melodramatic. Unlike more tendentious modernists like Jean-Luc Godard, Michael Haneke, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Lars von Trier, who undermine melodramatic emotionality via Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* in order to advance social critique,¹² Kubrick's modernist melodramas manipulate form and emotion to yield psychological rather than political effects. Kubrick does not engage in a subversion of melodrama, but rather a *submersion* of melodrama. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how this depth model—Kubrick's melodramatic unconscious—is informed by *fin-de-siècle* Viennese art and intellectual history as refracted through Late-Habsburg cultural imaginary as crystalized in the films of Max Ophuls, Kubrick's favorite director.¹³ I argue that in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Kubrick turned to the "cultural hothouse" of Vienna 1900 in order to reconcile modernism and melodrama. Through a brief detour into *Eyes Wide Shut*'s *Ur-text*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and with recourse to Viennese art historian Alois Riegl's influential concept of the *Kunstwollen*, and its attendant distinction between optical and haptic modes of perception, I will demonstrate how Kubrick effects a forcible yet dynamic erotics of authorship which invites viewers to assume a melodramatic relation to his own auteurist persona. Countering interpretations of *Eyes Wide Shut* as a moralizing diagnosis of social ills, I argue that Kubrick aligns his auteurist style with the *fin-de-*

¹¹ Nordern, "Playboy Interview," 47; Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar*, 302-03; Philips, *Stanley Kubrick*, 152.

¹² See Woodward, "European Anti-Melodrama," 586-95; Peucker, *The Material Image*, 129-58; Metelmann and Loren, *Irritation of Life*.

¹³ Cocks, *The Wolf at the Door*, 62.

siècle archetype of the seductive woman, thus elevating the categories of erotic and the aesthetic above the category of the ethical.¹⁴ In this respect, Kubrick's final film ultimately fits less snugly into Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's paradigm of Viennese "critical modernism" than into Carl E. Schorske's paradigm of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna's aestheticist retreat from politics.¹⁵ Translating the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* revolt against prevailing morality into a twentieth-century *fin-de-siècle* rejection of melodrama's moralism, Kubrick figures the erotic and the aesthetic as the ethical's irrepressible unconscious.

I. *Fin-de-Siècle* Atmospherics

In an often quoted passage from his memoir of working with Kubrick on the screenplay for *Eyes Wide Shut*, Frederic Raphael recounts a conversation he had with the director early in the development process, where the screenwriter expressed reservations about adapting Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*:

Kubrick: What's the problem?

Raphael: Underlying assumptions. Which are dated, aren't they? About marriage, husbands and wives, the nature of jealousy. Sex. Things have changed a lot between men and women since Schnitzler's time. (26)

Kubrick: Have they? I don't think they have.

Raphael: (*After thought*) Neither do I.¹⁶

There are two ways to interpret Kubrick's statement: one, romantic relations are relatively stable and largely unaffected by social changes; two, romantic relations are

¹⁴ Here I take my cue from Immanuel Kant's famous distinction between the agreeable (*das Angenehme*), the beautiful (*das Schöne*), and the good (*das Gut*). While Kubrick does not necessarily ascribe to Kant's strict distinction between these three categories, Kant's formulation remains useful because it recognizes the autonomous *value* of each of these categories. (Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 89-104).

¹⁵ See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*; Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*; and Janik, "Vienna 1900 Revisited," 27-56.

¹⁶ Raphael, *Eyes Wide Open*, 26-27.

shaped by socio-historical circumstances, but such circumstances had not changed significantly from Schnitzler's era to Kubrick's own. While the latter interpretation undergirds the majority of criticism on *Eyes Wide Shut* as an adaptation, the former interpretation is more consistent with Kubrick's commentary on Schnitzler, Raphael's commentary on Kubrick, and the film itself.

Understandably, critics have interpreted Kubrick's use of a Schnitzlerian source text as evidence that *Eyes Wide Shut* operates first and foremost a work of social commentary.¹⁷ Indeed, several literary scholars have read *Traumnovelle* as a critique of late-Habsburg Viennese society.¹⁸ Focusing on *Traumnovelle*'s own intertext—Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (1790)—Marc Weiner argues that Schnitzler's novella rejects the “nostalgic conservatism”¹⁹ of his contemporary Hugo von Hofmannsthal via modernist strategies of dissonance which dramatize the decline of Austria's Enlightenment values in the face of *fin-de-siècle* social and political tensions.²⁰ Prefiguring Weiner's argument that *Traumnovelle* functions as a social commentary rather than “simply a portrayal of the relationship between dream and waking or reason and unconscious drives,”²¹ Sidney Bolkowsky draws a crucial distinction between Schnitzler and his famously self-described *Doppelgänger* Freud: “where Freud wrote of the repressions of civilization,

¹⁷ The argument that *Eyes Wide Shut* advances a political message is most forcibly articulated by Tim Kreider in “*Eyes Wide Shut*,” 41-48, and Håvard Friis Nilsen in “Deterioration of Trust,” 262.

¹⁸ The exact temporal setting of *Traumnovelle*—which Schnitzler began in 1907, and serialized in *Die Dame* in 1925—remains ambiguous, but Pamela S. Saur maintains that the novella's multiple references to royalty set the novel “in the years prior to the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1917.” (“*Eyes Wide Shut* and its Literary Forebear,” 53).

¹⁹ Weiner, “*Die Zauberflöte* and the Rejection of Historicism in Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*,” 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Schnitzler wrote of the repressions of Vienna.”²² In other words, where Freud was concerned with the universal, Schnitzler focused on the local.

While Bolkowsky acknowledges that, like Freud, Schnitzler’s “realm was the world of the psyche,” Bolkowsky insists that Schnitzler “rarely separated that from the world of society.”²³ This connection between the psyche and society preoccupies several studies of Kubrick’s film as an adaptation. It may seem perverse to relocate Schnitzler’s narrative to late-nineties New York City, as one risks losing the cultural specificity which is constitutive of Schnitzler’s critique. But for these critics, such a transfer is unproblematic because it allows Kubrick to shed light on the similar dynamics governing the relationship between psyche and society from one *fin de siècle* to another. Hilaria Loyo Gómez insists that Kubrick’s film links the “motif of self-absorption perceived in Vienna’s *fin-de-siècle* culture” to what Christopher Lasch labeled the post-sixties “culture of narcissism.”²⁴ Matthew Sharpe also reads *Eyes Wide Shut* is firmly “of its time,” arguing that its 1990s “reframing” of Schnitzler “provocatively casts into relief the *malaise* haunting our own specifically capitalist, ‘permissive’ mode of organizing sexuality and sexual difference.”²⁵ In the bleakest analysis of *Eyes Wide Shut* as adaptation, Håvard Friis Nilsen posits that because both Kubrick and Schnitzler were working “during periods marked by finance capitalism and a strong concentration of

²² Bolkowsky, “Arthur Schnitzler and the Fate of Mothers in Vienna,” 2.

²³ Ibid, 12.

²⁴ Gómez, “End-of-Millennium Cynicism in Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*,” 161.

²⁵ Sharpe, “Contemporary Sexuality and its Discontents.” Michel Chion makes a similar point: “This society in which ‘permissiveness’ reigns is, we should note, exactly the same society as the one Schnitzler described in the early twentieth century, a clear proof that indeed nothing much has changed.” (Chion, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 88).

wealth among economic elites,” their novel and film warn about the specter of authoritarianism.²⁶ Robert Kolker and Matthew Abrams echo Nilsen’s sentiment, noting that Schnitzler’s *fin-de-siècle* pessimism attracted Kubrick because he “had always been interested in questions of class and wealth—not to mention the abyss into which the world is ready to fall.”²⁷

However, despite having consulted experts on *fin-de-siècle* Vienna about the history of Schnitzler’s era,²⁸ there is little evidence that Kubrick was interested in Schnitzler’s work as social or political commentary. In the transcript of a 1961 interview with Robert Emmet Ginna, Kubrick suspects that Schnitzler was “one of the most underrated writers of the twentieth century ... because he didn’t deal with things that are obviously full of social significance.”²⁹ Kubrick adds:

I know that for my part it’s difficult to find any writer who understood the human soul more truthfully and who had a more profound — you know — insight into the way people think, act and really are — and also who had a very sympathetic, if somewhat all-seeing cynical point of view.³⁰

Where critics such as Bolkowsky and Weiner seek to differentiate Schnitzler from Freud, Kubrick’s explicit concern with Schnitzler’s understanding of “the human soul” and his “insight into the way people think, act, and really are” suggests that the director elided such differences. Kolker and Abrams point out that, as far back as 1968, Kubrick was

²⁶ Nilsen, “Deterioration of Trust,” 277.

²⁷ Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 19.

²⁸ Kolker and Abrams report that Kubrick consulted writer Gersgon Legman and literary scholar J. P. Stern about *fin-de-siècle* Viennese culture, particularly its sexual history. (Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 36).

²⁹ SK1/2/8/2: Robert Emmett Ginna, 12.

³⁰ Ibid.

aware of Freud's famous 1922 letter to Schnitzler, in which the psychoanalyst disclosed that he considered the writer his *Doppelgänger*.³¹ As Edith Borchardt persuasively illustrates, it was the thematic overlaps between Freud and Schnitzler—the proximity of Eros to Thanatos, the dynamics of *Traum* and *Wirklichkeit*—that attracted Kubrick, not the historical and cultural specificity of Schnitzler's writings.³² Kubrick's annotations and underlining in critical studies of Schnitzler—Martin Swales's *Arthur Schnitzler: A Critical Study* (1971) and Reinhard Urbach's *Arthur Schnitzler* (1973)—reveal the director's interest in Schnitzler's treatment of enduring themes, such as illusion, fiction, denial, identity, and the *theatrum mundi*, as well as pivotal events in the author's personal life: marriage, births, deaths.³³

In preparation for *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick consulted two English translations of *Traumnovelle*: Otto P. Schinnerer's 1927 *Rhapsody: A Dream Novel*³⁴ and a private translation prepared by his brother-in-law Jan Harlan in 1970.³⁵ Kubrick's annotations and underlinings in Schinnerer's translation, republished in the 1931 collection *Viennese Novelettes*, betray his concern with themes of jealousy, deceit, and masquerade, as well as his affection for Schnitzler's dialogue. Indeed, the margins of an early draft of Raphael's

³¹ Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 18.

³² Borchardt, "Arthurs Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* and Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*," 5, 12.

³³ SK/17/2/5: Research Books. Reinhard Urbach, *Arthur Schnitzler* (trans. Donald Daviau. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), 1-10, 20; Martin Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler: A Critical Study* (Oxford and London: Clarendon Press, 1971), 204-215. Kolker and Abrams add that Kubrick sent his brother-in-law, Jan Harlan, to the Schnitzler Archive in Freiburg, where he consulted Schnitzler's unpublished diaries and "made notes on everything, even Schnitzler's dreams." (Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 64). Bob Mielke speculates that "Kubrick would have read Schorske for his background on Arthur Schnitzler," and that *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (1981) was a "source text" for *Eyes Wide Shut*, but I haven't encountered any evidence that Kubrick read or was familiar with Schorske's book. (Mielke, "Stanley Kubrick at the Fin de Siècle").

³⁴ SK/17/2/5: Research Books.

³⁵ SK/17/1/22: 'Traumnovelle' Translations.

screenplay are replete with Kubrick's admonitions to hew closely to the source text:

"follow Schnitz beats"; "Keep it as short as Schnitzler"; "follow Schnitzler"; "NO see book"; "DO LIKE BOOK"; "AS better"; "Why change Schnitzler?"³⁶ Reflecting on his turbulent relationship with the director, Raphael reports that "Kubrick didn't really know what kind of story he was intending to tell. What interested him was the atmosphere of eroticism and the distinct sexuality of conjugal love."³⁷ In an article on cinematic *Stimmung* (roughly translated as "mood" or "atmosphere"), Robert Sinnerbrink argues that "mood" discloses cinematic worlds by orienting spectators within those worlds via "affective attunement."³⁸ According to Sinnerbrink, our phenomenological experience of film mood determines our understanding of film meaning. But in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the primary purpose of *Stimmung* is not to convey meaning—to provide a socio-historically specific critique of late-capitalist class and gender relations, or even to provide transhistorical insight into enduring psychosexual dynamics—but rather to seduce its audience through Kubrick's hybrid style, which disciplines shimmering *fin-de-siècle* impressionism with his signature taut irony. *Eyes Wide Shut* reduces theme, narrative, and message to scaffolding for the erection of moody, magisterial Kubrickian images.

Whereas prior critics have privileged turn-of-the-century Vienna's social and thematic resonances in *Eyes Wide Shut*, I propose that Schnitzler's Vienna is a cluster of formal

³⁶ SK/17/1/2: 'Traumnovelle - F. Raphael Draft - William Morris.'

³⁷ Raphael, *Eyes Wide Open*, 102. In her adaptation study, Pamela S. Saur concurs with Raphael, insisting that Kubrick's film evokes "Schnitzlerian moods" (Saur, "Eyes Wide Shut and its Literary Forebear," 54).

³⁸ Sinnerbrink, "Stimmung," 148.

resources that Kubrick incorporates into his own authorial matrix in order to generate an erotic mode of spectatorial engagement.

