Making Sense Through Our Senses:
The Embodied Reader in Arthur Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else and
Paul Czinner’s Filmic Adaptation

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INTRODUCTION

Western culture has a long tradition of trying to separate the mind and the body and prioritizing the knowledge that we derive through intellectual reasoning. Plato first laid out what we now call his “Theory of Forms” in the Socratic dialogue *Phaedo*, reducing all physical objects to copies of ideal forms which exist in an immaterial realm of their own, accessible only through rigorous mental work. These forms are universals, thus making the world both possible and intelligible. But not only idealists like Plato deny the body any epistemological capacity: dominant discourses in the Western tradition have largely neglected the body as such as a vehicle of knowledge, at least until pre-Romanticism. When it comes to aesthetics, we can see a similar hierarchy playing out in terms of the senses. Whereas Plato was highly skeptical of the body as a locus of cognition, Aristotle did allow for some epistemological capacity in our sense experience, developing a sense hierarchy with the distance senses—vision and hearing—as the ones most suitable for the acquisition of knowledge and aesthetic judgment. He thus set up a hierarchy of the senses that maintained its hold on Western philosophical and artistic thought until the twentieth century. There is a “sensory hierarchy that subtends Western philosophy, in which only the distance senses are vehicles of knowledge, and Western aesthetics, in which only vision and hearing can be vehicles of beauty” (Marks 2008: 123).
In a variety of fields, fin-de-siècle Viennese thought moved beyond pure reason as a vehicle of reliable knowledge, adding new value to formerly neglected realms of the human experience, namely the human psyche and sensory experience. Alois Riegl, the pioneering Viennese art historian of the late nineteenth century who was instrumental in establishing art history as an independent academic discipline, examined which of our senses have been primarily engaged in the visual arts over time. He traced the development of art history from art that emphasizes the physical tactility by occupying a single plane, encouraging interaction and an attention to texture, like Egyptian art, to figurative, perspectival art that allows for the illusion of space and three-dimensionality, thus encouraging an optical visuality as opposed to the haptic visuality of pre-Renaissance art. Through the illusion of space on a two-dimensional plane, perspective emphasized the distance between the observer and the artwork, thus prioritizing a visuality that distances itself from the observed object as the viewing subject situates itself at a remove.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period in which interiority and the human experience were thoroughly examined in many artistic and academic fields: the young discipline of psychoanalysis dug into depths of the human mind that had not been explored before; in physics and philosophy the positivism of the so-called Wiener Kreis around Ernst Mach put a new emphasis on the importance of sensory experience as the primary source of knowledge.¹ Part of the intellectual elite of fin-de-siècle Vienna, Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931) was familiar with all these new

developments and personally acquainted with many of their proponents. He was a physician like his father, and like Sigmund Freud he was greatly interested in the workings of the human mind. Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else (1924) is a novella about a young woman who is asked by her parents to beg an older man for money in order to pay for the father’s debts. It is written in the form of an interior monologue which abandons an independent observer who orders and evaluates events and instead assumes the perspective of the narrating self. The novella’s subject is the disintegration of cultural and social certainties and how this disintegration necessarily leads to a dissolution of the personal construct.

I will pay close attention to how the haptic and the visual merge to allow for both clear vision and a visceral Schwindelgefühl that adds a layer of sensuous cognition. The term “haptic” is derived from the Greek word ἁπτω (hápto) and its many meanings range from “I kindle, set on fire, fasten fire to” to “I fasten to, bind fast, join to” or “I cling to, hang on by, lay hold“ (1 Cor 7, “don’t hold on to a woman” is a prohibition of sexual intercourse, for instance). The Oxford English Dictionary defines haptic not only as “of the nature of, involving, or relating to the sense of touch, the perception of position and motion (proprioception), and other tactile and kinaesthetic sensations,” but also as “having a greater dependence on sensations of touch and kinaesthetic experiences than on sight, esp. as a means of psychological orientation.”²

It is the aspect of the haptic as a mediator between the distance senses of vision and hearing and the proximal sense of touch and visceral response that I will be most

interested in, especially the relationship between the kinesthetic experience and (psychological) orientation, being moved by sensation both literally and figuratively. As I will lay out, a sense of Schwindelgefühl is at the heart of the protagonist’s experience. The German term does not have an exact correspondence in English, but it refers to a sense of vertigo or dizziness—when our senses betray us and trick us into experiencing movement when there is none. Schwindel, as it happens, not only refers to this feeling of instability when the world seems off kilter, but it also means “swindle” or “fraud.” As we will see, in Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else it is the father’s act of swindling others that sets the events in motion and propels the story forward, throwing Else into a maelstrom of the conflicting forces of filial piety and a strong desire to defend herself and her individual freedom. In Fräulein Else Arthur Schnitzler puts under the microscope of his psychoanalytical gaze a society that is pathologically preoccupied with the surface, keeping up appearances at all costs, concealing that which is not golden, pretending it does not exist. As a physician who was interested in hypnosis as a tool to diagnose and treat psychological disorders, Schnitzler—who wrote a Traumtagebuch himself—was familiar with the latest insights and theories of the “Father of Psychoanalysis,” Sigmund Freud. Eros and thanatos, the two major drives of human existence, are also the drivers of the novella, and the theme of the oedipal is clearly at play in the text.

3 British neurologist Henry Charlton Bastian (1837-1915) coined the term in 1880, deriving it from Greek kinein “to move” + aisthesis “sensation”: “We may […] speak of a Sense of Movement, as a separate endowment. Or in one word, Kinaesthesia […] To speak of a ‘Kinaesthetic Centre’ will certainly be found more convenient than to speak of a ‘Sense of Movement Centre’.”

The Austro-Hungarian director Paul Czinner (1890–1972) adapted the text for his 1929 silent film *Fräulein Else* with his wife Elisabeth Bergner in the title role. He skillfully used cinematic tools to transform the written narrative into a cinematic text that is original yet retains both the central effect of *Schwindelgefühl* to illustrate the subject of the text, namely the disintegration of social, cultural, and thus personal certainties, and the haptic visuality and aurality of its predecessor. These factors make an embodied reader response approach that focuses on the engagement of the senses equally suitable.

Given the nature of the texts and the way the authors invite their respective audience to become part of the creative process through interpretation, the lens I will use in this paper to look at Arthur Schnitzler’s novella *Fräulein Else* and Paul Czinner’s film of the same name will be that of reader-response theory, or embodied reader-response, to be precise. Reader response theory holds that meaning does not reside in a text, but in the reader’s mind and that through the act of reading and interpreting the reader completes what the text puts forth, using the text as a canvas, putting the finishing touches on it with his or her own set of experiences and cultural baggage. According to Wolfgang Iser, it is the “implied reader” who actualizes the elements that are left to our imagination, filling in these “gaps of indeterminacy.” Iser emphasizes the importance of the act of the reading and the person of the reader to the text, as the term implied reader “incorporates both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process—which will vary historically from one age to another—and not to a typology of possible readers” (Iser 1974, xii).
Blending reader-response with phenomenology and embodied cognition, I will look at the ways in which the reader’s embodied self fills in said gaps by engaging with the many sensual opportunities offered throughout a text to create meaning. The body was long considered peripheral to understanding the nature of mind and cognition in philosophy of the mind and cognitive science, but phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl or Maurice Merleau-Ponty pulled the body back into the realm of epistemological faculty, insisting that an understanding of the body underpins the possibility of lived experience. Francisco Varela has taken up their ideas, arguing that “cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and [...] that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context” (172). Embodied cognitive science uses the following Embodiment Thesis as a working hypothesis: “Many features of cognition are embodied in that they are deeply dependent upon characteristics of the physical body of an agent, such that the agent’s beyond-the-brain body plays a significant causal role, or a physically constitutive role, in that agent’s cognitive processing” (Wilson).

As Karin Kukkonen points out in her essay on the “Embodied Reader’s Cascades of Cognition” (Kukkonen 2014: 367), an effective strategy in analyzing a literary text is to link an Iserian approach—examining that which is left unsaid, focusing on the gaps within the text to use our imagination and “supply what they omit” (Kukkonen, 370)—with “a mode of exploration of the world that is mediated by knowledge of what we call sensorimotor contingencies” (O’Regan and Noë, quoted by Kukkonen, 369). When we read we engage the very senses that are being written about: reading of fog prompts our
skin to feel the cool dampness on our skin, to smell the thick air of a November morning, and to see in our mind’s eye the veil that covers the landscape. Laura Marks argues that with a reevaluation of the proximal senses a new level of knowledge can be obtained, because they “operate at the literal border between the intimate and the communal. Knowledge and communication that makes use of them may lose in ‘objectivity’ but they gain in depth, trust, and sociality” (Marks 2008/2011, 247).

Schnitzler’s novella Fräulein Else, published in 1924 and set in the early years of the 20th century, is especially suitable for an embodied reader-response approach due to the fact that it is written in the form of the interior monologue. The interior monologue is a literary technique that presents a narrative as the direct presentation of a character’s thoughts. These can range from loosely related impressions and associations to more structured, elaborate passages that allow the reader to make sense of the larger context and the supposed intent of the speaker. The outside world enters the story through the eyes and ears of the narrator, and it is the reader’s task to create the bigger picture—that which is outside of the narrator. Interior monologue or stream of consciousness, as it is also called, was perhaps not an invention of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, but the spirit of the age certainly lent the technique a pressing timeliness.