Schnitzler's contemporary Gustav Klimt, with his canvases of dense ornamentation and swollen female bodies, also generated a pervasive erotic atmosphere in his work that influenced Kubrick. In his memoir, Raphael claims that Kubrick sent him a "bundle" of reproductions of Klimt and Schiele's paintings and drawings.³⁹ In the first draft of his script, completed in December 1994, Raphael describes Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) returning home from the Somerton orgy and discovering Alice (Nicole Kidman) "lying asleep, dreaming" with "an art book of Egon Schiele's paintings and drawings, which she was looking at before she went to sleep ... lying face down, but open, in the space which Bill usually occupies."⁴⁰ In a subsequent draft dated 12 January 1995, Raphael replaces the Schiele catalogue with Gabriella Belli's 1990 monograph on Klimt. In this version of Raphael's script, Bill inspects two images from the catalogue: *The Altar of Dionysus* from the tympanum of the Burgtheater's south staircase (1886-88) and *The Three Ages of Woman (Die drei Lebensalter, 1905)*.⁴¹ Subsequently, Raphael describes Alice lying in the pose of Klimt's *Reclining Woman* (1914).⁴² Kubrick ultimately decided to eliminate all direct visual citations of Klimt and Schiele's work.

³⁹ Raphael, *Eyes Wide Open*, 112.

⁴⁰ SK17/1/1/1: 'Raphael First Draft,' 96.

⁴¹ SK/17/1/1/3: 'Traumnovelle Working Copy - Raphael,' 93.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 94.

While several critics have acknowledged Klimt's general influence on the golden atmosphere of Victor Ziegler's (Sydney Pollack) ballroom and the Harford's bedroom,⁴³ specific visual references have remain largely speculative. Fortunately, in the Kubrick Archive, a box of research materials provides key reference points for the film's production design. Initial sketches for Ziegler's ballroom were based on Josef Hoffmann's rendering of the music room for the *Palais Stoclet* (1905-11), a Brussels estate commissioned by financier Adolphe Stoclet.⁴⁴ These preliminary designs for Ziegler's ballroom were ultimately abandoned as production moved to the eighteenth-century Luton Hoo Estate in Bedfordshire, but details of Klimt's frieze for the *Palais's* dining room—reproductions of which are also included in the Archive—clearly provided inspiration for the decor of Ziegler's ballroom. Designed in 1906 and completed by 1911, in the twilight of Klimt's "Golden Phase" (1901-1908), the *Stoclet Frieze* comprises panels depicting a lone female figure, an embracing couple, and the Tree of Life [Figs. 73-74]. While Kubrick trades in Klimt's polychromatic, mosaic-like drapery for monochromatic formal attire typical of the late 1990s, the ballroom scene retains the *Frieze's* champagne-colored aura and stylized foliage.⁴⁵

But the reference is tinged with irony. Klimt's nourishing Tree of Life, whose swirling, tendril-like branches extend across the panels to signify erotic plenitude, are here demoted to tacky holiday garlands. Further, Kubrick frustrates the *Stoclet Frieze's*

⁴³ Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 19, 174; Mielke, "Stanley Kubrick at the Fin de Siecle."

⁴⁴ SK/17/2/22: Oversized Materials about Prop Research and Set Plans.

⁴⁵ Kolker and Abrams note that "a veil of ambient smoke was used to enhance [the] softness [of the lights in Zeigler's mansion], giving the set a golden glow of a Gustav Klimt painting, as well as a dreamlike atmosphere." (Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 87).

narrative of anticipation resolving in fulfillment,⁴⁶ as Ziegler's secretary (Michael Doven) interrupts Bill's flirtation with Gayle (Louise Taylor) and Nuala (Stewart Thorndike) with a swirling garland plainly in view [Fig. 75]. As Bill ascends to Ziegler's bathroom, where the sex worker Amanda Curran (Julienne Davis) lies nearly unconscious, Kubrick cranks up the decadence: in the ballroom, infidelity is suggested; in the bathroom, it has been executed. In the ballroom, characters drink to the point of mild inebriation; in the bathroom, Mandy is paralyzed by an overdose of speedball—a deadly *mélange* of heroin and cocaine. The contrast evokes two modes of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese style. If the ballroom recalls *Wiener Film* fantasies of waltzes, multiculturalism, and champagne, the bathroom reveals the truth behind the social facade, the transactional world of the *süßes Mädel* and the extremes of Dionysian intoxication.⁴⁷ In the bathroom, walls bleached by stark lighting supplant the ballroom's golden glow. Kubrick captures Amanda's body in a foreshortened pose reminiscent of Klimt's erotic paintings of the late 1890s, on the cusp of his transition from academic classicism to Secessionist modernism [Figs. 76-77]. The bathroom's bold, monochromatic molding and stark white walls retain a graphic quality reminiscent of Klimt's illustrations and drawings, which forego the hazy atmospheres of his contemporaneous paintings [Fig. 78-79]. Ziegler's green bathtub, with its industrial glass and chrome shower walls, recall the functionalist aesthetic of Otto Wagner, as does the green paneling, a possible reference to Wagner's extensive use of emerald and white in his designs for the Vienna *Stadtbahn* [Fig. 80].

⁴⁶ Labeled reproductions of Klimt's cartoons of *Anticipation* and *Fulfillment* were included in Kubrick's research materials. (SK/17/2/22: Oversized Materials about Prop Research and Set Plans).

⁴⁷ For a discussion of intoxication and its relationship to the grotesque in the film, see Jordan and Haladyn, "Carnavalesque and Grotesque Bodies in *Eyes Wide Shut*," 186.

Lucy Scholes and Richard Martin describe *Eyes Wide Shut*'s setting as "a New World haunted by the Old, a film where the past is always threatening to intrude on the present, where ... something barely repressed awaits."⁴⁸ This "something barely repressed," which comprises not only the personal—Alice's adulterous fantasies, Bill's sexual jealousy and latent homosexuality⁴⁹—and the social—the clandestine corruption of Ziegler and his fellow elites—is signaled via visual references to Secessionist forms and Viennese material culture. When Kubrick began pre-production for *Eyes Wide Shut*, Viennese interiors had been on his mind. In 1993, he sent a crew of location scouts to photograph Vienna and neighboring Austrian cities for the aborted "Aryan Papers" project, based on Louis Begley's semi-autobiographical World War II novel *Wartime Lies* (1991). Peter Stronborgher and Thomas Riccabona returned with thousands of photographs of apartment interiors, bustling streets, the Vienna Woods, and municipal landmarks, such as the *Narrenturm* (1784) and the *Karl-Marx-Hof* (1927-1930).⁵⁰ Kubrick supplemented these private photographs with published World War II-era photographs of Vienna's famous Hotel Sacher and publicity stills from *The Third Man* (1949).⁵¹ Although there are no direct representations of Viennese spaces in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the film is rife with visual allusions to the city's material culture, particularly with regards to the intersection of its distinguished design history and its cultural institutions: the café, the opera, the hospital, and the bourgeois interior. In addition to ordering coffee

⁴⁸ Scholes and Martin, "Archived Desires," 344.

⁴⁹ Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick*, 248-57.

⁵⁰ SK/18/2/2: Aryan Papers, Location Research, Austria.

⁵¹ SK/18/2/3/4/7: Austria.

at the diner Gillespie's, Bill visits two cafés over the course of the film. Kolker and Abrams contend that although modeled on Greenwich Village's Caffè Reggio (established 1927), Sharky's, with its reproductions of nineteenth-century Decadent paintings such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Astarte Syriaca* (1877) and John William Waterhouse's *Ophelia* (1894), resembles the Viennese cafés frequented by *fin-de-siècle* Viennese luminaries.⁵² But the Café Sonata, where Bill learns about the Somerton orgy from Nick, is the truly haunted space. Production designer Les Tomkins describes making only a few minor lighting changes to Madame Jojo's, the London nightclub which stood in for the film's Greenwich Village jazz café. Among these changes was the addition of small "opera" lamps to the tables, which resemble the white globes used in landmarks of Viennese modernism, such as Wagner's *Kirche am Steinhof* (1904-1907) and Ferdinand Fellner, Hermann Helmer, and Ludwig Baumann's *Wiener Konzerthaus* (1911-1913) [Figs. 81-82].⁵³ In their sinister illumination of Bill and Nick's faces as they discuss the orgy, these lamps suggest *fin-de-siècle* Vienna decadence bubbling up from the realm of the repressed [Fig. 83]. Similar bulbs illuminate Bill and Alice's apartment [Fig. 84], a reminder that Viennese modernism was not only the province of public spaces, but also intimately tied to the domestic interior,⁵⁴ the milieu *par excellence* of bourgeois family melodrama.

⁵² Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 106.

⁵³ Tomkins quoted in Ciment, *Kubrick*, 273.

⁵⁴ See Gronberg, *Vienna, City of Modernity*, 97-122.

Peter Gay explains that in the Victorian century, “the bourgeoisie was defined by its antagonists, a ferocious and growing sect of avant-garde writers and artists.”⁵⁵ Vienna was an exception. Not only did avant-garde artists receive substantial civic and private financial support for their creative endeavors, but the bourgeoisie—and particularly the Jewish bourgeoisie—used these modernists developments to advance their class interests and fashion their ethnic identities.⁵⁶ Bourgeois ideology was not merely contextual but in fact integral to *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics. Although their attitudes toward ornament and functionality varied drastically, turn-of-the-century artists, architects, and designers were overwhelmingly united in a reaction against *Gründerzeit* historicism, and in an atavistic embrace of Biedermeier design principles. Sparked in 1896, one year prior to the founding of the Secession, the “Biedermeier Revival” lasted well into the first decades of the twentieth century, enshrining Biedermeier as a “native” Austrian style.⁵⁷ While even today the Biedermeier period (1815-1848) still suffers associations with parochialism, conservatism, complacency, and censorship,⁵⁸ at the turn of the century its qualities of “quietism, simplicity, domesticity and inwardness ... remained a powerful image for an Austrian cultural identity.”⁵⁹ It is unclear whether in his research on Viennese design, which probably dates back to his preparations for *The Shining* in the late 1970s,⁶⁰ Kubrick registered the influence of Biedermeier style on Viennese modernism.

⁵⁵ Gay, *Schnitzler's Century*, 28.

⁵⁶ See Jensen, “A Matter of Professionalism,” 195-219, and Shapira, *Style and Seduction*.

⁵⁷ Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna*, 185-85.

⁵⁸ Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History*, 9.

⁵⁹ Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna*, 185.

⁶⁰ Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 33.

Nevertheless, his treatment of Bill and Alice's apartment re-stages the harmonies and tensions that characterized the Viennese interior. In the Harfords' apartment, bland, commoditized adaptations of Biedermeier furniture (which were themselves middle-class adaptations of courtly Empire furniture) cohabit with vibrant post-Impressionist paintings by Kubrick's wife Christiane and charming Pop portraits by his daughter Katharina. True to the film's postmodern milieu, in Bill and Alice's apartment all distinctions between artistic styles have been leveled and absorbed into a matrix of neutered bourgeois taste. Tag Gronberg explains that at the turn of the century, the Secessionist ideal of the interior as *Gesamtkunstwerk* provided a means of reconciling the traditional and the modern, the European avant-garde and "native" Austrian style.⁶¹ In this sense, such interiors anticipated the cultural omnivorousness that defined the postmodern era. Further, Gronberg demonstrates that Viennese interiors often sought to blur distinctions between inside and outside, bringing nature into the home and extending architecture into the garden.⁶² Gronberg's conception of Viennese interiors and exteriors as "mutually inflecting spaces"⁶³ finds a parallel in the Harfords' apartment, where the outside constantly impinges on the inside. Flushing toilets, telephone calls, eerie pools of blue light, non-diegetic music, and uncanny resemblances to other interiors in the film suggest that the Harford's apartment is not just a stage for the performance of bourgeois status; rather, it is a porous space susceptible to the lure of the world beyond the nuclear family unit. Kubrick captures this sense of the domestic space treacherously opening up

⁶¹ Gronberg, *Vienna, City of Modernity*, 49.

⁶² Ibid., 43.

⁶³ Ibid., 30.

in the film's first corridor shot, which tracks Bill and Alice preceding through a hallway lined with lush depictions of flora and fauna [Fig. 85].⁶⁴ Whether or not Christiane Kubrick's paintings were directly inspired by Klimt, her compositions bear an uncanny resemblance to his nature pictures such as *Farm Garden with Sunflowers* (1905-1906) [Fig. 86] and *The Sunflower* (1907). Their bright colors, *horror vacui* compositions, and the way they seem to press their vegetation against the picture plane are all echoed in Christiane's tableaux. Kubrick, having been immersed in reproductions of Klimt's work for pre-production research, may have noticed the affinity.

II. Optical Odysseys

In addition to Vienna 1900's legacy of art and design, its no less influential disciplinary influence in the then emerging field of art history can help illuminate Kubrick's aesthetics. At the turn of the twentieth century, Viennese art historian Alois Riegl developed a formalist approach to the study of artifacts that revolutionized the discipline.⁶⁵ Inspired by his curatorial work in the textile department of Vienna's *k. k. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie* (today the *Museum für angewandte Kunst*), Riegl insisted that careful attention to the formal qualities of a work of art could

⁶⁴ Naremore remarks that "the shot generates a feeling of anxiety, as if we were moving forward or backward through a demonic space that might burst open into something threatening or unknown." (Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 246).

⁶⁵ In his historiography of art history, Christopher Wood declares that "no art historian other than Vasari has written texts with a longer lifespan than Alois Riegl." (Wood, *A History of Art History*, 267). Indeed, the massive English-language scholarship on Riegl continues to grow. Comprehensive monographs include Margaret Olin's *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, Margaret Iversen's *Alois Riegl*, and Michael Gubser's *Time's Visible Surface*. Saul Ostrow's edited collection *Framing Formalism* also covers the diversity of Riegl's brief yet productive career. Recently, scholarship has focused on the institutional and political contexts of Riegl's life and work, as evinced by Wood's long "Introduction" to the *Vienna School Reader*, 9-81, Matthew Rampley's *Vienna School of Art History*, and Diana Reynolds Cordieone's *Alois Riegl in Vienna, 1875-1905*.

reveal the artistic will (the “*Kunstwollen*”) of the group or individual that produced it.⁶⁶ As Christopher Wood explains, the *Kunstwollen* is “rooted in the experience of space and time,”⁶⁷ which yields a desire to regulate a viewer’s relationship to the visible world by advancing particular methods of representing space. For Riegl, the most critical antinomy was between haptic (*taktisch*) and optical (*optische*) modes of representation: the haptic mode, prevalent in ancient Egyptian art, is characterized by an emphasis on the integrity of the individual object and the suppression of space; conversely, the optical mode, largely fulfilled in late antiquity but pushed to its limits in Renaissance art, embraces the representation of space.⁶⁸ Commentators have frequently mapped Riegl’s distinction between haptic and optical visual modes of representation onto an analogous distinction between objective and subjective modes of perception: the haptic mode objectifies the phenomena of the world, whereas the optical mode acknowledges the viewer’s subjective position in the world.⁶⁹

Since Riegl’s categories entered Anglo-American film studies discourse via English-language translations of Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema* books (1986 and 1987) and Noël Burch’s *Life to those Shadows* (1990), they have been both widespread and contested. Despite their disagreement about what constitutes a haptic (or “haptical”)

⁶⁶ Riegl’s concept of the *Kunstwollen*, introduced in his 1893 book *Stilfragen (Problems of Style)* was further elaborated in his *Spätrömische Kunst-Industrie (Late Roman Art Industry)* of 1901. For an influential account of the *Kunstwollen*, see Panofsky, “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” 17-33. For further illumination of Riegl’s concept and its development, see Iversen, *Alois Riegl*, 2-18, 24, 71-72; Wood, “Introduction,” 10, and *A History of Art History*, 291; and Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna*, 203-04.

⁶⁷ Wood, “Introduction,” 26.

⁶⁸ Riegl elaborates this distinction, and its historical development, in *Die Spätrömische Kunst-Industrie*, 19-22.

⁶⁹ See Iverson, *Alois Riegl*, 47, 78, and Lant, “Haptical Cinema,” 50.

space, Burch and Antonia Lant both adopted the term more or less descriptively in order to chart the development of from early cinema conventions to classical Hollywood film style.⁷⁰ However, subsequent critical interventions have proved decidedly normative.

While Margaret Iversen explains that for Riegl, the haptic *Kunstwollen* “wants to subordinate the world to its will” while the optical *Kunstwollen* “wishes to receive the world,”⁷¹ recent feminist and phenomenologically-oriented film scholars have inverted these categories. In an influential account, Laura Marks champions the haptic visuality of “intercultural cinema” as an alternative to the dominant mode of western ocular-centrism. Following the tenets of apparatus theory, Marks maintains that traditional optical cinema—which situates figures in a clearly delineated, illusionistic space—constructs a spectator who experiences herself as an “all-perceiving subject” distanced from the world she surveys.⁷² According to Marks, such perceived distance breeds a desire for mastery and control. Conversely, haptic cinema—epitomized by extreme close-ups which force viewers to perceive the texture of an object’s surface before apprehending its overall shape, or its situation in an illusionistic space—closes the distance between image and spectator. Marks insists that such intimacy prompts the spectator to relinquish her desire for mastery and control, to yield, pleurably, to the image’s elusive alterity. Marks describes the optical mode, with its implied distance, as fundamentally voyeuristic in

⁷⁰ Burch, “Building a Haptic Space,” *Life to those Shadows*, 162-85, and Antonia Lant “Haptical Cinema,” 45-73.

⁷¹ Iversen, *Alois Riegl*, 47.

⁷² Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 162. Notable appropriations of Marks’s work include Giuliana Bruno’s *Surface* and Rizvana Bradley’s guest-edited 2014 issue of the *Women and Performance* devoted to “The Haptic: Textures of Performance.”

contrast to the haptic mode, which is fundamentally erotic because it generates intimacy between viewer and image.⁷³

But Kubrick's cinema proves that intimacy has no monopoly on the erotic. Peter Rainer has called Kubrick "perhaps the least sensual of all the major directors."⁷⁴ He is also, in my view, among the least *haptic* of the major directors. In all of his films, Kubrick emphasizes form and space over material and surface texture. Close-ups are by no means alien to Kubrick's films, but they are always saturated with meaning. Even though Kubrick is known for striking facial close-ups, such faces often assume a static, exaggerated, "mask-like" quality. Legibility of expression typically overrides any tremors of ambiguity that register on the surface of the face. Close-ups of objects are likewise semiotically charged. In *Eyes Wide Shut*'s Sonata Café scene, for instance, the haptic quality of a wrinkled cocktail napkin, framed in close-up, is immediately diluted as Nick Nightingale (Todd Field) writes the password "FIDELIO" onto it, negating its materiality by reducing it to a surface for the inscription of language. Further, Kubrick rejected Chris Baker's (pseudonym: Fangorn) haptic storyboards for a fantasy sequence illustrating Alice's dream [Fig. 87].⁷⁵ Eschewing the obstinately haptic images celebrated by Marks, Kubrick's camera rarely revels in texture for its own sake. Instead, his close-ups function classically, revealing character information and propelling his films' narratives forward.

⁷³ Ibid., 183-84.

⁷⁴ Rainer, "Strangelove."

⁷⁵ Baker appended a note to these sketches dated March 18, 1996: "I like the idea of extreme close-ups of parts of the body that are reacting to the lovemaking." (SK/17/2/10: Concept Artworks [Storyboards] - Alice's Dream).

Kubrick's optical preference for clearly articulated spaces sets his aesthetic apart from Ophuls's. Kate McQuiston observes that Kubrick eschews "Ophuls's taste for baroque clutter in the *mise-en-scène*," eliminating objects or architectural barriers that inhibit a clear view of his characters.⁷⁶ Prior critics have implied that by overlaying Klimt and Ophuls's respective styles, Kubrick amplifies *Eyes Wide Shut*'s Viennese aura via association. But no critics have remarked on how Kubrick puts Klimt and Ophuls's styles in tension. Kubrick uses Klimt's erotic frankness to open up Ophuls's studio-mandated exclusion of explicit sexuality, and Klimt's painterly stillness to rein in Ophuls's restlessly mobile camera. Conversely, Kubrick activates Ophulsian motion in order to expand claustrophilic Klimtian space.⁷⁷ In the ballroom scene, the Klimtian and Ophulsian styles collide most forcibly. As his camera encircles Alice, who is framed by a wall of golden light, Kubrick deploys Ophulsian camerawork to inflate flat Klimtian space into three dimensions. According to Gottfried Fliedl, in the *Stoclet Frieze* Klimt prioritizes the "decorative significance" and "luxurious materials" that adorn the surface of the image over the figures they envelop. Fliedl insists that in the *Frieze*, "it is impossible to make any spatial distinction between foreground and background. The figures *are* the background, and vice versa."⁷⁸ Such flattening of space and privileging of symbolic ornament is consistent with the haptic quality of ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Byzantine art which exerted a huge influence on Klimt's style in the first decade of

⁷⁶ McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again*, 182, 191.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the influence of Klimt's claustrophilic style on R. W. Fassbinder's *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972), see Drude, "Im goldenen Käfig," 25-32.

⁷⁸ Fliedl, *Gustav Klimt*, 145-46.

the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Conversely, *Eyes Wide Shut* relegates decoration—strings of lights, Christmas trees, shaped garlands—to the background, consistent with the optical mode of Renaissance perspectivalism, which situates objects within a convincing representation of space.⁸⁰ Whereas Fliedl speculates that “with the *Stoclet Frieze*, Klimt gave up this resistance and surrendered to the material,”⁸¹ in *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick continued to subordinate material to his authorial will.

Nowhere is the optical dimension of Kubrick’s authorial will—his *Kunstwollen*—more evident than in his signature use of central perspective [Figs. 88-90]. Unlike modernist filmmakers who emphasize the medium’s properties of color, flatness, and collage in order to obscure, distort, or displace perspectival representation,⁸² Kubrick embraces perspective, exploiting its sublime and uncanny properties. Brigitte Peucker points out that film theorists and art historians in the 1970s and 1980s deemed *perspectiva artificialis* a “bad object” that buffers the illusion of the unitary viewing subject as, in Jean-Louis Baudry’s phrasing, the “active center and origin of meaning.”⁸³ Kubrick’s trademark use of central perspective, however, could scarcely be credited with

⁷⁹ Borchhardt-Birbaumer, “Eros statt stiller Größe,” 37.

⁸⁰ James Elkins insists that during the early modern period, “artists and writers thought first of objects and second of what we call perspective space or fictive space,” arguing that the Renaissance notion of perspective was “object oriented,” whereas the modern concept of perspective is “space oriented.” (Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 15).

⁸¹ Fliedl, *Gustav Klimt*, 148.

⁸² Brigitte Peucker lists Robert Wiene, Alfred Hitchcock, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Godard among these anti-perspectivalists. (Peucker, *Aesthetic Spaces*, 15-39).

⁸³ Ibid., 15; Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” 287. See also Nichols, *Ideology and the Image*, 52-57.

buffering the mastery of his protagonists or his viewers.⁸⁴ Michel Ciment, Robert Kolker, and Michel Chion concur that Kubrick's recurrent use of one-point perspective symbolizes the entrapment of his characters and foreshadows their doom.⁸⁵ These identifications of formal cruelty are not only consistent with the perennial accusation of "coldness" launched at Kubrick from antagonists and admirers alike,⁸⁶ but also with the remarks of visual theorists who attest to the inherent coldness of perspectivalism. Following Erwin Panofsky's influential formulation that perspective "transforms psychophysiological space into mathematical space,"⁸⁷ James Elkins describes perspective as a "cold, mathematical endeavor."⁸⁸ Martin Jay elaborates on the perspectival gaze's "abstract coldness," insisting that it de-eroticizes the visual order by widening the gap between spectator and spectacle, disincarnating the eye, and buffering "a reifying male look that turns its targets into stone."⁸⁹ But, as Deleuze and Gaylyn Studlar have argued in their respective studies of masochism, the aesthetics of "coldness" and "cruelty" are inherently erotic.⁹⁰ Even critics who have accused Kubrick of coldness have acknowledged the erotic force of his images. Kolker argues that Kubrick's "fearful symmetry" ensnares not only his characters but his viewers as well, arresting our

⁸⁴ Roelof Overmeer insists that "like Cocteau, or Welles in *The Lady from Shanghai*, or Tarkovsky in *The Mirror*, or Powell in *Peeping Tom*—Kubrick explores, rather than the ego-formation function, the ego-shattering function of that mirror, film." (Overmeer, "Filming/Seeing *Eyes Wide Shut*," 60).

⁸⁵ Ciment, *Kubrick*, 75; Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, 119; Chion, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, 78.

⁸⁶ See Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, 109; Chion, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, 94; Sarris, "Eyes Don't Have It."

⁸⁷ Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 31.

⁸⁸ Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 2.

⁸⁹ Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," 8.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," 7-138; Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure*.

attention and forcing us “to look again and again.”⁹¹ Chion argues that, in contrast to Hitchcock and Bresson, whose “centrifugal” images constantly direct attention to what is outside the frame, Kubrick’s images are “centripetal” because they attract the viewer’s attention to the center of the frame.⁹² James Naremore describes Kubrick’s “characteristic ‘tunnel shot’” as “pleasurably dynamic in its streamlined movement and almost phallic in its energy.”⁹³ Taken together, these characterizations present a Kubrickian image that is both aggressive and receptive, phallic and yonic, and not at all disinvested in eroticism. Contra Marks, such eroticism does not inhere solely in the dyadic relationship between viewer and image. Rather, because Kubrick’s films circulate under the category of auteurism, the Kubrickian image serves as a powerful mediator between viewer and authorial persona.

While I am more inclined to agree with Kolker’s contention that perspective, in Kubrick’s hands, is an assertion of authorial mastery rather than a bestowal of mastery on the viewing subject *à la* Baudry, I reject the notion that their fundamental theme is entrapment, or that they seek to entrap viewers at all. It is important to acknowledge the temporality of Kubrick’s films. In lieu of stable, physical edifices, Kubrick produced temporary, modular cinematic architecture, a phantasmagoria of shifting spaces that dissolve as quickly as they congeal. Luis García Mainar points out that in *2001*, one-point perspective becomes a symbol of tradition that must be transcended.⁹⁴ Indeed, *2001*’s

⁹¹ Kolker, *The Extraordinary Image*, 160.

⁹² Chion, *Kubrick’s Cinema Odyssey*, 78.

⁹³ Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 246.

⁹⁴ García Mainar, *Narrative and Stylistic Patterns in the Films of Stanley Kubrick*, 49.

celebrated Stargate sequence harnesses the power of perspective while shaking off its dusty canonicity. Ingeniously, Kubrick re-invigorates perspective by emphasizing the color, flatness, and abstraction endemic to modernist painting, perspective's established foe. To the optical mode, Lant attributes "the thrill of depth, our plunge outward or into deep space,"⁹⁵ a formulation that perfectly describes *2001*'s Stargate sequence, which was heralded as "the ultimate trip" for hurtling viewers through a corridor of vibrant, shifting abstract patterns [Fig. 91]. But the sequence is more than a mere exemplar of optical visuality. If perspectival constructions stretch opticality to its limits by suggesting infinite space, *2001*'s Stargate sequence transcends this extremity, taking viewers "beyond the infinite." The sequence achieves this effect by intensifying not only the optical but also the haptic qualities of the image. Rather than unsettling the distinction between the haptic and the optical, the sequence keeps both modes of visuality in scintillating tension, staging a clash between the opticality of Renaissance perspective and the hapticity of the modernist obsession with surface.⁹⁶ Innovating on experimental filmmaker John Whitney's "slitscan" method of photographing controlled blur, special effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull combined camera movement and bi-lateral symmetry to create the Stargate's "corridor effect."⁹⁷ When gathering *moiré* patterns to incorporate into the

⁹⁵ Lant, "Haptical Cinema," 73.