In Fräulein Else narrator and protagonist coincide, and Else’s exhibitionist and narcissistic tendencies underscore the duality of seeing and being seen—she is at once viewing subject and viewed object. Else T. is on vacation with her aunt and cousin when she receives a letter from her mother, begging her to ask an elderly gentleman who is staying at the same hotel, the art dealer Herr von Dorsday, for a large sum of money. Else’s father had embezzled ward money and needed to repay immediately, or else he
would be imprisoned. Von Dorsday agrees to pay the fee under the condition that he see Else naked for fifteen minutes.

The whole premise of the plot’s climax—namely that Else should undress so that Herr von Dorsday could see her naked for a quarter hour and would then agree to pay the father’s debt—revolves around acts of seeing: Dorsday asks to see Else naked, but Else also sees the conditions of her existence clearly for the first time, realizing that there is no way out of this dilemma that would keep her integrity intact, as she has to choose between loyalty to her father (who doesn’t deserve it) and to herself (who doesn’t have the agency).

Hearing, too, is an important part of the narrative. For one, it features a musical meta-narrative that mirrors the plotline as in a fun house mirror, turning the romantic musical exchange between lovers in Schumann’s Carnaval into a skewed cat-and-mouse-game between two very unequal partners. Secondly, the outside world enters the story through Else’s aural and sensuous perception which is indicated by punctuation and formatting. The way in which our visual and aural senses and sense memories are engaged has a haptic quality, touches and moves the reader by eliciting a certain kind of instability and dizziness which I will refer to as Schwindelgefühl.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the ways in which an embodied reader-response approach can help us unpack hidden meaning in a text, be it literary or cinematic, by focusing on the sensuous aspects of the reader’s meaning-making. In my analysis of Arthur Schnitzler’s novella Fräulein Else in the first chapter and Paul Czinner’s filmic adaptation in the second, I would like to expand Marks’ notion of “haptic visuality” to a kind of seeing that elicits a visceral response, thereby breaking
down the distance between the viewing subject and the viewed object—which, in the case of the literary, self-narrating Else, is a cross of both of these positions. Laura Marks, a film scholar and theorist whose research focuses on intercultural perspectives on new media art and philosophical approaches to materiality and information culture, uses the term haptic visuality to examine how certain (video) images invite a sensory response rather than an intellectual one. Lack of focus, exaggerated exposure time or extreme close-up are techniques that blur images or make them hard to identify at first glance, and Marks argues that the way we make sense of them is by letting our sense memory do the investigative work. Intellectually, we may not be immediately able to identify what it is that we see, but our bodies know better. She takes the term from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who use it in reference to “smooth space, a space that must be moved through by constant reference to the immediate environment, as when navigating an expanse of snow or sand” (Marks 2002, xii). The “striated” space, on the other hand, is that which corresponds to the more distant sense of vision. I will employ the term haptic visuality slightly differently, using it to refer to ways in which both the literary and the filmic text engage the reader’s sense of vision in order to move her viscerally, eliciting the Schwindelgefühl that is at the core of Else’s experience.

The novella had been one of Arthur Schnitzler’s greatest successes throughout his entire career. It was first published in the notable German literary magazine Neue Rundschau in 1924, and by 1929 70,000 copies had been sold. Schnitzler was himself an avid moviegoer and had enjoyed the new medium since its inception, visiting the
kinematograph almost as often as the theater. Several of his works had already been adapted for the cinema, notably *Anatol* by Cecil B. DeMille in 1921 (*The Affairs of Anatol*), and *Der junge Medardus* in 1923, directed by the Austro-Hungarian Michael Kertész who would later go to Hollywood and make a name for himself as Michael Curtiz. Already in December of 1924 Arthur Schnitzler makes a note in his journal of having talked with the dramaturge and literary agent Franz Horch “über Frl. Else als Regieaufgabe” (quoted in Wolf, 85). The actress Elisabeth Bergner, one of the most-beloved young stage actresses in the German-speaking world at the time, was his ideal Else right from the start. Her delicate build and androgynous type matched the beauty ideal of the 1920s, and her intense acting elicited praise for her physical expressiveness, reviewers raving about her “Gliedersprache” (Herbert Ihering, *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, Nr. 114, 8 March 1929, quoted in Gandert, 183) and the “Melodie ihres Körperspiels” (ib.) of the “leuchtende Seelenschauspielerin” (Alfred Kerr, *Berliner Tageblatt*, Nr. 115, 8 March 1929, quoted in Gandert, 184). Film historian and critic Lotte Eisner describes Bergner as “[v]ibrant, sensitive, an actress of great nervous intellectuality […]. Up to the advent of Hitler, she embodied the spirit of an age which was ardent, anguished, intensely spiritual and still very close to the expansive ecstasy of the immediate post-war years” (Eisner, 197). One can see how Bergner and her ability to express mental states through her physicality would seem like a natural choice for young Else, particularly considering the adapted text and its form of the interior monologue. Czinner skillfully combined

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Bergner’s strengths with an eloquent camera to tell a devastating tale of betrayal and exploitation. Through specific artistic choices, such as superimpositions, fast cuts, or specific camera movement depending on the character, he elicits the Schwindelgefühl in the viewer and makes us understand Else’s ordeal on a visceral level: not just showing and telling, but making us feel what it means to be in her position.

So why then is the engagement of the senses so vital for our making sense of this particular story, and what is it about the Schwindelgefühl that imparts superior knowledge to the reader/viewer? Several factors play a role. Else is a young woman of nineteen years, and while there are passages in the text that show her as a truly insightful, observant, and well-educated young woman, she is caught up in her own world and cannot step outside of herself to analyze the full extent of her circumstances. But there is also another factor that may play a part: the implications of the bargain she is asked for are unspeakable, being sold off by her own parents (in the case of the novella—in the film the mother bears all responsibility) to pay for the father’s failures. Words alone necessarily fail to relate the extent of the tragedy, hence the need for additional means to describe it. The reader/viewer needs to embody Else’s dilemma in order to empathize with her. If we as viewers remain distant from the title character, Else’s reaction to Dorsday’s indecent proposal might be seen as excessive, after all she only needs to show herself unclothed for fifteen minutes. Both authors, Schnitzler and Czinner, deal with this in rather different ways: Schnitzler’s Else is exhibitionist and a bit of a narcissist, daydreaming about lying naked on marble steps, being seen by others and enjoying the prickling eroticism of the idea, but she is also an innocent young girl who only dreams of sexual encounters and is not actively pursuing them. Her distress is called forth not
merely by the nature of the demand—as she obviously enjoys at least the idea of showing herself as long as she is the one who decides about the when, where, and to whom—, but by the implications: As a daughter, Else should feel safe and protected by her parents, not used as a pawn to buy out the fraudulent father. By asking Else, if indirectly, to prostitute herself, they are pulling the figurative rug out from underneath her feet, leaving her shaken and unstable, *schwindelig*, as it were.

Siegfried Kracauer, journalist, cultural critic, and leading film theorist of the first half of the twentieth century, was adamant in his rejection of the film and bemoaned Czinner’s choice of using an (allegedly) independent camera instead of having the film be narrated from Else’s interior perspective. He criticizes the alleged loss of the female voice and Czinner’s focus on developing the background story to the extent that he has. I will argue in chapter two that Kracauer focuses on the surface of the plot without inspecting the film closely from a cinematographic point of view or—just as fruitful a way to engage with the film as an original text—letting himself be affected by it without preconceived notions of what it should be, based on its being an adaptation. As “knowing audiences” (Hutcheon 120) who are familiar with the adapted text, we need to forget our misgivings and our expectations of what an adaptation of a beloved written work needs to look like. Only then will we be able to let ourselves be moved by the film as an independent work of fiction.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “adaptation” refers to the “action or process of adapting one thing to fit with another, or suit specified conditions, esp. a new or changed environment.”5 Be the context biological or artistic, adaptation is always a

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process of change from one object to a slightly different one, initiated by a change of
environment and/or purpose. Colloquially, adaptation is understood in the context of
novel-to-film, but as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, the tradition of adapting stories
from one medium or discipline to another is a longstanding one: “The Victorians had a
habit of adapting just about everything—and in just about every possible direction; the
stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs, dances, and tableaux vivants
were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again” (xiii).
The evaluation of adaptations has moved from demanding a close rendering of the
original (considering a filmic adaptation successful only when it puts the literary world
on screen as close in content, dialogue, and character portrayal as possible, staying “true
to the original” in a very literal sense) to a more medium-dependent emphasis on whether
the relevant issues of the “original” text have been successfully transposed into the new
medium with its proper tools and possibilities. Hutcheon also makes the case for the
adaptation as an independent work in its own right that should not be judged at all in
relation to what she calls the “adapted text.” Adapting plot lines, whole narratives, or
even entire works is a creative, artistic work in its own right and should be judged as such
and along the categories that are used to evaluate the respective art form.