⁹⁶ Benson cites the non-representational paintings of Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky, as well as the Abstract Expressionism of Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock as influences on the Stargate sequence. (Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 347).

⁹⁷ For detailed explanations of the slitscan process, see Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 151-56; LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick*, 154, 303-04; Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 341-44; and Trumbull's interview in Halstead, *Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*.

slitscan imagery,⁹⁸ Kubrick, Trumbull, and artist Roy Naisbitt consulted a 1964 *Time* magazine article by John Borgzinner titled “Op Art: Pictures that Attack the Eye.”⁹⁹ In sensationalizing prose, Borgzinner describes the “tantalizing, eye-teasing, even eye-smearing” quality of op art, its ability to “enslave and enthrall the eye.”¹⁰⁰ Violence, for Borgzinner as for Marks, inheres in the image itself, rather than in the authorial intentions that generated it. While Borgzinner insists that op art precludes the artist’s subjective journeys of self-discovery and self-expression, reducing him to “a computer programmer churning out visual experiences,”¹⁰¹ with the “perceptual assault”¹⁰² of the Stargate sequence Kubrick inverts Borgzinner’s paradigm, in effect re-subjectivizing op art by incorporating it into an eroticized authorial matrix. The Stargate sequence restores agency to aggression.¹⁰³

Whereas the first phase of the Stargate sequence positions haptic imagery within an optical arrangement, the second phase luxuriates in unadulterated hapticity.

Incorporating footage of chemical reactions of black ink and paint thinner shot under high-intensity light,¹⁰⁴ and inspired by recent photographs of star nebulae published by

⁹⁸ Other images incorporated into the slitscan matrix included architectural drawings, printed circuits, published grids, and electron microscope photographs. (LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick*, 303-04).

⁹⁹ SK/12/2/2/6: Black Research Files: Secondary Design Ideas - Book 2.

¹⁰⁰ Borgzinner, “Op Art,” 78.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰² Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick*, 49. Kolker makes a similar point: “It could be argued that much of Kubrick is an assault. He forces our attention through the creation of the extraordinary image. Certainly Dave Bowman experiences his trip through the black hole and into his own mind-made hotel room prison as an assault, represented by his shuddering, wide-eyed stare.” (Kolker, *The Extraordinary Image*, 204).

¹⁰³ Burch insists that when “the viewer feels he is the direct victim of a *structured aggression*,” that is to say, by the authorial structuring of visceral, even cruel film moments, he experiences “a very pure aesthetic satisfaction.” (Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 130).

¹⁰⁴ Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 81.

the California Institute of Technology,¹⁰⁵ the second phase features oozing, indeterminate biomorphic forms that offer a hypnotic respite from the first phase's roller-coaster ride [Fig. 92]. The contrast between the receding vertical abyss of the star corridor and the advancing voluminousness of the interstellar nebulae is so abrupt and so extreme that the bulging forms seem to be pushing through the surface of the film screen. With a charge more seminal than semiotic, these images constitute one of the rare instances of erotic hapticity in Kubrick's cinema. By modulating from high to low speed, from forward- to backward-facing directionality, and from geometric to organic form, this abrupt transition mobilizes the varieties of visceral experience. Whereas Riegl argued that the traditional *Kunstwollen* sought to satisfy viewers by creating forms that would confirm their *a priori* conceptions of space and time, Kubrick's *Kunstwollen* seeks to challenge and stimulate viewers by, as Albert Halstead puts it, warping the space-time continuum.¹⁰⁶ Whereas Mario Falsetto and Randy Rasmussen identify sexual references in the sperm-like qualities of Bowman's pod and the biomorphic star clusters,¹⁰⁷ Thomas Allen Nelson is closer to the mark when he calls the sequence a "pyrotechnic orgy"¹⁰⁸; its eroticism is holistic, not condensed into isolable components. In contradistinction to Marks's equation of the erotic with the intimate, *2001* conceives of the erotic as an expansive phenomenon. The Stargate sequence treats cosmic architecture as eroticized space. It is the climax of a film that has spent nearly two hours displacing libidinal energy from eroticized human

¹⁰⁵ SK/12/2/1/29: Star Clusters.

¹⁰⁶ Halstead, *Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*.

¹⁰⁷ Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick*, 50; Rasmussen, *Stanley Kubrick*, 103.

¹⁰⁸ Nelson, *Kubrick*, 131.

figures to a formalist *mise-en-scène*.¹⁰⁹ While void of explicit sexual activity, the film is saturated with phallic, yonic, and penetrative machine imagery. While Kubrick used this device to comic effect in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), in *2001* such imagery is more subliminal, less overt, yet equally assured. Eroticism pervades the film's form, organizing the spectacle's relationship to its spectator. Sexual dynamics are displaced from the diegesis of the narrative onto film style itself.

In Kantian terms, the passage from the "Jupiter Mission" segment to "Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite" is a transition from an aesthetics of the beautiful to an aesthetics of the sublime. In his mature "analytic of the sublime" (*Analytik der Erhabenen*), presented in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), Kant distinguishes the beautiful (*das Schöne*) from the sublime (*das Erhabenen*). Whereas the beautiful is a quality of an object's form and attendant limitations (*Begrenzung*), the sublime inheres in the formless (*formlos*) object's representation of limitlessness (*Unbegrenztheit*). The beautiful yields pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*) through its quality (*Qualität*), the sublime through its quantity (*Quantität*).¹¹⁰ The second section of the "Dawn of Man" sequence, following Heywood Floyd's (William Sylvester) journey to the Clavius moon base, and the entire "Jupiter Mission" section exemplify the beautiful. Through their hypnotic pacing, these sections spotlight the elegance of simple, contained

¹⁰⁹ For further remarks on the *2001*'s erotic imagery, see Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 140; Geduld, *A Film Guide to 2001: A Space Odyssey*, 60; García Mainar, *Narrative and Stylistic Patterns*, 130; Cocks, *The Wolf at the Door*, 122; and Toles, "Double Minds and Double Binds in Stanley Kubrick's Fairy Tale," 172.

¹¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 129.

forms. Nearly every object, architectural detail, typeface, and article of clothing is monochromatic, subordinating surface to shape. While certain strains in Western aesthetics have associated color with excess and intransigence,¹¹¹ the restriction of *2001*'s palette to primary colors set against blacks and whites (with the occasional intrusion of magenta, orange, and green), and the high contrast in value between adjacent colors in the *mise-en-scène* renders the limits of form visible.

If color defines line in the “Dawn of Man” and “Jupiter Mission” sequences, color dissolves line in “Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite.” The glowing aura of the Stargate corridor, which grows more diffuse as the sequence progresses, heralds the disintegration of beautiful form into sublime formlessness. By coupling the surging formlessness of its walls with the sense of infinite space suggested by the its central perspective, the Stargate corridor is the apotheosis of sublime imagery. The widely publicized fact that the film was shot in 65 mm for exhibition in Cinemascope Super Panavision 70 mm stock projected onto colossal, curved Cinerama screens would have primed the film's initial audience for a sublime experience.¹¹² Although Pauline Kael mocked *2001*'s straining for Kantian sublimity, noting that the film invites viewers to “trip off to join the cosmic intelligence and come back a better mind,”¹¹³ contemporaneous critics of *2001* were stunned by the film's capacity to expand the possibilities of the medium. In her landmark 1969 review of the film in *Artforum*, Annette Michelson argued that *2001* was no less than a *rite de passage*, initiating viewers into a new conception of cinematic possibilities

¹¹¹ Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 21-50.

¹¹² Chion, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, 75.

¹¹³ Kael, “Trash, Art, and the Movies,” 229.

by systematically disorienting viewers' embodied apprehension of the sensible world.¹¹⁴ One year later, Gene Youngblood described the film as "a cinematic approach to cosmic consciousness," placing in the context of the "expanded cinema" of experimental filmmakers like John Whitney and Jordan Belson.¹¹⁵ In the proceeding years, numerous critics have elaborated on the film's sublimity. Alexander Walker insists that the *Stargate*'s "cosmic ride" dissolves David Bowman's (Kier Dullea) perception and subsumes his physical being into a transcendental experience.¹¹⁶ George Toles emphasizes the fear of death Bowman's eyes express as he hurtles through the *Stargate*, a fear arising from the "force of revelation."¹¹⁷ McQuiston brilliantly observes that the sublime quality of the *Stargate* sequence extends beyond the image to the soundtrack. According to McQuiston, the micropolyphony of György Ligeti's *Atmosphères* (1961), which "creates complex textures with dense clusters of sustained pitches and gradual additions and subtractions of layers," is so dense that it challenges the listener's perceptual capacities, a hallmark of the Kantian sublime.¹¹⁸ The sublimity of Ligeti's music contrasts starkly with the melodic beauty of Strauss's *An der schönen, blauen*

¹¹⁴ Michelson, "Bodies in Space."

¹¹⁵ Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 156.

¹¹⁶ Walker, *Stanley Kubrick*, 175.

¹¹⁷ Toles, "Double Minds and Double Binds in Stanley Kubrick's Fairy Tale," 150.

¹¹⁸ McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again*, 152-53.

Donau (1866),¹¹⁹ a composition which, according to Pierre Bourdieu's classic study, had massive cross-class appeal in 1960s France.¹²⁰ Scott Bukatman places *2001*, and science-fiction visual effects more generally, in a tradition of spectacular media—maeoramas, landscape paintings, stereoscopic views—that evoked rhetorical figures of the sublime in order to both address modern viewers' anxieties over a perceived loss of cognitive power in the face of an increasingly technologized world, and to produce within these same viewers a sense of cognitive mastery.¹²¹ Bukatman proceeds to compare the diegetic spectators of *2001*'s sublime imagery to the surrogate figures that populate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape painting.¹²² Similarly, in her monograph on the relationship between the sublime surfaces and the post-classical narrative structures of Kubrick's films since *2001*, Elisa Pezzotta describes Kubrick's protagonists as *flâneurs*, enchanted by their "dreamy diegetic worlds" but ultimately consigned to passivity.¹²³

Can we attribute such passivity to Kubrick's audience, with whom he frequently aligns his characters, perceptually if not emotionally? As Kant argues, such passivity in

¹¹⁹ Although critics have argued that the inclusion of *Blue Danube* waltz conveys the banality of space travel (Jameson, "Historicism in *The Shining*," 117; Gilbert, "Auteur with a Capital A," 35), Kubrick attests, "I wanted something that would express the beauty and the grace that space travel would have, especially when it reached a fairly routine level with no great danger involved ... I listened to about twenty-five recording of *Blue Danube* before choosing the one for Deutsche Grammophon by Herbert von Karajan, the world's greatest conductor. It's the kind of music that can sound terribly banal, but at its best, it's still a magnificent thing." (Kubrick quoted in Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 359).

¹²⁰ In his empirical survey of class tastes conducted in 1963 and 1967-1968, Bourdieu found that of fourteen classical pieces, the *Blue Danube* ranked third in preference after Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* (1847) and Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (1787). While appreciated by members of all classes surveyed, Strauss's waltz was by a wide margin the most favored composition of several groups holding working class occupations: craftsmen, small shopkeepers, clerical workers, and junior executives. (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 528-29).

¹²¹ Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 250.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 261.

¹²³ Pezzotta, *Stanley Kubrick*, 120.

the face of sublime spectacles—what he calls the inhibition of vital powers—is a temporary state resolving in a more respectful, rational, conscious subject.¹²⁴ While I disagree with Kant’s notion that sublime perceptual experiences amplify a subject’s morality or sense of mastery, I contend that Kubrick’s sublime images seek to empower the spectator by expanding her capacity for pleasure. Released during a period of expanding cosmic consciousness among European and North American youth cultures, *2001*’s eroticism transcends the intimate and immediate, entailing not the dissolution of the subject, but rather the dissolution of the subject’s resistance to the transformative potential of cosmic spectacle. Bowman’s trajectory enacts this ideal spectatorial experience. After the marvelous surrender of being “sucked into infinity on a cosmic ride he cannot control,”¹²⁵ Bowman repairs to the marriage bed where he copulates, symbolically, not with a woman but with the monolith. Described by Kubrick as “something of a Jungian archetype”¹²⁶ and alternately interpreted as a symbol of the phallus¹²⁷ and the womb,¹²⁸ the monolith operates as a significant form of enigmatic erotic power, the Penelope to Bowman’s Odysseus.¹²⁹ The film’s final image—a wide-eyed fetus gently confronting the audience—embodies the fruits of our erotic encounter

¹²⁴ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 128-29. For a lucid discussion of the Kantian sublime *vis-à-vis* film, see Freeland, “The Sublime in Cinema,” 65-83.

¹²⁵ Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 183.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar*, 306.

¹²⁷ Chion, *Kubrick’s Cinema Odyssey*, 142.

¹²⁸ Geduld, *Film Guide to 2001: A Space Odyssey*, 68.

¹²⁹ Leonard Wheat provides a thorough discussion of *2001* as Homeric allegory (Wheat, *Kubrick’s 2001*, 41-62).

with the cinematic spectacle, and emblemizes the figurative rebirth of the film spectator, compliments of the Kubrickian sublime.

Despite the prevalence of yonic forms in *2001*, the film retains a classical association of the sublime with masculine energy and control, an association long critiqued by feminist scholars.¹³⁰ Aforementioned equations of the monolith with the symbolic Freudian womb have had little impact on the popular imagination: in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), which was shot six months after the wrapping of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Tom Cruise's hypermasculine motivational speaker Frank T. J. Mackey ascends a conference stage illuminated like the monolith and scored by Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896). Indeed, Kubrick's language in a 1968 interview reveals that his own conception of the erotic dimension of art was resolutely masculine:

I intend the film to be an intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner level of consciousness, just as music does; to "explain" a Beethoven symphony would be to emasculate it by erecting an artificial barrier between conception and appreciation.¹³¹

Echoing Susan Sontag's lament that interpretation depletes the work of art (and, by extension, the world),¹³² Kubrick endorses, whether knowingly or not, her clarion call for "an erotics of art."¹³³ Such erotics assume a newfound feminine valence in *Eyes Wide Shut*, a film widely understood Kubrick's own "answer to *2001*."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ See Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, and Yaeger, "Toward a Female Sublime," 190-212.

¹³¹ Quoted in Norden, "Playboy Interview," 47.

¹³² Sontag, "Against Interpretation," 14.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁴ Chion, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, vi. Roelof Overmeer considers *Eyes Wide Shut* a "rethinking" of *2001*, dubbing it "Kubrick's last odyssey." (Overmeer, "Filming/Seeing *Eyes Wide Shut*," 73).

III. The Erotics of Authorship

Like *2001*, *Eyes Wide Shut* initiates an erotic relation with its audience. *Eyes Wide Shut* boasts its fair share of corridors, several of which are figured as intermedial spaces. Decked with vibrant, post-Impressionistic still lifes, landscapes, and animal portraits, Bill and Alice's entrance hall appears in the film's first scene, assuring us that we have entered the Kubrickian world. Near the end of the film, a dejected Bill, fresh from inspecting Amanda's corpse, proceeds down a hospital hallway decorated with brightly hued nonobjective paintings, a visual allusion to *2001*'s Stargate sequence. In *2001*, Kubrick abjects the female body from the realm of sublime erotic experience.¹³⁵ In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the formal abstraction *2001* morphs into seductive bodies. The eroticized female figure re-emerges with a vengeance. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, a film rife with allusions to *2001*, Kubrick abandons the erotic dialectic of the beautiful and the sublime, and instead opts to associate fin-de-siècle Vienna with another erotic category: the uncanny.

While Alice is arguably the most fully realized female character in Kubrick's *oeuvre*,¹³⁶ her role is marginal compared with Bill's, particularly in the final two-thirds of the film in which she appears only intermittently. But the reduction of Kidman's role abets the film's seductive strategy. Kidman's performance, which has been widely praised as more skilled than Cruise's, is so magnetic that reviewers reported eagerly anticipating Alice's return whenever she was off screen. From the first frame to the last, Kubrick aligns his auteurist style with the figure of the seductive woman, a cinematic variation on

¹³⁵ White, "Kubrick's Obscene Shadows," 139.

¹³⁶ Whitehouse, "Eyes Without a Face"; Nelson, *Kubrick*, 265; Rice, *Kubrick's Hope*, 197.

the Klimtian conception of “the world in female form.”¹³⁷ In the film’s iconic opening shot, the tension between the dramatic churning of Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Jazz Suite Waltz No. 2* (1938) and the abrupt revelation of Alice’s slender nude body flanked by fluted columns recalls the fusion of classical and baroque modes of representation that dominated Viennese art at the *fin de siècle* [Fig. 93]. Just as Kubrick uses black screens to control his peep show, Alice uses her black gown to regulate our voyeurism of her nude body. Improvised under Kubrick’s encouragement, Kidman’s decadent gesture functions as a *mise-en-abyme* of Kubrick’s auteurist strategies.¹³⁸ The metaphor of disrobing extends from visual style to narrative structure, as *Eyes Wide Shut* cedes the phallic thrust of classical narrative, in which one action begets another, to a distended unfolding, an opening up, a revelation, a striptease.¹³⁹ Alternately boldly confrontational and teasingly sinuous, Shostakovich’s waltz reflects Alice’s self-presentation, a promise of Dionysian absorption delineated by a sharp Apollonian edge.

¹³⁷ Fliedl, *Gustav Klimt*, 201-07. Kolker and Abrams suggest that because Pollack is a fellow Jewish director, Ziegler serves as a “stand-in” for Kubrick, “a patriarchal voice of reason and control.” (Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 178). I contend that by aligning his film style with the women in his film, Kubrick subverts this homosocial association. All of Kubrick’s films are hard on men, but at the same time they all work to broadcast a traditionally masculine mode of artistic genius. With its complicated authorial identifications, *Eyes Wide Shut* is Kubrick’s attempt at autocritique, as well as a disavowal of the inherent masculinism of post-Romantic genius.

¹³⁸ My argument that Kubrick’s aligns his style with female bodies counters a cluster of articles that insist that the film figures Kidman’s body as grotesque, castrating, and irredeemably “othered.” See Jordan and Halaydyn, “Carnavalesque and Grotesque Bodies in *Eyes Wide Shut*,” 185, and Dovey, “*Eyes Wide Shut*,” 172-78.

¹³⁹ Carolyn Geduld was already suspicious of Kubrick’s seductive strategies after the release of *2001*, writing, “perhaps we should at least briefly touch upon the ethics of a filmmaker like Kubrick, who deliberately uses the frosty logic of film technique to manipulate and control us, his audience, at our deepest and most vulnerable fiber of being. While we are being seduced by a cleverly camouflaged fantasy or by philosophical content or even by a breathtaking vision of the future, we should wonder if we are being subtly altered by what appears, despotically, on the screen.” (Geduld, *Film Guide to 2001: A Space Odyssey*, 72).

In his earlier films, Kubrick had managed to contain the explosive physicality of actors like George C. Scott, Peter Sellers, and Jack Nicholson with steady, controlled camera movement. But when faced with Kidman's infectious abandon, he relents. In the pot-smoking scene, when Bill's treacherous underestimation of female desire propels Alice into a fit of laughter, Kubrick cheerfully relinquishes his signature rigidity. His camera rapidly darts and swerves, attentively reframing Kidman's jagged movements as her body erratically contracts and expands. Recalling the opening shot of Ophüls's *Madame de...* (1953), which dutifully tracks Louise's (Danielle Darrieux) right hand as she scours her wardrobe for objects to pawn, in his cinematic *pas de deux* with Kidman, Kubrick happily follows her lead. Far from a captive of magisterial vision, or a passive object of voyeuristic contemplation, Kidman's performance asserts its agency in refashioning the Kubrickian aesthetic. In 1967, Andrew Sarris declared that "the difference between Kubrick and Ophüls is that Kubrick makes the players follow the camera and Ophüls makes the camera follow the players."¹⁴⁰ Kidman causes Kubrick to violate this tendency. When Alice "desperately" charges toward the bathroom at Ziegler's party, swiftly downing a glass of champagne en route, she almost seems to push the camera backward as it bobs to stay on balance. In contrast, even when Bill charges at the camera, he remains steadily framed. For instance, in a moment of high frustration after imagining Alice making love to the naval officer, Bill briskly traverses a Greenwich Village sidewalk while violently slapping his gloved hands. But it is clear from the patent artificiality of the shot, executed with Cruise on a treadmill in front of a 35mm rear

¹⁴⁰ Sarris, "Max Ophüls," 354.

projection, that the Kubrickian world has fixed Bill rigidly in place. Even when the camera “follows” Bill from behind, his movements appear to be equally determined by the *mise-en-scène*. He seems less trailed than stalked. In addition to camera movement, Kubrick occasionally delegates other authorial duties to Kidman, namely control of lighting, rhythm, and sound. When Alice retreats to the bathroom to retrieve a bag of pot and a package of rolling papers from a Band-Aid tin, the shot is framed so that the medicine cabinet occupies the majority of the frame, enabling Kidman to fully determine what we see and hear as she opens and closes the mirrored door [Fig. 94]. Ending the shot with a deadpan gaze over sunken spectacles, Alice’s resemblance to Kubrick drives the point home [Fig. 95].¹⁴¹

Parallels between Kidman’s Alice and *Bad Timing*’s heroine Milena Flaherty (Theresa Russell) abound. At turns flirtatious and confrontational, both women have an affinity for the intoxicants of Expressionist painting, cigarettes, alcohol, and sex. While Milena’s vibrant wardrobe survives in Domino’s (Vinessa Shaw) bright mauve minidress and zigzagged furs, for Alice, costume designer Marit Allen—who worked on both films—adopted a more muted palette. While Bob Mielke insists that Kubrick makes Kidman into a Klimtian woman by bathing her in golden light,¹⁴² in fact, Kubrick’s representation of Kidman owes more to Schiele than to Klimt. As in Schiele’s drawings and paintings, Kidman is frequently shown in casual, contorted poses, in various states of undress.

¹⁴¹ Audiences registered this resemblance early on. Writing in 2004, Dennis Bingham reported that “one Kubrick Web site went so far as to suggest that Kidman, in shots in which she peers over the top of her glasses, comes to resemble the director, who is shown in a nearly identical pose in a portrait released by Warner Bros.” (Bingham, “Kidman, Cruise, and Kubrick,” 272).

¹⁴² Mielke, “Stanley Kubrick at the Fin de Siècle.”

Unlike the regal Jewish matriarchs who populated Klimt's Golden Phase canvases, Kidman's clothing never blends into the decor—it is always crisply outlined. Her color palette is also Schielean—blacks, whites, and neutrals, with the occasional burst of pastel. With characters who typically oscillate between affectless and hysterical, Kubrick's films seem to have little affinity with the psychological nuances of Schiele's portraiture. But Schiele's late work, which subordinated emotional content to an increasingly objective formal rigor¹⁴³ provide a template for Kubrick's representation of Alice. Casually dressed with her hair tied up, Kidman resembles Schiele's final portraits of his wife Edith Harms. Allen, too, would have been familiar with Schiele's paintings from her work on *Bad Timing*.

Throughout the film, Kubrick deploys eroticized female bodies to align his visual style with *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics, incarnating the metaphors of the social masquerade and the Secessionist trope of *Nuda Veritas* through the exposed flesh of Amanda and her fellow escorts [Figs. 96-97]. Kubrick not only associates the seductive female body with the film's thematics, but also with his representation of film space. When Milich (Rade Serbedzija) confronts his pubescent daughter (Leelee Sobieski) during Bill's nocturnal visit to Rainbow Fashions, she whispers the Sacher-Masochian line "You should have a cloak lined with ermine" into Bill's ear, cracks a knowing smile, and proceeds languidly down the costume corridor [Fig. 98]. This unusual cinematic configuration—a camera tracking slowly forward while facing a figure walking slowly backward—crystalizes Kubrick's seductive style. The shot inverts the motion of our first glimpse of Bill, who

¹⁴³ Comini, *Egon Schiele's Portraits*, 155.

strides toward the camera as it tracks out of his dressing room.¹⁴⁴ As the narrative progresses, Kubrick undermines Bill's phallicism—his desire to thrust the film's narrative forward—while also aligning his filmmaking practice with the backward march of Milich's daughter, who leads us into an uncanny space, brimming with visual references to the mannequins of *Killer's Kiss* (1955) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). The recurrence of Kubrick's stylistic signatures throughout his filmography—striking one-point-perspective compositions, hypnotic tracking shots, figure-bleaching light sources, and foregrounded musical scores—generate a film world that spans genres, periods, and locations. Despite a rotating crew of screenwriters, editors, cinematographers, and production designers, the uncanny consistency of Kubrick's visual style obtains across his films. As Mario Falsetto claims, “viewers always know when they are watching a Kubrick film.”¹⁴⁵ Drawing on the largest reservoir of Kubrickian tropes, *Eyes Wide Shut* is his most uncanny film.¹⁴⁶

Although the Kubrickian uncanny is largely an effect of auto-citation negotiated through filmic space and time,¹⁴⁷ in *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick also deploys a more traditional figure of the Freudian uncanny: the Romantic trope of the *Doppelgänger*. Doubles abound in *Eyes Wide Shut*, including Bill and his former classmate Nick, decked out in contrasting black and white tuxedos signifying their divergent professional paths;

¹⁴⁴ Dargis, “Peep Show.”

¹⁴⁵ Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick*, 186.

¹⁴⁶ David Hughes supplies a comprehensive catalogue of *Eyes Wide Shut*'s intra-authorial citations in *The Complete Kubrick*, 259. Abrams calls the film “a palimpsest of Kubrick's previous works.” (Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick*, 245).

¹⁴⁷ See Pezzota, *Stanley Kubrick*, 128-46; Prammagione, *Making Time in Stanley Kubrick's Barry Lyndon*, 141-74; and Abrams and Hunter, “Kubrick and Psychoanalysis,” 277-80.

Bill and his look-alike Carl (Thomas Gibson), photographed in near-identical *Rückenfigur* tracking shots; and Alice and Milich's equally pale, equally svelte daughter, both clad in white lingerie. Even Kubrick has been compared to Bill (in the 1960s, Kubrick was also a denizen of the Upper West Side) and to Ziegler (Pollack was another celebrated Jewish director).¹⁴⁸ In the orgy scene, the figure of the double splinters into multiplicity as the masks of cloaked men and naked women negate their individual identities. The Pinewood sets themselves serve as a double for New York, which is itself a *Doppelgänger* of Vienna. But perhaps we find the most subtle and instructive doubling in the unlikely couple of Bill and Amanda. By volunteering to sacrifice her life to save Bill's, Amanda assumes the role of the double-as-substitute described by the Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Rank. Rank argues that the modern motif of the double descends from an ancient desire for immortality. In Romantic literature, the double both assures the hero of his immortality and threateningly announces his death.¹⁴⁹ By taking Bill's place at the disposal of the secret society, Amanda extends Bill's life while also serving as a *memento mori*. Amanda's role as *Doppelgänger* takes on Klimtian resonances in the morgue scene. Laid out on a metal table, the rigid symmetry of Amanda's body and her long red hair recall Klimt's painting of *Nuda Veritas* (1899) and its corresponding drawing featured in an 1898 issue of *Ver Sacrum*, the official publication of the Vienna Secession. Inverting the *vanitas* motif, common in German Renaissance painting, of a maiden inspecting herself in a mirror, Klimt's heroine turns her mirror upon the viewer,

¹⁴⁸ Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick*, 244.