In Kracauer’s opinion, Czinner’s crucial mistake is this: “Zudem hat Czinner alles
getan, um die Bedingungen vergessen zu machen, unter denen Fräulein Else bei
Schnitzler steht und aus denen allein ihr Handeln begreiflich wird. Er zeigt sie nicht etwa
als ein Mädchen, dem das Gemisch von Unschuld und Reflexion zuzutrauen wäre,
sondern setzt sie mitten in die sportfrohe Nachkriegswelt hinein” (Kracauer writing under
the pseudonym „Raca“, Frankfurter Zeitung, 14 April 1929, quoted in Gandert, 189). In
the second chapter I will try and show that Kracauer’s criticism is largely unwarranted if we read the film closely. I will examine the many in ways in which Czinner did indeed explore the conditions that explain Else’s actions, albeit giving them a slightly different edge. It may be true that Czinner’s Else does not speak of her awakening sexuality to the extent that Schnitzler’s Else does—let us not forget it is a silent film and the tools to express a character’s thoughts and states must be expressed differently than in a literary text—, but I will show that sexuality and the concomitant confusion do play a vital role in the narrative. The on-screen version experiences similar struggles and at an equivalent intensity as her literary alter ego. The cinematography engages the viewer’s senses and thus elicits the same kind of Schwindelgefühl the reader experiences when reading the novella.

Cinema\(^6\) is in and of itself a suitable medium to excite all of our senses, a “sensation machine,” as Elizabeth Stephens calls it, “a technology for the stimulation and cultivation of all the senses” (529).\(^7\) When we enter the black box of the movie theatre we surrender to its magic. We expect to be thrilled or scared, stunned or excited, moved to tears of joy or sorrow—but moved in some fashion, in all our physicality. Surround

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\(^6\) My focus will be on the experience of the moviegoer. There are numerous ways to consume film nowadays, from TVs and home-projectors to computers and smartphones. Most of these alternatives are characterized by a certain arbitrariness: videos on YouTube play off one after the other, and the choice what follows is often left to an algorithm; the videos can be paused and resumed at a later point in time or abandoned entirely. I am more interested in the experience in the theatre, with its black box, fixed start and end times, assigned seats, and where the viewer is keenly aware that he might miss a vital detail if he left his seat.

\(^7\) While the latest technologies literally engage all five of our senses I will limit my examination to the way our sensual memory is engaged in an abstract fashion. For further reading on the latest technologies expanding the film-viewing experience corporeally, see Sobchack 2004.
sound envelops us, visual and sound effects grab us by the guts, and the soundtrack often enough tells us exactly what to feel and how to feel it. This is largely owed to the viewers’ training in cinematic conventions: “[E]ven our most immediate response to films is dependent on the way our senses are trained, as well as the viewing habits and the cinematic knowledge and memory that are ingrained in us” (Beugnet 2007, quoted in Stephens 2012, 531). Crosscutting can elicit goose bumps—imagine a switch from a close-up of a knife to a barely visible figure in the shade and an unsuspecting woman strolling down a quiet path.

We know how to connect the visual cues because we have learned to read cinema’s language. We “see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being,” and how we physically experience a film is “informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium” (Sobchack 63). If we have ever been to the colder regions of the world, we know how it feels to be out in a winter landscape, we know the sensation when the tip of the nose freezes and we are familiar with the smell of crisp fresh snow. When we see an on-screen image of a snow-covered landscape, we tap into our sensuous memory, remembering the dryness of the skin and the crunching sounds of footsteps. If we have ever been in a room full of smokers, we are familiar with the scent and the stinging in the eyes—and even if we haven’t, a resourceful director will still manage to convey the stuffy feeling by making the smoke just a little denser and the light just a little dimmer, the room feel a bit more cramped. “By paying attention to bodily and sensuous experience, we will find that it is to a large degree informed by culture. Perception is already informed by culture, and so even illegible images are
(cultural) perceptions, not raw sensations,” Laura Marks writes in her study of intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses (145).

In my thesis I will look at how the two media of literature and film can both be used successfully to engage their audience’s senses in order to steer the reader’s/viewer’s interpretation of the respective text and enable a cognitive level beyond rational comprehension: a bodily understanding. In the first chapter I will examine the ways in which Schnitzler uses the tools of the writer—language and typography—to enable a reader’s meaning-making on a visceral level: how does he influence our sensuous response in order to add to what we have perceived on an intellectual, strictly linguistic level?

As for the film, I will not be interested in whether it is on the surface a faithful replica of the novella in question, but in the medium-specific ways in which it engages the viewer’s visual, aural and haptic senses to convey the protagonist’s predicament. I will show that upon thorough inspection and analysis one must recognize that Czinner’s adaptation is indeed both original and faithful—albeit not to Schnitzler but to Else.
CHAPTER 1:

SCHWINDELGEFÜHL, THE EMBODIED READER, AND

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER’S FRÄULEIN ELSE

Else T. is vacationing in the Italian Alps with her aunt and cousin. An express letter arrives in which her mother begs Else to ask an elderly gentleman staying at the same hotel for a large sum of money in order to keep her father out of jail for embezzlement. The man agrees to paying the fee under the condition that he see Else naked for fifteen minutes. The better part of the text deals with Else’s reaction to the indecent proposal and her struggle with being a pawn in her parents’ hands—and in extension, those of society.

Such is the plotline of Arthur Schnitzler’s novella Fräulein Else, published in 1924 and set in the early years of the 20th century. What makes the text unique and especially suitable for an embodied reader-response approach as I will be employing is its form: Fräulein Else is an interior monologue, a self-narration of the title character through whose eyes and ears the reader perceives the story, presenting itself as practically unmediated. The narrative is made up of various different parts: stream of consciousness passages that relate Else’s thoughts as they go through her mind consisting of remembered and imagined incidents, remembered and imagined speech—both of herself and others—, and direct speech, also of herself and others. Typography gives the reader clues as to who is speaking or what the level of imagination is: quotation marks frame
spoken quotations, with italic font if spoken by others and normal font if spoken out loud
by Else herself. Em dashes often mark an exchange, a dialogue, but sometimes those
dashes also mean regular breaks in the flow of Else’s stream of thought.

Interior monologue or stream of consciousness, as it is also called, is a literary
technique that developed in the late nineteenth century in tandem with the rise of a deep
interest in human psychology. In Vienna, this new interest in the interior and in the
human experience manifested itself not only through the revolutionary concept of
psychoanalysis, but also in physics, where the new positivist philosophy of science and
the Viennese Circle around Ernst Mach insisted on the importance of sensory experience,
interpreted through reason and logic, as the exclusive source of authoritative knowledge.8
Arthur Schnitzler, a Viennese-born and -bred Jew, was very much nurtured by this
intellectual *humus*. Like his father, he was a physician, and like Sigmund Freud he was
greatly interested in the workings of the human mind, his only scientific publication
being on the topic of hypnosis and suggestion. Schnitzler can be considered Freud’s alter
ego, as both were diagnosing and examining the symptoms of a repressive, neurotic
society—one in his medical practice, producing seminal works of literary value in a new
scientific field, the other writing plays and prose with a keen understanding of the
psychology of his protagonists.9

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8 For background on the intellectual milieu and philosophical as well as artistic
movements of the time see Janik/Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*. Simon and Schuster,

9 For information on the similarities between Sigmund Freud and Arthur Schnitzler see,
for example, Peter Gay, *Schnitzler’s Century*, or Martina Caspari, “Durchkreuzungen des
zeitgenössischen Hysterie-Diskurses: Fräulein Else von Arthur Schnitzler und Freuds
Dora-nicht nur zwischen den Zeilen gelesen.” *Germanic Notes and Reviews*, 37/2006,
5–28.
Many years prior to the writing of Fräulein Else, in 1900, Arthur Schnitzler had already successfully employed the then-new technique when creating Leutnant Gustl, an interior monologue about an arrogant and self-absorbed soldier with the royal army, who has an idiosyncratic notion of honor and an anti-Semitic and sexist fervor. This book cost Schnitzler his officer’s rank and brought him notoriety as a dissector of his class and times. As readers we find ourselves inside the mind of a narcissistic individual whose thoughts revolve solely around the satisfaction of his needs—both sexual and societal. We are repulsed by his hypocrisy, cowardly ruthlessness, and the utter superficiality of his character. Witnessing his thoughts and emotions so directly through the interior monologue, seemingly without a mediator, makes it hard to distance ourselves from him, but also to identify with him as he is such a loathsome character. We are left in a state of limbo, both glad that we can step outside of this unsavory character’s mind at the end of the novella and dismayed that he has not evolved as a character at all.

Schnitzler’s choice to tell Fräulein Else in the form of the interior monologue accomplishes several things: politically, it suggests to the reader that the events are portrayed from a female perspective rather than a misogynistic one as in Leutnant Gustl—and lets us almost forget that the author is male. Psychologically, it connects the reader and the speaker directly: it seems as if Else’s thoughts were expressed straight from the heart without being censored by a conscious effort of formulating polished sentences or structuring the narrative. This leaves us with an allegedly “true story” that generates empathy and lets the reader side with the protagonist, a young woman who is used by her own parents as a pawn to save her embezzling father from prison. Reading the text is akin to being inside Else’s head, and we learn what she thinks, we hear what
she hears, we see what she sees—or so it seems. While we do not have an outside narrator relating the details of Else’s thought process to us, hence mediating and removing us from her, there is still the fact that we rely on her account of the unfolding of events. We as readers are dependent upon her assessment of the situation, her interpretation of other people’s comments and actions, and her ability to read the intentions and motives of others. Keeping in mind that she is a nineteen-year-old, sheltered young woman from a bourgeois background, we have to do a lot of reading between the lines to put the picture together, sometimes reevaluating that which she might have misinterpreted.