¹⁴⁹ Rank, *The Double*, 73.

amplifying her assertive gaze. Beholding Amanda's corpse, Bill sees what could have been his fate. Amanda's cautionary words, "Because it could cost me my life, and possibly yours," ring through Bill's head, just as Alice's description of her erotic dream haunted Bill earlier that evening. Whereas Schnitzler lingers on Fridolin's emotionally charged, unspoken thoughts, Kubrick provides only fleeting glimpses of Bill's interior life, and these instances are dominated by women's voices and women's desires. In *Traumnovelle*, Schnitzler describes Fridolin's encounter with the dead body of the Baroness Dubieski as eliciting a "shudder" (*wie er nun erst erschauernd wußte*) because he realizes that he had been projecting Albertine's face onto the Baroness's body.¹⁵⁰ In this passage, Schnitzler shows the operations of the uncanny as they unfold in time. Bill shudders because he is jolted into awareness of the limitations of his consciousness. He realizes that he has conflated his wife with the Baroness, and the unexpected confrontation of difference has a chilling effect. By introducing a maskless Amanda to Bill early in the film, Kubrick avoids the Schnitzlerian problem of facial recognition, instead locating the triangular uncanny relation—Amanda-Bill-Alice—in the remembered female voice. If Amanda and, by association, Alice, have assured Bill of any semblance of immortality, it is by expanding the zone of his understanding and identification to the reality of female desire, agency, and victimhood.

Acknowledging that Kubrick was an enthusiastic reader of Freud's seminal essay "The Uncanny" (1919), Peucker demonstrates that Kubrick registered the corporeal

¹⁵⁰ Schnitzler, *Dream Novel*, 90.

essence of the Freudian *Unheimlich*—namely, its link to the maternal body.¹⁵¹ In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick once again links the female body to the uncanny in order to defamiliarize the genre of the domestic melodrama, and woman's place in it. Despite his feminization of the film's seductive mise-en-scène and its masochistic narrative pacing, Kubrick inverts the gender dynamics of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Madame de...*, the Ophüls melodramas that most directly influenced his film. Kubrick places Bill in the structural position traditionally occupied by the heroine in classical melodrama. When the consummation of his adulterous desires are not thwarted by chance, he curbs them in order to preserve the integrity of his nuclear family unit. Further, his moral will to uncover the truth behind Nick's mysterious departure and Amanda's untimely death is obstructed by incommensurable social forces. His illuminating, fatalistic *tête-à-tête* with Ziegler recapitulates the socioeconomic origins of the melodramatic genre: the eighteenth-century conflict between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.¹⁵² Although largely devoid of heightened affect—throughout the film, Bill alternates between feeling confident, curious, frustrated, and nonplussed—upon his final return home, his stoicism dissolves into a pool of tears as he takes refuge in Alice's maternal embrace. True to form, Kubrick treats Bill's outpouring of emotion with irony rather than sincerity, drowning the pathos in a flood of Expressionist blue light. (Having worked with Douglas Sirk's cinematographer, Russell Metty, and his art director, Alexander Golitzen, on *Spartacus* (1960), Kubrick may have had Sirk's melodrama staple *All That Heaven*

¹⁵¹ Peucker, *The Material Image*, 108; Freud, "The Uncanny," 245.

¹⁵² Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," 45-47; Szondi, "*Tableau and Coup de Théâtre*," 323-43.

Allows (1955) in mind, another film that ironizes outpourings of emotion by suffusing domestic interiors with eerie, intense colors.) A sharp edit jumps to a confrontational image of Alice, raw from crying, in the aftermath of Bill's confession. Denying us the melodramatic satisfaction of witnessing his heroine's emotional release, Kubrick preserves Alice's armor of mystery. Kubrick extends the privilege of opacity to all of the film's women. Traditionally, the true melodramatic victim of the film would be the doomed fallen woman Amanda, but we never see her face register emotion. She always wears a mask, so to speak, whether it's her blank expression during her overdose, her Venetian mask at the Somerton orgy, or her death mask in the morgue. Her sacrifice is too ritualized to fit into the post-Enlightenment paradigm of melodramatic victimhood, where affective legibility is *sine qua non*.

Aside from her emotional opacity, Alice's covert but unrepentant narcissism subverts the melodramatic archetype of the self-denying mother. In the pot-smoking scene, Alice twice defies the stereotype of the empathic woman. Midway through the scene, she confesses that her attraction to the naval officer was so intense that for only one night of pleasure, she would have given up "everything": her husband, her daughter, her "whole fucking future." She fails to act on her desire not out of a commitment to her family, but for lack of opportunity: he checks out of the hotel before she can pursue him. Although Alice frames her confession as proof that women's erotic desires can overpower their need for "security and commitment and whatever-the-fuck else," she in fact makes a second, socially taboo point: that her own sexual desire can overpower her maternal instincts. Later in the scene, when her monologue is interrupted by a phone call

announcing Lou Nathanson's (Kevin Connealy) death, Alice refuses to muster even the semblance of compassion. Locked into her own narcissism, her pouty exhalation and impassive stare indicate annoyance rather than sympathy.

Kubrick reinforces Alice's narcissism through a pair of visual references to Schiele's drawing *Nude Model before a Mirror* (1910) [Fig. 99]. Upon their return from Ziegler's ball, Alice admires the reflection of her nude body in a large bedroom mirror [Fig. 100]. Once Bill approaches and embraces her, she returns her gaze to the mirror. Her thoughts in this moment are ambiguous. Though some critics suggest that she is fantasizing about her missed opportunity to make love to Sandor Svazost (Sky Dumont) among Ziegler's collection of Renaissance bronzes, the title of Chris Isaak's song "Baby Did a Bad, Bad Thing" (1995) suggests that Alice revels in having had the upper hand: not only did she match his Old World cultural capital note for note (Sandor: "Did you ever read the Latin poet Ovid on the art of love?" Alice: "Didn't he wind up all by himself, crying his eyes out in some place with a very bad climate?"), but she walked away from the flirtation resisting his charms and leaving him wanting more. In the following montage of the Harford's daily routine, we glimpse Alice's calve-length black socks as the camera tilts up her otherwise nude body, a graphic detail similar to the two-toned stockings worn by Schiele's model, also dark up to her calves. The sinuous camera movement coupled with the shallow focus of the shot emphasize the crisp linearity of Alice's figure, a key quality of Schiele's minimalist, radically non-volumetric drawing.

The daily routine montage provides exemplifies melodrama's key aesthetic strategy: the siphoning off of excess. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith explains, "undischarged

emotion which cannot be accommodated within the action ... is traditionally expressed in the music and, in the case of film, in certain elements of the *mise-en-scène*,” adding that “music and *mise-en-scène* do not just heighten the emotionality of an element of the action; to some extent they substitute for it.”¹⁵³ The contrast between the heavy romance of Shostakovich’s “jazz-waltz” and the banality of Bill and Alice going through the motions of their day has struck some critics as coolly ironic. Alternatively, the dissonance between sound and image can be read as an expression of the repressed: Shostakovich’s waltz signifies a fusion of the erotic and the aesthetic which operate as the unconscious of the ethics of daily life. Throughout the film, Bill and Alice are revealed to be motivated more by the erotic than the ethical. At Ziegler’s ball, Bill uses his honorable occupation as a doctor to bolster his erotic appeal. At the dinner table, Alice casts a desiring eye on Bill as she carries out the role of the good mother, assisting Helena (Madison Eginton) with her math homework. The daily routine montage—with its glimpses, however apparently desexualized, of nude bodies—crystallizes the Freudian-Schnitzlerian notion of social behavior as a performative denial of deeper sexual impulses. The montage finds its corollary in the Somerton orgy scene. With its hyper-formalized organization of the group—from the required uniform of cloak and Venetian mask, to the arrangement of women in a circle, to their choreographed striptease, timed to the rhythm of a tapping scepter—and Ziegler’s revelation that the disguised guests comprise members of the power elite, the scene suggests that what we may take to be an increasingly secularizing, informal, egalitarian society remains undergirded—if not outright determined—by

¹⁵³ Nowell-Smith, “Minnelli and Melodrama,” 272.

residual modes of erotic, aestheticized, semi-religious ritual. The scene enjoins its overt Mediterranean references—its Venetian masks and Moorish architecture—to a more subtle Mitteleuropean one. Inspired by Helmut Newton’s contemporary fashion photography,¹⁵⁴ the stiletto, g-string, and choker-clad sex workers who encircle the red cloaked ritual leader (Leon Vitali) recall Klimt and Schiele’s erotic models. The scene draws an analogy between contemporary fashion photography and *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics, both of which revel in the image of the confrontational, self-possessed woman, adorned with nothing but a few fetishistic accoutrements.

The final scene is part assertion, part surrender of authorial control. By constructing the scene in shot-reverse shot—the signifier *par excellence* of traditional film grammar—Kubrick sets up a deliciously perverse contrast between classical Hollywood decorum and New Hollywood vulgarity.¹⁵⁵ Miriam Jordan and Julian Jason Haladyn insist that Alice’s final utterance—“fuck”—“represents the complete antithesis of our initial glimpse of her classically framed body in the opening shot.”¹⁵⁶ I disagree. By allowing Alice to dominate the first image, and to have the last word—“fuck”—Kubrick lets Alice’s Apollonian resolve burn through the murky Dionysianism of sexual compulsion. By displaying Alice’s ability to confidently harness and concentrate erotic energy into a curt, forcible declaration, Kubrick passes the baton to a worthy successor: just as Kubrick’s signature frisson of “cold image” and “hot affect”¹⁵⁷ would leave an

¹⁵⁴ SK/7/2/22: Oversized Materials about Prop Research and Set Plans.

¹⁵⁵ García Mainar, *Narrative and Stylistic Patterns*, 15; Ciment, *Kubrick*, 266; Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*, 192.

¹⁵⁶ Jordan and Haladyn, “Carnavalesque and Grotesque Bodies in *Eyes Wide Shut*,” 195.

¹⁵⁷ Peucker, *The Material Image*, 131.

indelible mark on the modernist melodramas of Haneke and Paul Thomas Anderson, Kidman would use her own global star power and versatile acting skill to enliven two decades of projects that re-envisioned the “woman’s film.”¹⁵⁸ Whereas Schnitzler’s novella ends with the “gay laughter” (*hellen Kinderlachen*) of Fridolin and Albertine’s daughter,¹⁵⁹ Kubrick abjects the Helena—both visually and aurally—from the film’s final shot. As Alice utters her final declaration and Shostakovich’s waltz reprises over the end credits, *Eyes Wide Shut* returns to its beginning, enacting the narcissistic sex drive that Lee Edelman would soon champion as a “queer” antithesis to the social imperative toward reproductive futurity embodied by the figure of the child.¹⁶⁰ In the end, Alice asserts her status as a Klimtian woman—both object of desire and desiring subject, both focus and manipulator of *mise-en-scène*, both nurturant mother and emasculating *femme fatale*.

In the critical literature, Carolyn Geduld’s description of Kubrick’s work as “a cinema of rigidly controlled excess”¹⁶¹ remains unmatched. Geduld’s formulation captures how thoroughly the ineluctable Nietzschean dialectic of the Apollonian and the Dionysian pervades Kubrick’s films at every level: narrative, stylistic, philosophical.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Since *Eyes Wide Shut*’s release in July of 1999, numerous films starring Kidman have deconstructed traditional “woman’s film” themes of desire, professional life, motherhood, and the reaction to male sexual violence, notably *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *The Hours* (2002), *Dogville* (2003), *The Stepford Wives* (2004), *Rabbit Hole* (2010), *Stoker* (2013), *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017), *Being the Ricardos* (2021), and the miniseries *Big Little Lies* (2017-2019).

¹⁵⁹ Schnitzler, *Dream Story*, 99.

¹⁶⁰ Edelman, *No Future*.

¹⁶¹ Geduld, *Film Guide to 2001: A Space Odyssey*, 10.

¹⁶² Kubrick would likely have encountered Nietzsche’s discussion of the Apollonian and Dionysian cultural forces at least twice, first through a direct reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) while auditing one of Lionel Trilling’s courses at Columbia in the early 1950s (Cocks, *The Wolf at the Door*, 64-65), and again in Karen Horney’s *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, 271 (SK/17/2/5: Research Books).

Strauss's waltz itself exposes the fragile boundary between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, at turns swelling, twirling, flirting with dissolution, then reintroducing disciplining boundaries with staccato plucks of the string. Surely, this dialectic binds Kubrick's work to his *fin-de-siècle* Viennese forebears, Nietzsche-worshipping cultural luminaries whose ideological and aesthetic diversity yielded a fundamental modernist "opposition between expressive freedoms and rigorous constraints."¹⁶³ Kubrick's execution of this stylistic formula has seduced audiences for decades, spatializing and embodying the melodramatic unconscious, mobilizing the aesthetic to keep us in erotic thrall.

¹⁶³ Foster, "1900a," *Art since 1900*, 56.

EPILOGUE

The two decades following the release of *Eyes Wide Shut* yielded a spate of biopics of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese luminaries. On the whole, they are scarcely adventurous in terms of style or structure. In *Bride of the Wind* (2001)—which follows Alma Mahler (Sarah Wynter) through her marriages to Gustav Mahler (Jonathan Pryce), Walter Gropius (Simon Verhoeven), and Franz Werfel (Gregor Seberg), and her torrid affair with Oskar Kokoschka (Vincent Perez)—director Bruce Beresford indulges in the golden-hued stereotypes of turn-of-the-century Vienna while cautiously remaining this side of auteurist flamboyance. Though far less sun-drenched, David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* (2011)—a triple portrait of Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen), Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender), and Sabina Spielrein (Kiera Knightly)—is surprisingly tame compared with the psychological torment and body horror that characterizes his prior filmography. While it centers on an iconic modernist painting that was criticized for emphasizing materiality over representation¹ (Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* [1907]) Simon Curtis's *Woman in Gold* (2015), which follows the reclamation efforts of Bloch-Bauer's niece Maria Altman (Helen Mirren) and Arnold Schoenberg's grandson Randol (Ryan Reynolds), employs conventional prestige film editing and dialogue to condemn Austrian cooperation with the Nazis during the *Anschluss*. The glowing atmosphere of Dieter Berner's *Egon Schiele: Death and the Maiden* (2016) could not be further from the artist's own tortured aesthetic, and its self-conscious multiculturalism hardly redeems its unsettling apology for Schiele's pedophilia. The days of Ken Russel's

¹ Whitford, *Klimt*, 9.

outrageous *Mahler* (1974), Axel Corti's gritty *Young Dr. Freud* (1976), Herbert Vesely's unflinching *Egon Schiele* (1980), and Derek Jarman's postmodern *Wittgenstein* (1993) seem long gone.

But there are exceptions. Raúl Ruiz's *Klimt's* (2006) mixture of extravagant visual style and cerebral allusions to the modernist discourse of ornament has attracted the attention of art historians and film scholars alike.² Maria Schrader bookends *Stefan Zweig: Farewell to Europe* (2016) with tense, magisterial long takes that elevate the routinely pedestrian genre of the biopic into the art cinema firmament. But the most daring of these entries in the cinematic reconstruction of Vienna 1900 is Marvin Kren's outlandish miniseries *Freud* (2020). Poetic license does not begin to cover the anachronistic and speculative liberties taken with this heavily fabricated account of Freud's early forays into research on hysteria and hypnosis. Although it engages nominally with Freud's work,³ and is packed with iconic Viennese landmarks (St. Stephen's, *Schönbrunn*) and figures (Franz Joseph, Schnitzler), the atmosphere is pure David Lynch. Lurid production design, ritualistic violence, body horror abjection, subterranean locales, hallucinatory images, and even an eerie jazz score appropriate the stylistic hallmarks of Lynch's surreal brand of Freudian melodrama. Though less overt in his references to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, aside from Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, Lynch has forged his own version of the melodramatic unconscious. Whereas Ophüls, Cavani, Roeg, and Kubrick (whose *The Shining* [1980] was heavily influenced by

² See Stewart, "Filming Vienna 1900," 49-79, and Fischer, *Cinema by Design*, 193-202.

³ Each episode is named after a key psychoanalytic concept: hysteria, trauma, somnambulism, totem and taboo, desire, regression, catharsis, and suppression.

Lynch's *Eraserhead* [1977]) privilege the aesthetic and the erotic over the ethical, Lynch reverses this formulation. An ethically engaged filmmaker whose work seeks to expose the afflictions of modernity—media violence, atomic destruction, spiritual malnourishment—Lynch's films and television series are ambivalent about eros and consistently disrupt aesthetic pleasure in order to advance a critical position. It's no wonder his variant of "subversive melodrama" has been celebrated.⁴ But subversive style is just as ripe for appropriation as the original target of its parody. It's unlikely that *Freud* will ever equal *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017) in cultural impact or critical esteem. Yet, there is something profound about *Freud*'s shallowness. By cynically grafting Lynchian style onto a gratuitous, sensationalistic revision of Freud's biography, *Freud* raises a crucial question about Freud: perhaps the longevity of his ideas has less to do with their social utility than with their entertainment value. Perhaps some psychoanalytically inclined academics find his arguments more intriguing than persuasive. Perhaps the mind of the moralist pales beside the soul of the artist. Perhaps like Milena we lie down on that couch not in pursuit of what we need, but of what we want.

⁴ Loren and Metelmann, *Irritation of Life*, 107-40.

FIGURES

Figure 1: *Grand Hotel* (1932, dir. Edmund Goulding)

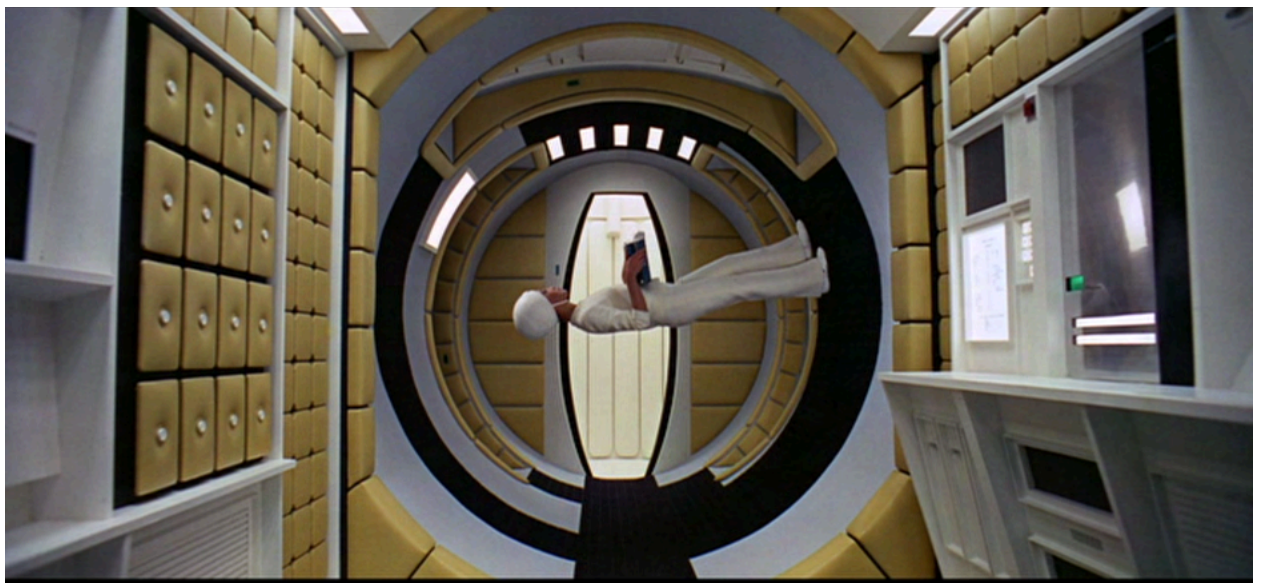


Figure 2: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 3: *Der Ring* (1896, dir. Lumière brothers)



Figure 4: *Vienne en tramway* (1906, dir. Pathé brothers)



Figure 5: *Before Sunrise* (1995, dir. Richard Linklater)



Figure 6: *La ronde* (1950, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 7: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 8: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 9: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 10: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 11: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 12: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 13: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 14: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 15: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 16: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 17: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 18: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 19: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 20: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 21: *Madame de...* (1953, dir. Max Ophüls)



Figure 22: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophüls)



Figure 23: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 24: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)



Figure 25: *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, dir. Max Ophuls)

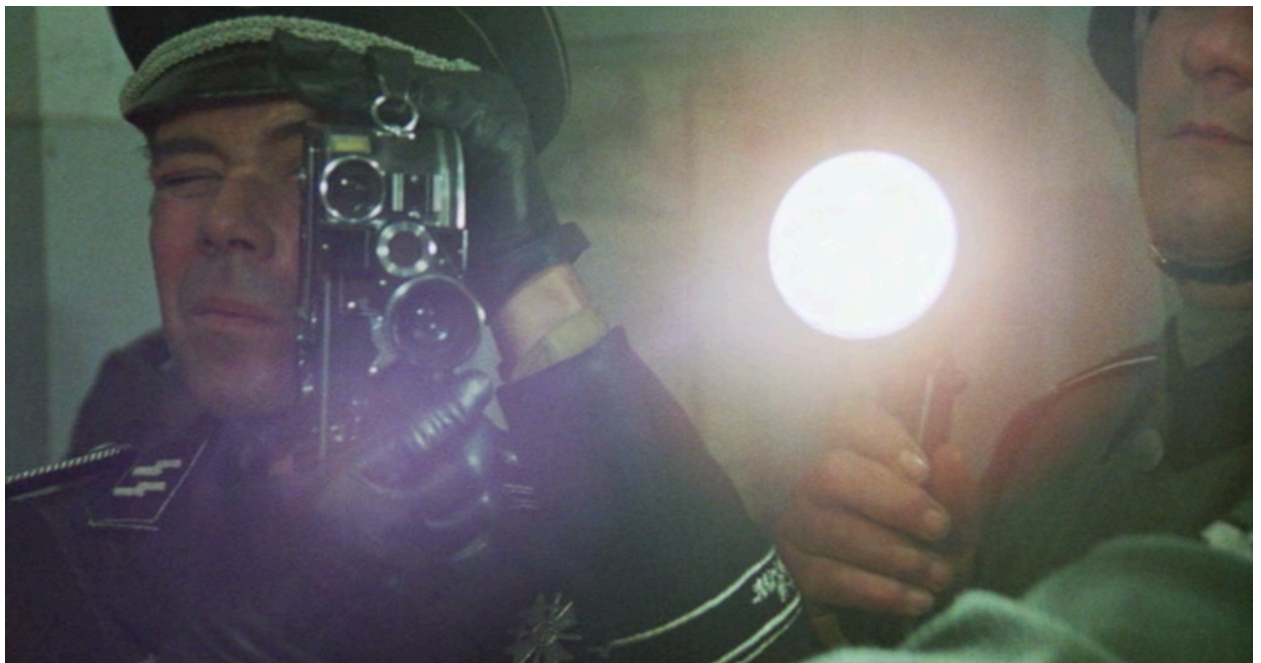


Figure 26: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 27: Peter Eisenman. *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005)



Figure 28: Installation detail of Marc Adelman's *Stelen (Columns)* (2007-2011) at the Jewish Museum, New York



Figure 29: *Films and Filming* (September 1973)

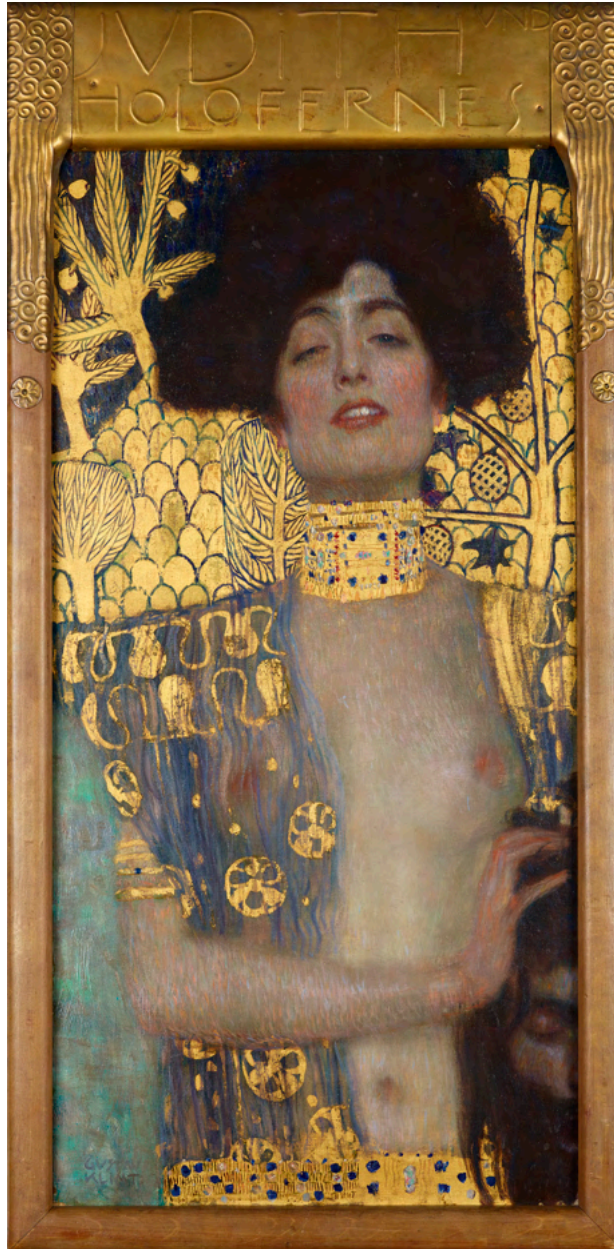


Figure 30: Gustav Klimt, *Judith I* (1901), Belvedere Museum, Vienna



Figure 31: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 32: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)

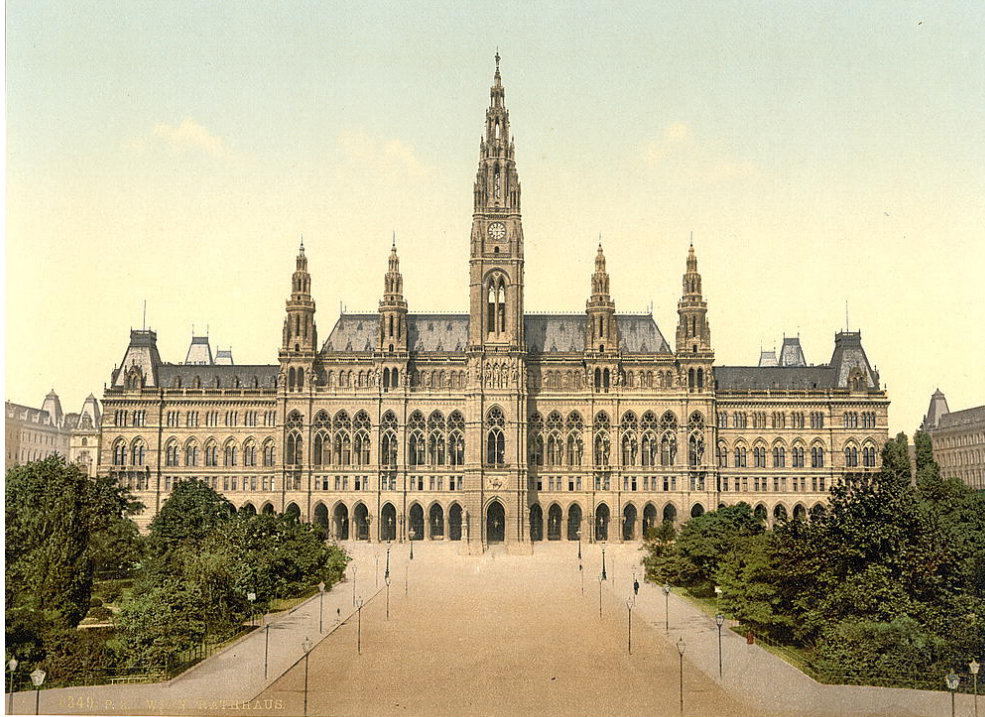


Figure 33: Friedrich Schmidt. *Rathaus* (1872-1873)