When Else seems convinced that Cissy is jealous of her, for instance, an outsider may well judge the situation differently and see no malice behind Cissy’s words (28). Schnitzler juxtaposes Else’s thoughts, “Sie ärgert sich, daß ich so hübsch aussehe. Wie verlegen sie ist,” with Cissy complimenting her on her looks: “››Ihr Schal ist sehr hübsch, Else, zu dem schwarzen Kleid steht er Ihnen fabelhaft.‹‹”10 The reader instantly picks up on the dissonance between what Cissy says and how Else interprets it. Reading Else’s own text against the subtext she herself provides is but one of our tasks as readers. The density of the text is created through these many layers of speech that are related to us through—as we must assume—Else’s consciousness. When we read Cissy’s words the quotation marks identify them as direct speech, but as the story is self-narrated by Else

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10 The page numbers I am referencing are taken from the Insel Taschenbuch edition (2002). It sets direct speech of others in italics and in chevrons (inverted guillemets). Else’s uttered speech is set in regular type within chevrons. A digitalized copy of the first edition, which was published by Zsolnay in 1924, can be accessed at http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/schnitzler_else_1924. While the Insel edition does not keep the exact page count, all other typographic and artistic decisions such as inclusion of sheet music and italicization have been retained.
we must assume that she chooses which speech to pick up on out of the world that surrounds her. There may be words she misunderstands, there may also be parts of conversations that she does not overhear because she is preoccupied with her own thoughts.

Another, equally fruitful and enlightening task is to engage with the many sensual opportunities offered throughout the text to create meaning through embodiment. As I have laid out in the introduction, I will link an Iserian reader-response approach with a focus on how our senses and our sense memory fills in that which is omitted. In this chapter I would like to examine the many ways in which Schnitzler engages the reader’s senses—aural, visual, and haptic—through his use of that which is outside of what Else expressly relates to us, specifically sound, gaze, and touch, and combinations thereof as vehicles of knowledge, for us to complete a story that is seemingly one-dimensional, told from one single perspective, albeit an endopolyphonic one.

The interior monologue invites the reader more than other literary conventions to complete the story. The self-narrator is naturally biased, and the subjective form leads us to look for clues of this bias and for additional information in order to paint the bigger picture of the narrative. Schnitzler skillfully uses a variety of devices to induce the same kind of Schwindelgefühl in the reader as Else is experiencing. He juxtaposes narratives like the love story that is told in the musical piece that is playing in the background with the not so romantic tale of Dorsday and Else’s involvement, providing visual cues—the excerpts of musical notation that illustrate Else’s heightened agitation or increased use of ellipses to show her reflecting on her struggle. Other literary choices, such as the rapid switches between narrative voices within the one voice of the narrator-protagonist as she
conducts imaginary conversations or remembers past exchanges, also make for a dizzying reading experience.

So far, scholarship on Schnitzler’s text has primarily focused on questions of gender, race (Barker 2001), and morality in their socio-historical context, examining Schnitzler’s representation of women, ascribing to him an unequalled sensitivity to the female experience (Möhrmann 1985) as well as an “explicitly pro-feminine positioning” (Szalay 2000). Else has been presented as a female performance artist (Comfort 2006, Kuttenberg) and compared with Freud’s traumatized Dora (Finney 2012) or a hysterical Elektra (Kronberger 2002). Wolfgang Hackl placed Schnitzler’s use of landscape within the context of a culture that shifted its spirituality from religion to the experience of nature (Hackl 2002), and Cathy Raymond added great insight to the ongoing discussion about the significance of music for Schnitzler and Viennese society of the fin-de-siècle by “unmasking” the “hidden meaning” that is concealed in the text.

The purpose of this chapter is to shift the focus from the writer and the narrator to the shared experience of the protagonist and the reader. As Karin Kukkonen writes, “every attempt to theorize interpretation models its ideal readers as it describes how meaning emerges from texts” (367). Schnitzler skillfully writes into the text the haptic, aural, and visual experiences that help the reader become one with the protagonist and make meaning of the text, to do the final work of “co-writing” it, so-to-speak. I will look at how the aforementioned senses are engaged throughout the reading of the text.

11 While the narrator and the protagonist coincide, there is a difference in that the former is the one who relates the story to us and the latter is the one experiencing it.
Fräulein Else lends itself perfectly to an embodied reader-response approach as the sensual experience is so clearly inscribed into the text. Else is a woman who senses the looks of others quite literally on her skin, feeling threatened or comforted by the gaze of an other, immediately reacting with her whole body and mind to the experience of gaze and touch. The text is full of evocations of dizziness and vertigo, generated by both material and sensual experiences: the air is like champagne, the mountains are of a vertigo-inducing height, hashish and barbiturates play a prominent role. Throughout the text Else plays with the thought of taking her own life by overdosing on Veronal, a barbiturate that was used as a sleeping aid at the beginning of the twentieth century with severe side effects. Apart from producing hallucinations, it was highly addictive, and involuntary overdosing was quite common. When Else first mentions Veronal she immediately associates it with hashish and its hallucinatory properties—properties which she only knows about second hand. She displays the interest that can be expected from an adolescent when it comes to anything that is unfamiliar and possibly dangerous:


This calling forth of hallucinations and the constant switching of narrative perspectives within the single voice create a dizziness and often feverish pace that engender a similar Schwindel\(^\text{12}\) in the reader as Else herself is feeling. Her fundamental assumptions have

\[^\text{12}\text{I will use the terms Schwindel and Schwindelgefühl throughout my essay as I find them more suited than the English translations of dizziness or vertigo which lack the additional semantic level of Schwindel, namely “swindle” or “fraud” (see pages 5 and 6).}\]
been upended, such as that her parents would protect her and not the other way round.

With Garrett Stewart’s (1990) notion of the “inner articulation” or “endophony” (Stewart 1990: 7) that is involved in the process of silent reading, this switching back and forth between the first and third person with insertions of direct speech is responsible for a great deal of shared anxiety on the part of the reader. The pace of the narrative and the associative character of the (silent) speech is moving us as readers along, coercing us to sympathize also physically, feeling her tension in the fibers of our own bodies. As readers we perform the silent work of taking in the words and transforming them into images and sensations of the mind, experiencing the tensions built up through “the continual confrontation, within writing, of the phonic and the graphic” (Stewart 1990: 24).

Adding to this tension and to a sense of Schwindelgefühl is the layout of the text: While the narrator stays the same throughout the text, the narrative voice switches back and forth in an often dizzying speed. Seemingly without regard for an audience that may read or hear or otherwise experience her thoughts, Else lets her associations flow freely, including direct speech of others and her own, remembered direct speech, speech that is addressed to an other but has never been uttered aloud and mere thoughts that are—often implicitly but also explicitly—addressed to herself. Italics and quotation marks are used to signal exterior dialogue, quotation marks around regular type signal Else’s own spoken statements. Em-dashes are used heavily throughout the text to signal breaks—either mental leaps of Else’s or sudden interruptions through the outside world. By the middle of the novella, ellipses start showing up, finally taking over as visual, non-verbal cues to Else’s frame of mind.
Aural epistemology: competing narratives and Schwindelgefühl

The most strikingly sensuous aspect of the text is its aural dimension. Music plays a pivotal role in characterizing Else as well as her struggle. As a member of the Viennese bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, Else has received a musical education and is familiar with the established repertoire. She can identify a piece by hearing it from a distance, has even learned to play that particular piece herself. As Raymond elaborated in her essay “Masked in Music: Hidden Meaning in Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else,” through the way in which Schnitzler writes Schumann’s Carnaval, op. 9, into the text he includes not only the extradiegetic readers in Else’s psychic dilemma but also the diegetic audience within the text, who unknowingly witnesses Else’s mental tumult through the storyline of the musical piece.

Carnaval, subitled Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes (Little Scenes on Four Notes), is a collection of short character pieces “whose literary associations are by no means limited to the vivid images of a masked ball conjured up by the title” (Raymond 173). Throughout the cycle the motif of the double nature comes back again and again, Pierrot (II) and Arléquin (III) as well as Eusebius (V) and Florestan (VI) are characters that complement each other like yin and yang. Schumann based them on Jean Paul’s theme of Doppelnatur, with Florestan representing the extroverted and impulsive, and Eusebius the dreamy and calm nature of man. As a young, sexually inexperienced but keenly interested woman Else embodies this double nature of the shy and outwardly reserved Eusebius and the provocative Florestan. Schnitzler was a great admirer of
Schumann’s music\textsuperscript{13} and well aware of the subtext—and the context, namely the fact that Schumann had written them when he was in love with Ernestine von Fricken. The four letters referred to in the subtitle were the three note letters As (A flat), C, and H (B natural) that tie Schumann and Ernestine together—Ernestine stemmed from the city of Asch (As-C-H), but the letters also feature in SChumAnn’s surname. Throughout the piece, Schumann writes romantic messages to Ernestine into the music, employing these notes. These romantic underpinnings of the story that is told in the music serve as an ironic and inverted counter-narrative to Else and Dorsday’s relationship.

Schnitzler’s incorporation of musical script into the great climax of the novella, when Else decides to fulfill von Dorsday’s condition and descends naked under her coat to the music room where she reveals herself to everyone present, shows the reader, even if she has not learned to read music, that the music gets frantic, the notes agitatedly moving up and down the staff, the texture getting darker from the many more notes and ties. We as readers cannot hear the music acoustically, but we see it literally on the page and if we have any musical learning our brains translate it into sound in accordance with Else’s psychological state. The audience within the text, on the other hand, is not aware of what is going on in Else’s mind, but they, in turn, experience the narrative of the piano cycle live. They hear diegetically the themes of masquerade, metamorphosis, and duality played out on numerous levels. Hence, the written text itself and the music played within the text corroborate each other’s narratives, so to speak.

\textsuperscript{13} For more on Schnitzler’s love of music and its importance for his time and society, see Marc A. Weiner, \textit{Arthur Schnitzler and the Crisis of Musical Culture} (Heidelberg: Winter, 1986)
The first movement included visually in the novella is No. VI, Florestan (Figure 1).

Adding yet another layer to the double-entendre, it is a bar which contains a motif from Papillons, an earlier piece of Schumann’s—the fluttering, flighty character of the butterfly as well as the subject of metamorphosis can all be applied to Else as well. She shifts from reasonable to dramatic, from hesitant to assertive in a matter of moments, lending the narrative a fluttering character, a speedy pace that hardly ever comes to rest, just like the butterfly, fluttering from blossom to blossom, only briefly stopping to feed. Else’s thoughts are racing, her eyes taking in the scene in the music room at breakneck speed:


We as readers share the dizziness that the protagonist must feel, we imagine the music as we read about it, our attention, too, jumping from one character to the next, only to return to Dorsday, the double of the father and as such the root of all evil for Else.
The next musical excerpt that is inserted into the flow of the text is another bar of *Florestan*, in tempo and rhythmic activity more closely connected with the themes elaborated in *Papillons* (see Raymond, 176).

![Figure 2](image)

But its flighty character is not the only epistemological opportunity that the butterfly metaphor offers: Else herself undergoes a metamorphosis of her own. She wraps herself in her coat much like the pupa is wrapped up in her cocoon, and once she has freed herself from the casing, her transformation is complete. All her senses are involved in the process: the music is playing in the diegetic background, telling the story of *Coquette* during Else’s quasi-flirtatious play with looks, trying to make herself understood through eye contact with Dorsday:


What is positively playful and coquettish in Schumann’s musical plotline of *Coquette* is mirrored in the literary text, but with a feverish and desperate undertone.

Next in Schumann’s piece is *Réplique*, the musical reply to the flirtatious *Coquette*. The movement is not referenced in the text, but if we assume that the pianist is playing the entire *Carnaval* cycle, this is what would be playing in the background while
Else goes on to relate what is happening. She describes Dorsday’s responding looks full of desire as piercing into her forehead, glowing eyes that threaten her:


Schnitzler masterfully weaves the narrative of Carnaval with that of his much darker story of “romance”: While Else’s thoughts and gaze flutter back and forth between Dorsday and the “Filou” who had caught her attention earlier in the text, the (presumed) musical diegetic background is provided by movement No. IX, Papillons:


Else imagines a possible love interest in order to make the act she is about to commit, to prostitute herself, bearable and to preserve a modicum of agency and autonomy. After all, the act of exhibiting herself is not entirely unpleasant to Else, on the contrary. Throughout the text she plays with narcissistic and exhibitionist thoughts, displaying a sensuality that is very much repressed by the rules society has put upon her.

The subsequent movement that is being played within the narrative by the pianist is Lettres dansantes, X. Again, there are no direct references, but if we compare Schumann’s piece, the “dancing letters” are up next in the cycle. The love letters of Schumann’s piece are juxtaposed with Else’s thoughts of the telegram that she expects Dorsday to write in exchange of her complying with his demand to see her naked:

Es rieselt durch meine Haut. Die Dame spielt weiter. Köstlich rieselt es durch meine Haut. Wie wundervoll ist es nackt zu sein. (75)
The pleasure she experiences in this extreme situation is tremendous, and it is utterly visceral. Certainly the Veronal has a hand in her somatic response to the—so far only imaginary—exchange between her and Dorsday, but as readers we can comprehend her excitement and Schwindel, particularly on a visceral level. We have gone through a similar experience, led by the author who has rushed us along with the frantic pace of alternating voices—Else’s endopolyphony, so-to-speak—and the visual cues of increasingly busy musical notation.

Now Else’s transformation seems almost complete. The description of the sensations she feels not only on her skin but indeed under/within her skin, again, are reminiscent of the transformation of the butterfly. No one outside of the chrysalis knows what is going on within these confines. All we know is that what was before is nothing like that which then emerged. And thus Schnitzler goes on:


Through this process of metamorphosis, she has reached a new level of awareness, her disrobing instrumental in attaining a position of truth. Much like Eve who becomes aware of her nakedness at the same moment that she sheds ignorance and learns to discern good and evil, Else now sees clearly. We see this mirrored in the musical subtext

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14 The similarities between Else and Eve would be a rich topic to explore but, alas, they go beyond the scope of this thesis. Still, I would like to draw attention to the first appearance of the snake that may well have bitten Else while she dreamt on the bench at the edge of the forest: “Vor den Schlangen habe ich keine Angst. Wenn mich nur keine in den Fuß beißt. Oh weh. Was ist denn? Wo bin ich denn? Habe ich geschlafen? Ja. Geschlafen habe ich. Ich muß sogar geträumt haben. Mir ist so kalt in den Füßen. Im rechten Fuß ist mir kalt. Wieso denn? Da ist am Knöchel ein kleiner Riß im Strumpf.” (49)
as well: At the very moment in which Else drops her coat, Schnitzler inserts the following two systems of musical notation:

![Figure 3](image)

During the final two systems of musical notation, taken from movement XIV, *Reconnaissance*, Else drops the coat and everyone sees her naked. The recognition (*reconnaissance*) thus is both on part of the diegetic audience and on Else’s part, though what they see may differ greatly in content. What the hotel guests in the music room see is a young woman who for some strange and undecipherable reason decided to show herself naked to the entire party, only to succumb literally to the *Schwindel* and faint in their midst. Else, by contrast, sees very clearly the workings of the society of which she is only a small cog. The scene has been interpreted as an act of rebellion and agency, but it really is the exact opposite: the truth which is revealed by and through her is that she has no constructive way out of the proverbial corset that convention has constricted her to.
By disrobing in public she stretches the terms of Dorsday’s demand, who most certainly did not expect her to undress in front of a greater audience, but this only leads to an even clearer recognition of her solitude and exposure. No one is here to help her, only to misread her. Her great act of defiance has resulted in nothing but her realization that no one will ever see the truth, all they can see is that she will always remain powerless—a realization clearly expressed in her internal response to Paul’s comment to his mother on page 76: “››Du siehst doch, Mama, daß sie ohnmächtig ist.‹‹ – Ja, Gott sei Dank, für Euch bin ich ohnmächtig. Und ich bleibe auch ohnmächtig.”

We as readers, on the other hand, share her insight and participate in her moment of catharsis and anagnorisis. With her, we become aware of the workings of society and our own psyche and the many ways in which we are playing parts that are not entirely written by ourselves. This self-awareness, though, is the first of many steps toward knowledge and the higher realms of cognition. Like Else, the reader is invited to shed the confines of societal expectations, open her wings and set her mind free: “Ich fliege…ich träume…ich schlafe…ich träu…träu – ich flie…” (86).

**The haptic gaze: seeing as touching and moving**

The gaze and its power are at the heart of the narrative. Seeing and seeming, performing and being watched are examined on various levels from numerous perspectives. The most obvious act of seeing which agitates Else so much that she is willing to commit suicide is Dorsday’s request to see her naked. Else is a narcissist and an exhibitionist, reveling in both the gaze of the other and in looking at herself, her self-directed gaze often leading to immediate tactile associations: “Bin ich wirklich so schön
wie im Spiegel? Ach kommen Sie doch näher, schönes Fräulein. Ich will Ihre blutroten Lippen küssen” (64). Numerous times she revels in memories of showing herself, for instance to a couple of strangers in a boat on a nearby lake when vacationing in Gmunden—”Ich war wie berauscht” (43) —, or visualizes herself, lying naked on marble steps at the Riviera (51). It is not only the freedom that comes with disrobing and the power to stimulate someone else’s sensuality that is so intrinsically appealing to her. Divesting is also an act of stripping off guises—of costumes that we wear properly to perform the role that society has intended for us—, “revealing the truth”, as it were. “So werde ich durch die Halle gehen, und kein Mensch wird ahnen, daß unter dem Mantel nichts ist, als ich, ich selber” (67).