Figure 34: Gottfried Semper and Karl von Hasenauer. *Hofburgtheater* (1874-1888)



Figure 35: Heinrich von Ferstel. *University of Vienna* (1873-1884)



Figure 36: Theophil Hansen. *Parliament* (1874-1883)



Figure 37: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 38: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 39: Parmigianino. *Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c. 1523-1524), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Figure 40: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 41: Poster for the Joseph Maria Olbrich's *Secession House* (1898)



Figure 42: Adolf Loos. "Der Potemkin'sche Stadt." *Ver Sacrum* (July 1898)



Figure 43: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 44: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 45: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)

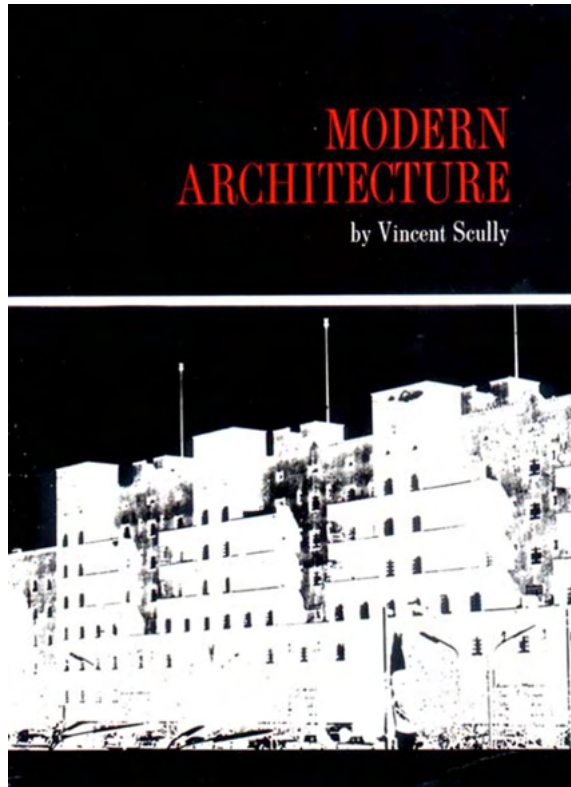


Figure 46: Vincent Scully. *Modern Architecture*, second edition (1974)



Figure 47: *The Night Porter* (1974, dir. Liliana Cavani)



Figure 48: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)

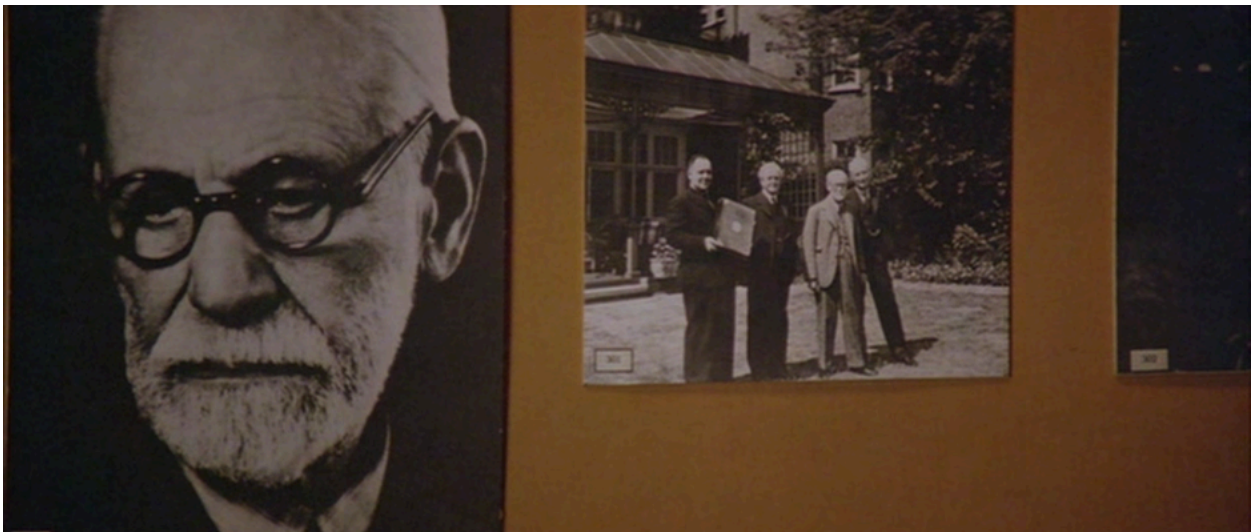


Figure 49: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 50: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 51: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 52: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 53: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 54: Egon Schiele. *Two Women Embracing* (1915), Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest



Figure 55: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 56: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 57: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 58: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 59: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 60: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 61: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 62: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 63: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 64: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 65: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 66: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 67: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 68: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 69: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 70: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 71: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 72: *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg)



Figure 73: Gustav Klimt, *Fulfillment* (detail), mosaic for dining room of the *Palais Stoclet* (executed by Leopold Forstner) (1906-1910)



Figure 74: Gustav Klimt, *Tree of Life* (detail), mosaic for dining room of the *Palais Stoclet* (executed by Leopold Forstner) (1906-1910)



Figure 75: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 76: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 77: Gustav Klimt, *Medicine* (1900-1907)



Figure 78: Gustav Klimt, *Fish Blood (Fischblut)* (1898)



Figure 79: *Eyes Wide Shut*, (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 80: Otto Wagner, *Hofpavillon* (1899)



Figure 81: Otto Wagner, *Kirche am Steinhof* (1904-1907)



Figure 82: Ferdinand Fellner, Hermann Helmer, Ludwig Baumann, *Vienna Konzerthaus*, (1911-1913)



Figure 83: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 84: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 85: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 86: Gustav Klimt, *Farm Garden with Sunflowers* (*Bauerngarten mit Sonnenblumen*) (1905-1906), Belvedere Museum, Vienna

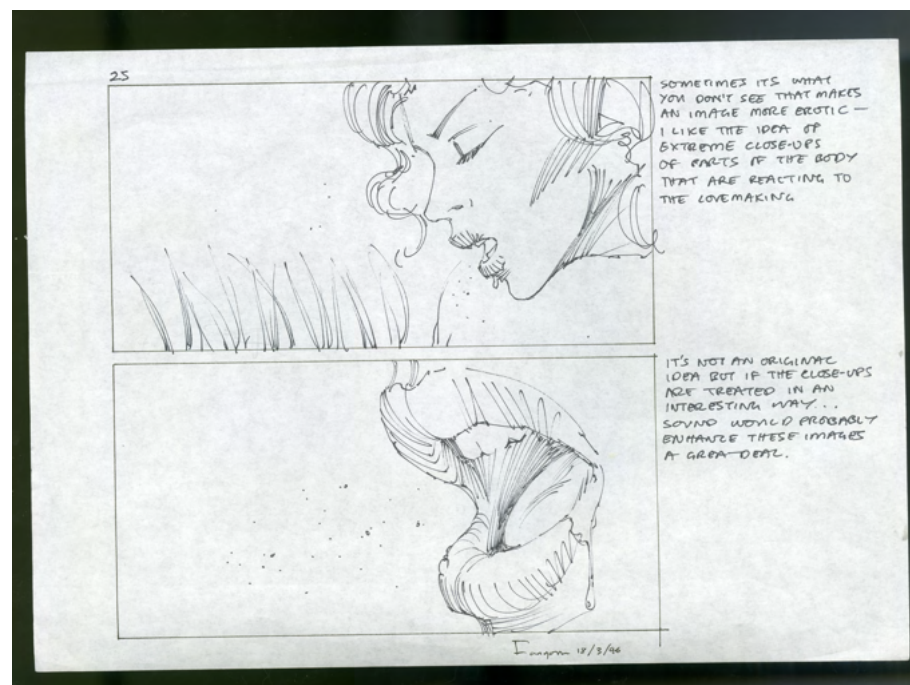


Figure 87: Chris Baker (Fangorn), storyboard for Alice's dream, 1996 [SK/17/2/10: Concept Artworks [Storyboards] - Alice's Dream]



Figure 88: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



MORGUE (revised position of body trays) 16 / 8 / 96
18mm from doorway

Figure 89: Computer generated artwork for morgue sequence, 1996 [SK/17/2/8/4: Pre-Production: Art Department: Set Building Plans (Blue Folders): 'Int.[erior] Morgue']



Figure 90: Photo of the Harfords' hallway, with orthogonal lines [SK/17/2/8/1:Pre-Production: Art Department: Set Building Plans (Blue Folders): 'Bill and Alice's Living/Dining Room']

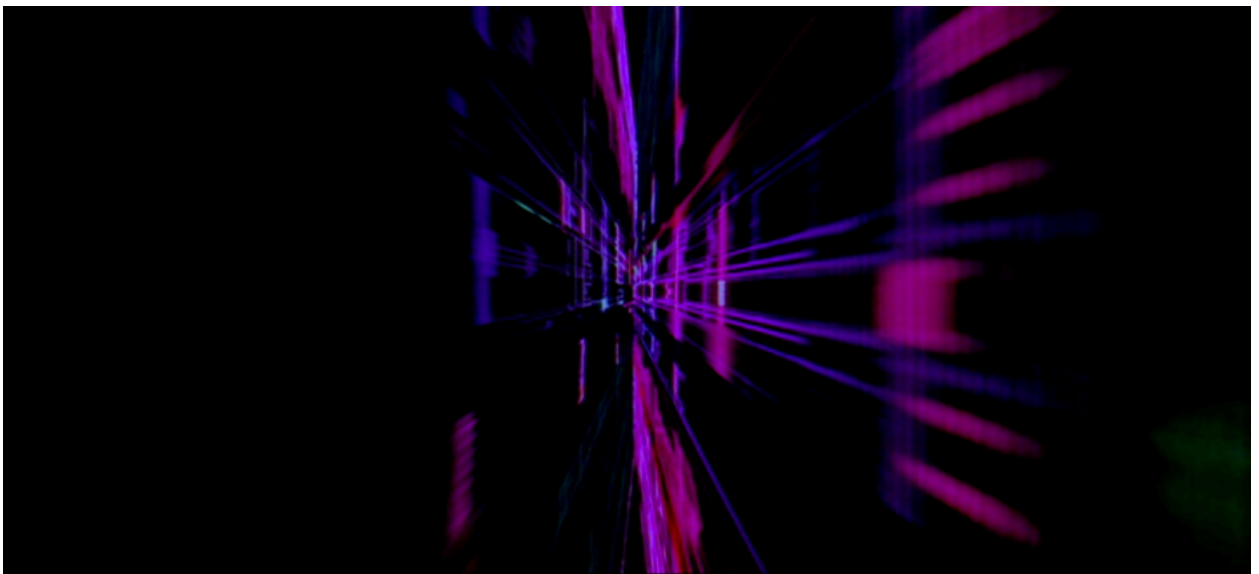


Figure 91: 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 92: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 93: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 94: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1999)



Figure 95: Publicity shot of Stanley Kubrick for *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999)

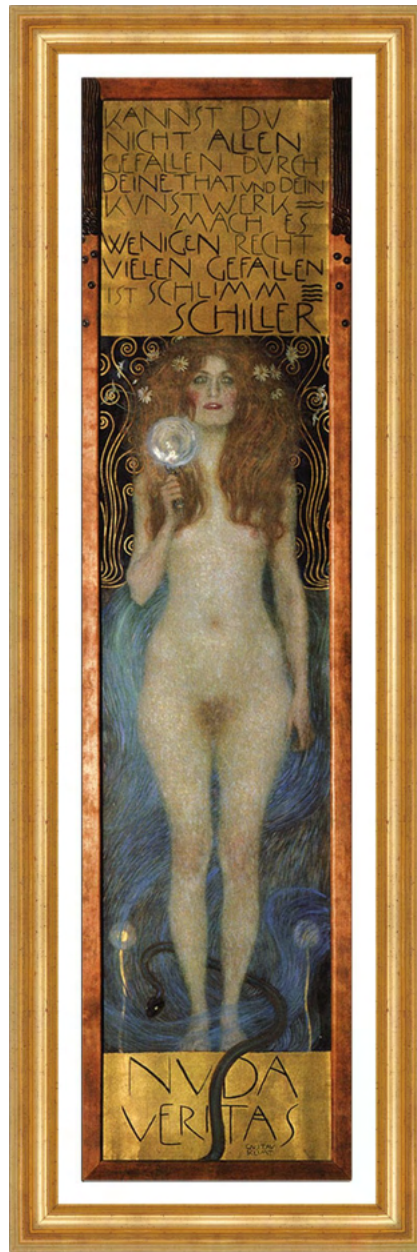


Figure 96: Gustav Klimt, *Nuda Veritas* (1899), Theatermuseum, Vienna



Figure 97: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 98: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)



Figure 99: Egon Schiele, *Nude Model Before a Mirror* (1910), Albertina Museum, Vienna)



Figure 100: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick)

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