The kind of gaze that is of interest to me for the sake of this essay, though, is what I would like to call the “haptic gaze,” which touches and moves the one whom it hits. It is an active gaze that can make the viewed object feel caressed, but it can also be experienced as threatening and prying. “Haptic” can refer to anything that is perceived and grasped with the senses, but it has also another connotation which I laid out in the introduction, namely that it connects the kinesthetic experience with (psychological) orientation, evoking the Schwindelgefühl that is so essential to Else’s experience. This ambivalence and the instability of the term is what makes it appropriate in this context, as I examine the many ways in which the reader’s senses are engaged—also through the embodied experience of the protagonist. Being held under this kind of gaze is always ambiguous, the holder of the gaze may be well-intentioned or wicked, and it is really the recipient who inscribes the gaze with meaning.
The haptic gaze can be perceived as caressing and loving, observant and disinterested in a Kantian sense, or it can be threatening and entangling—in any case, it is a gaze that Else feels on her skin and that we as readers experience by proxy. The aggressive, dissecting nature of Dorsday’s gaze is emphasized by the fact that he wears a monocle. Else seems like some kind of strange creature that warrants closer inspection. Already at our first encounter with Dorsday, Schnitzler draws our attention to his gaze, albeit in a humorous, slightly disparaging manner:


Right away, Dorsday is connected to his sharp eye, and this connection will be maintained throughout the text. After the receipt of her mother’s letter, Else imagines the meeting with Dorsday, complaining about “die Art, wie er mich ansieht […]. Seine Augen werden sich in meinen Ausschnitt bohren” (21). The adjectives and verbs associated with his gaze are either derisive or aggressive, Dorsday “schielt herüber” (29) or “macht […] Kalbsaugen” (31). “Wie er mich ansieht” (35), Else complains again and again about the way he looks at her: “Er steht vor mir und bohrt mir das Monokel in die Stirn und schweigt” (37). His gaze is positively invasive, drilling into her cleavage and brow, and when Else thinks of him, this piercing and drilling is what comes to her mind first: “Gerade der! Wie seine Augen stechen und bohren werden. Mit dem Monokel wird er dastehen und grinsen” (53). The reader, too, can feel the discomfort that his gaze elicits, and feels for her. As we find ourselves inside of Else, drawn in by the conventions of the interior monologue, we, too, feel violated by this gaze. Dorsday is not just looking
at Else but assailing her. We imagine in our minds the monocle that acts like a magnifying glass, inspecting our face and décolleté, touching every inch of uncovered skin.

Seeing is very closely tied in the text with recognition and reckoning – on multiple levels. First, on the purely linguistic level we can examine the lead-up to the climactic scene in the music room, the “große Vorstellung” as Else sarcastically refers to it (68). “Laß dir noch einmal in die Augen sehen, schöne Else. Was du für Riesenaugen hast, wenn man näher kommt” (67). She may be getting closer to “the truth” that she is seeking, hence her eyes are getting bigger, taking more in. Already earlier, in the lead-up to the “mirror scene” (60–67), Schnitzler closely connects the eyes with (re)cognition: “Wie schön meine blondroten Haare sind, und meine Schultern; meine Augen sind auch nicht übel. Hu, wie groß sie sind. Es wär’ schad’ um mich. Zum Veronal ist immer noch Zeit. – Aber ich muß ja hinunter. Tief hinunter” (60, 61). The bigger the eyes, the more they can take in, one is inclined to interpret.\footnote{Dorsday, too, “tears open his eyes” the moment he realizes that Else has come to fulfill his condition to undress, albeit not on the stage he had envisioned for it, his room or the clearing in the woods: “Niemand weiß es. Keiner noch sieht mich. Filou, Filou! Nackt stehe ich da. Dorsday reißt die Augen auf. Jetzt endlich glaubt er es.” (75)} 

Tief here certainly has less a topographic than a moral connotation. Taking off her clothes before him will lead her down to the lowest strata of society, reserved for prostitutes, forced to sell their bodies in order to make ends meet and survive. It is not Else’s survival, though, that is secured by her sacrifice, but her father’s, and the disgrace for the family cannot be avoided either way. In an effort to appropriate the act, Else has decided to agree to Dorsday’s proposal, but not in his room or on a clearing in the nearby woods, as he suggested. She will show
herself naked for fifteen minutes, but she will metamorphose the demand to fit her own
exhibitionist, performative and rebellious needs: by disrobing in public she attempts to
exert a modicum of control and garner witnesses to her plight. It is her way of revealing
the truth of her situation to everyone present—even if no one can be expected to
acknowledge her dilemma.

People will say that she is crazy, a hysteric, and for most, life may go on
unchanged, but not for Else and those that she has touched immediately, namely the
readers. Her transformation may engender a heightened self-awareness and lead to self-
reflection. As readers we have embodied her trauma, have been shaken by the dizzying
events, are *schwindelig* from the ride that is this text. We are invited to scrutinize our own
conventions and question the truths that we hold. We may be grateful for having
overcome these sorts of traditional gender conventions, or we may realize that we still
hold fast to them. We may contemplate our attitudes toward feminism and the struggle
for emancipation, consider it ongoing or overcome, whatever our personal situation may
be. We may have gained a greater awareness of the ways in which personal dependency
and lack of agency can sometimes go unnoticed or be perceived as a matter of course. We
may direct the gaze inward and rewrite our truths accordingly.
CHAPTER II:
THE SENSES AS VEHICLES OF COGNITION IN PAUL CZINNER’S
FRÄULEIN ELSE

In this chapter I will focus on the visual, aural, and haptic dimensions of the 1929 silent film *Fräulein Else*, directed by Paul Czinner, with Elisabeth Bergner starring in the title role. While Czinner did not choose Else’s perspective as a first-person narrator of her tale, he skillfully combined Elisabeth Bergner’s strengths with an eloquent camera to convey the young woman’s turmoil and subtly express the emotional whirlwind she finds herself in. In contrast to Schnitzler’s interior monologue, Czinner’s film broadens the arc of narrated time as well as the narrative perspective(s). He begins the film with a soirée at the Thalhof residence, follows Thalhof around knocking on doors of possible financiers and shows him struggling to find a way out of the quicksand he has driven himself and his family into.

From a filmmaker’s perspective the switch from first-person to third-person narration makes sense, especially in silent film: words are only available to a certain extent to propel the story forward, and Czinner uses them—written either diegetically as letters, telegrams, signs, or newspaper headlines or as transcribed dialogue in inserts—economically and fittingly. But his medium is cinema and his narrative tools are

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16 See page 12.
primarily visual, so I will focus on how he uses these to engage the viewers’ senses and elicit the emotional turmoil, the *Schwindelgefühl*, that is so central to Else’s experience.

**The critic disagrees: why Kracauer was wrong**

Some critics bemoaned the shift away from Else’s self-narration to a conventional society plot narrated by a seemingly objective camera, as well as Czinner’s choice to spend the entire first half on setting up the background story, focusing primarily on Else’s father and developing his character to a much greater extent than in the novella. This may—and did—generate a sense of dissatisfaction, anger even in the mind of an admirer of the literary predecessor, but it speaks to exactly what is at the heart of the problem that Schnitzler discusses: Else is struggling with the role assigned to her—by society in general and her parents in particular. Everything revolves around the father, and Else herself is but a cog in the wheels of a society that commodifies its women and daughters, robbing them of agency but letting them pay for the shortcomings of their patriarchs. Siegfried Kracauer wrote in a review in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on April 14th, 1929: “[s]tatt die Handlung aus der Perspektive Fräulein Elses aufzubauen, hat er einen normalen Gesellschaftsfilm gedreht, in dem auch Fräulein Else vorkommt” (Gandert 189).

Kracauer’s criticism, “[d]amit verliert aber das Geschehen seinen Sinn, und es bleibt eine ziemlich schale Verkettung von Ereignissen übrig, die eines großen Aufwands nicht bedurft hätte,” points to a certain disappointment that stems exactly from the film text’s character as an adaptation. Being familiar with the adapted literary text, Kracauer plays one against the other and seems unable to approach the film as an independent
work of its own, making use of its medium-specific tools. “Alles erscheint bei Schnitzler von Fräulein Else aus gesehen: Vater, Mutter, die Freunde, das Hotel und der Mann, um dessentwillen sie sich vergiftet. In den Schleier ihrer einsamen Assoziationen sind die Figuren gewirkt, vergrößern sich ihr, bringen Gefahr.“ He reproaches Czinner for straightforwardly showing that which is only partially visible to the reader, mediated through Else’s perception and relation. „Weder Menschen noch Gegenstände treten in der Novelle auf, wie sie sind, sondern ragen nur stückweise in die Erzählung hinein, so stückweise, wie sie dem Geist des Mädchens sich bieten” (ib.).

It is certainly surprising that Kracauer, a film theorist, should be so adamant in his refusal to grant the filmic adaptation an analysis with an independent and cinema-oriented lens. If we watch Czinner’s film closely we realize that he masterfully explores exactly the circumstances that Else is struggling with: she may be the title character, but she has little agency and is reduced to being a pawn, selling herself to keep her father out of jail. Czinner’s choice to have a seemingly objective camera narrate the story from a distance instead of trying to equate the method of self-narration by cinematic means, Kracauer complains, results in a loss of what is at the heart of the adapted text: the female voice. As readers of Schnitzler’s novella we are placed right into the middle of Else’s dilemma as told by herself, whereas Czinner chose to have father Thalhof’s ordeal front and center and a supposedly objective camera narrating. I would argue, though, that by developing the father’s role more clearly Czinner is able to add another layer of complexity and to underscore the oedipal theme that is a latent undercurrent to Schnitzler’s text, namely through doubling. The many instances of Else doubling for her
father are subtle cinematic ways of making comprehensible issues and connections that are not expressed on a linguistic level.

When Kracauer criticizes Czinner for allegedly disregarding the conditions that are vital for our understanding of Else’s actions, he himself overlooks the masterful way in which the filmmaker transposed the literary text into an original cinematographic one: “Zudem hat Czinner alles getan, um die Bedingungen vergessen zu machen, unter denen Fräulein Else bei Schnitzler steht und aus denen allein ihr Handeln begreiflich wird. Er zeigt sie nicht etwa als ein Mädchen, dem das Gemisch von Unschuld und Reflexion zuzutrauen wäre, sondern setzt sie mitten in die sportfrohe Nachkriegswelt hinein” (ib.). In this chapter I will show that Kracauer’s criticism is largely unwarranted if we read the film closely. I will examine the many ways in which Czinner did indeed explore the conditions that explain Else’s actions, albeit giving them a slightly different edge. It may be true that Czinner’s Else has little of the awakening sexuality that Schnitzler’s Else exhibits, but the on-screen version experiences the same struggles and at the same intensity as does her literary alter ego. The cinematography engages the viewer’s senses and thus elicits the same kind of Schwindelgefühl the reader experiences when reading the novella.

*Schwindelgefühl as a vehicle of visceral cognition*

But why is the engagement of the senses so vital for our making sense of this particular story, and what is it about the Schwindelgefühl that imparts superior knowledge to the reader/viewer? Several factors play a role. Else is a young woman of nineteen years, and while there are passages in the text that show her as a truly insightful,
observant, and well-educated young woman, she is caught up in her own world and cannot step outside of herself to analyze the full extent of her circumstances. But there is also another factor that may play a part: the implications of the bargain she is asked for are unspeakable, being sold off by her own parents (in the case of the novella—in the film the mother bears all responsibility) to pay for the father’s failures. Words alone necessarily fail to relate the extent of the tragedy, hence the need for additional means to describe it. The reader/viewer needs to embody Else’s dilemma in order to empathize with her. If we as viewers, like Kracauer, remain distant from the title character, the criticism may be right and Else’s reaction to Dorsday’s indecent proposal seems excessive. But if we forget about our misgivings and our expectations of what an adaptation of a beloved text needs to look like, we may be able to let ourselves be moved by the film as an independent work of fiction.

I will examine how the director’s artistic choices engage the viewer in his or her entirety—as an embodied implied viewer. Just as the implied reader is an embodied reader, the implied viewer of film is an embodied viewer, perhaps even more so than the reader, given the sensuous nature of the film-viewing experience: bodies in front of a screen in the theatre exposed to a finite visual and aural artistic work that excites all senses. Not only is cinema a visual medium, but we experience the work in time; we cannot stop the film, pause and reflect on what we have seen as we can put down a book and come back to it at a later point. We are swept by its temporality which deemphasizes the rational aspect as opposed to the literary text—we can just put down a book. Cinema also addresses our auditory capacities. While this is obvious to the contemporary viewer who is used to hearing a soundtrack and is trained in differentiating, for example, diegetic
from non-diegetic sounds, this fact is less obvious when we refer to so-called “silent” film. Silent film, of course, never was entirely silent. Since its inception at the beginning of the twentieth century, the cinematic work was accompanied by all sorts of sounds: narrators who related the background story from the stage to help the audience understand a complicated plot; pianists who by their choice of accompaniment would emphasize the content seen on screen—quick runs during a chase scene, elegiac romantic phrases while lovers embrace. For some pre-talkies, composers created scores, as did Charlie Chaplin for his film *City Lights* (1931). In the earliest days, music was primarily used to cover up the sounds of the projecting equipment with little regard on emphasizing the cinematic narrative through musical means, but it did not take long for directors to understand how vital a narrative tool sound can be.

**Sensed sounds**

Music and diegetic as well as non-diegetic sound, whether recorded or played live, is clearly part of a movie theatre’s soundscape. But there are also the sounds coming from within the auditorium—gasps and sighs, laughter or that dreaded unremitting commentator sitting right behind one—that are an essential part of the moviegoer’s experience. While all these sounds are part of the cinematic experience, I will concern myself with the sounds that come into being within the viewer; the sounds that a viewer adds in her imagination when seeing a certain image. Can we ever see the close-up of a gong calling to dinner without adding some sort of gong-like sound in our minds? This internal mechanism does not work with aurality alone, of course. Our body reacts strongly when we see a gruesome scene of violence, we get goose bumps at particularly
scary or exciting junctures, and we have a pool of sense memories from which to draw in order to co-write the on-screen text. And sometimes quick cross-cutting, slanted angles or a revolving camera can induce a rollercoaster-ride of the senses.

In the case of Fräulein Else I will be most interested in how director Paul Czinner and his cinematographer, Karl Freund, use cinematic tools to narrate Else’s ordeal on a visceral level, a level more clearly understood by our bodies and senses and perhaps less by our reasoning faculty. Else is a young, excitable woman of a charming flightiness. She is fluttering around like a butterfly, able to do so without harm because she is safely tucked into her familial and societal structure. She adores her father and does not seem to mind her mother too much. This protective structure is damaged when her mother involves Else in the struggle to keep the father out of jail, and it is taken down entirely with von Dorsday’s indecent proposal. He is crossing the lines (as we will later see foreshadowed in the sign at Chur station) and he has the whole force of the camera behind him. I will discuss a number of scenes in detail that illustrate the themes of instability and societal constraint that characterize the figure of Else. With her youthful grace and carefree fluttering about, Else is both charming and fragile, a child that feels safe and has nothing to fear. Her embraces are warm and innocent, and she touches everyone she meets both literally and figuratively—the house staff (the cook helps Else unzip her dress in the kitchen, a gesture of uncomplicated closeness that suggests Else’s status as the child of the house), the guests, her cousin and aunt, and of course her father, Alfred Thalhof, with whom she obviously has a very strong and sincere bond. He is the one who takes her shopping for the upcoming trip, and he is also the one who gets the most embraces when the parents send Else off at the train station. Her desire to touch, to
connect on a haptic level, is reflected in the way the film connects with the viewer, not only on a surface level by showing us the many instances of tactile exchange in which the pleasure of the touch is being shown and addressed, but through engaging our senses and our haptic imagination, especially through eliciting Else’s *Schwindelgefühl* in the viewer through cinematic means—jump cuts, dissolves and superimpositions, tracking shots and close-ups, but also by the use of mise-en-scène and costume, for example smoke-filled environments or fabrics like fur or wool that engage the viewer’s sense memory immediately, or the use of doubling.

In order to show how cinematography and mise-en-scène work together to relate Else’s visceral experience and generate it in the viewer, I will focus on a small number of scenes that illustrate this point. The first two scenes I will discuss are shots of the city during Else and Alfred Thalhof’s shopping trip and the landscape on the train ride to Chur. The depictions of the city life are characterized by dissolves and superimpositions: by layering several shots of street scenes with cars and pedestrians driving and walking in numerous directions, the camera always at a different angle of the street, Czinner achieves an utterly fluid, unsteady and dizzying portrait of city life. The viewer sees the busy street scenes and completes them with his or her own aural-experiential tool kit, adding the sounds of bustling traffic and the sense memories of busy street life: slightly bumping into passers-by, the occasional stumble on uneven cobblestone, car exhaust and honking of horns.

The dizzying visuals help us feel the excitement and the sense of anticipation—positive anticipation in the case of Else, who is looking forward to her upcoming trip, and a nervous apprehension in the case of the father, who is dreading complications from his
embezzlement. The few shots of the landscape zipping by the moving train create a
certain instability, especially since they are violating the rules of contiguity editing: the
landscape is not moving in one direction but also in the reverse, evoking a sense of
foreboding and suggesting that this journey will not be a smooth ride. It also foreshadows
Else’s later struggle, her being torn between being a good girl and following her mother’s
request and asserting herself by refusing to come begging to Dorsday. In addition, the
scene in the cabin is characterized by the shuttering of the actors and an unstable frame,
and when Paul and Else walk along the corridor they have to hold on to both sides of the
aisle, tilted, countering the impetus of the moving train.

**Manifold acts of transgression**

At Chur where the party needs to switch trains, a sign foreshadows the
transgression that will later occur (Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image)

The lines that will be crossed are manifold. Else’s parents are asking her to do what no
child should be asked to do by her parents: namely assume the responsibility that the
father himself has failed to show and pay his debt in his stead. Dorsday will cross the line
of what is morally acceptable by asking Else to repay him with her body. And Else, finally, will cross the line by disrobing in public and committing suicide. This sign also marks a caesura in the narrative that is told on a meta-level, hinting at Else’s feminine and sexual potential by suggesting a different kind of relationship between Paul and Else. The second train ride is quite different in atmosphere from the first. The first section of the voyage is characterized by the flat landscapes along the railroad tracks of the Westbahn. Else’s position as a child is emphasized by her meeting with Cissy Mohr. The worldly married woman is the sexually experienced counterpart to Else in relation to her cousin Paul. Paul flirts with both women, but his interactions with Else are innocent and light-hearted, whereas the sexual tension between Paul and Cissy is obvious. Cissy travels in the company of her nanny and daughter, and when Else meets the little girl she instantly swaps seats with her. Now Else has assumed the position of the little girl while the two presumed lovers are looking on.

In the second portion of their voyage the setup is strikingly different. Of the travelling party only Else and Paul are on screen, and the camera is positioned at the very rear so that we see Else standing on the rear platform of the train. The camera is very unstable as the train moves along, instilling in the viewer a sense of imbalance. While the vehicle is making its way up the winding mountain track, Else looks down at the valley, turned toward that which she left behind as if taking leave of her earlier life. The low angle of the camera emphasizes the sensation of the upward moving train, and the serpentine curves induce the kind of Schwindelgefühl that is so essential to Else’s experience and the ideal vehicle to pass on the message to the reader/viewer.
The way Paul and Else are photographed together is also strikingly different from before: while Else had always looked much shorter and obviously younger than her cousin, the low angle of the camera now makes them appear to be of similar height, their clothing matches in color and fabric, and the way they are placed right next to each other suggests a couple, possibly on their honeymoon. We even get the classic tunnel shot\textsuperscript{17}—everything goes dark and all is permitted—after which the two stand hand in hand, all excitement and joy. While there is hardly an exchange of longing looks, the fact that they don’t seem to be able to keep their hands off each other after exiting the tunnel insinuates (at least the possibility of) a romantic relationship.

Another indicator of the latent possibility of romance between Else and Paul is elaborated in the scene where Else, Paul, and Cissy go on a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh together. Cissy and Paul sit in the box seat in the front while Else sits behind them, separating the pair with the whip and reins she holds on to. We can interpret this as an act of jealousy, trying to keep the lovers apart. This is all the more poignant as it is in this very scene that Else will get access to the Veronal that will later be her means.

\textbf{Else doubles for her father}

There are several details that suggest Else being a double to her father: both play the piano (but while the father’s play elicits cringing and applause only out of politeness, Else’s play is beautiful and welcome—the cook tells the other staff to tone it down so she can hear, and the audience in the room sits quietly while she performs a duet with Paul on

\textsuperscript{17} Since the earliest days of cinema the darkness of the tunnel was used for sexual advances. \textit{The Kiss in the Tunnel (UK, 1899)} was probably the first one to use this device, although in this particular case the viewer can even see the (married) couple kissing, the darkness of the tunnel suggested by the black paper that covers the windows of the rail cars
the violin). The father is wearing a heavy dark fur coat when knocking on the doors of possible creditors whereas Else wears a big white fur coat during her “walk of shame.” Both share a certain excitability: Thalhof needs little encouragement to invest heavily, and Else is easily persuaded to go on vacation with her cousin and aunt. There is the charming ease they display in their interactions with society, countered by the dark private moments when they consider their respective situations. And, most importantly, there are the mirrored bed scenes (see Fig. 13 and 14, p. 63): upon his return from the unsuccessful search for a loan the father breaks down and seems to have an attack of sorts. His wife helps him to his bed where he lies down. She takes care of him, handing him medicine dissolved in water to cure him. She covers him with a dark plush blanket whose texture closely resembles the white fur that will later be Else’s cover: we will see a very similar scene play out when Else is laid down in her bed, poisoned by medicine that she had dissolved in water herself and drunk on her own accord—medicine that she had been handed by Paul who wanted to take it away from Cissy. Paul will lament her loss, sitting by her side—Else having finished what her father started, namely his halfhearted attempts at suicide.

The scene with Cissy, Paul, and Else in the sleigh is another important indicator for Else’s doubling for her father. In the prior scene, the father has a breakdown after wanting to go out and kill himself. His wife tries to keep him from leaving, finds a gun in his waist pocket, and prevents his suicide. She leads him to his bed where he lies down to recover. The shot that we see now, someone sitting next to a person lying in a bed, suffering, is one we will encounter again at the end of the film. Only then it will be Else in her father’s stead, and Paul will have come too late to rescue her. The pills that mother
Thalhof hands to her husband to cure him will find their double in the suicidal Veronal of the subsequent scene when Paul takes the pills from Cissy to protect her, only to place them in Else’s care, providing her with the means to commit suicide.

The tactility of textures

Yet for now, Else is all excitement and joy. Her carefree demeanor is mirrored in her dress which is always appropriate for the occasion, thus giving us clues on how to read the scenes: for a walk around town to observe the Olympic sports events with Paul she wears a sweater with a tied scarf and an a-line skirt that swings like a tutu as she imitates the ice skaters they observe together, or later in the hotel lobby where she makes carefree pirouettes, waiting for the elevator to arrive (Figure 5). Else’s penchant for pirouettes is a playful variation of the Schwindelgefühl: this turning around and around is one that gives pleasure to both her and the viewer who partakes in her gaiety (but will later give way to a whirlwind of despair).

When skijoring\textsuperscript{18} with Paul, her costume is all sensible sports clothing: a sweater and woolen pants that have no other purpose than to keep her warm and comfortable during the exercise. The fabric elicits a haptic response in the viewer, bringing to mind

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Figure 5}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Skijoring is a kind of winter sport where the skier is pulled by either dogs, a horse, or a motor vehicle. In the film, Else is pulled by Paul riding a horse.
the dreaded itchy woolen sweaters of childhood winters in temperate climates. The cut of the clothing is, in fact, strikingly unflattering in its roominess. In the scene shown in Figure 6 Else is reading the letter she has just received from her mother, informing her that she is the only one who can help keep her father out of jail. This scene is especially relevant for the remainder of the story, figuring as a turning point in Else’s state of mind. From now on all light-footedness will be a thing of the past. The carefree circling about will become a dreadful spinning around her own axis, ending in her breakdown and death.

The first letter scene (at 0:51, there will be a second one at 1:17) in her room consists of just a few rather long takes, reminiscent of the Kammerspiel in its likeness to the staging in a theatre. The camera follows Else into the room and then positions itself opposite the door where the window is. Doors played a prominent role already during her father’s unsuccessful run from one creditor in spe to another, often only opening halfway before closing for good. We as viewers are on the side of the window, looking in on Else in her small and unadorned hotel room—with its clear rectangular structure it reminds us of the rigid societal corset she finds herself in. The net of parental and societal expectations will be drawn around her ever more tightly, and the way this scene is photographed is a clear indication for her unsuccessful efforts to escape the burden that has been placed upon her. The heavy frame of the camera rests upon her and barely moves. Else is captured cinematographically inside of the frame as well as figuratively
within the narrative, and there is no escape. While the camera is almost immobile, Else slowly drags herself from one side of the room to the other, barely finding the power to move. Whenever she approaches the edge of the frame the camera slightly shifts with her, not letting go of her, always keeping her caught within the frame.

When the camera cuts to the outdoors we look up a snow-covered, deserted mountain landscape—the blue tinting an indicator that night has fallen. The next frame shows the nocturnal landscape from a different angle: now we are looking down from the mountain into the small village, the illuminated hotel at its very center—slowly making our way from the bitter cold of loneliness to the promise of warmth in human society. The cold that the viewer imagines is contrasted more sharply a few frames later when Else reaches into the freshly filled bathtub and quickly withdraws her hand, having scalded herself, presumably.

These opposing physical sensations mirror the contrasting emotions that Else experiences. The cinema is a visual medium, but it works on the viewer’s consciousness all encompassingly. While we are not actually experiencing the cold of the snow and the scalding heat of the water in the tub, we know the nature of these sense experiences, and in our mind we read them as if we were experiencing them directly. We understand the implications of the sensual excess, the polar opposition in Else’s sense experience. And our bodies translate these opposing pulls and the instability into the sensation of *Schwindelgefühl*, the dizziness that arises from a feeling of instability, in the specific case, of the instability of sense experience. Else is being pulled from the pressures of following her supposed filial duty to freeing herself from the outrageous request, first put

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19 For use of color and color codes in early film see Thompson 2003.
to her by her mother and later by Dorsday. The pressure will become overwhelming in the second letter scene when a telegram arrives, smashing to pieces Else’s newfound resolve to refuse Dorsday’s proposal and immediately return to Vienna.

Between the sporty woolen attire of the first letter scene and the fragile feminine gown of the second, we see Else wearing a high cut velvet dress, inviting to the touch as little kittens invite cuddling, that could not have been more appropriate to narrate the subtext (Figure 7). Having received her mother’s letter, Else changes into her dinner clothes. The dark dress is high cut with a white lace collar, reminiscent of a school uniform, prim and proper. The fabric looks incredibly soft, like plush or a kitten’s fur, and we cannot help but want to reach out and touch it, stroking the innocent smoothness. This soft innocence is what should be moving Tante Emma towards the end of the Act, when Else undertakes one last effort to avoid addressing Dorsday and pleads with her aunt instead to come to Thalhof’s rescue. Tante Emma was introduced at the very beginning of the film as adamantly opposing her brother-in-law’s business ventures, telling her sister (Else’s mother) that she wished never to be approached again for paying off his debts. And now not even the velvety softness of her niece’s submission, her pitiable mean and nervous pleas make Emma reconsider her adamant refusal to help out her brother-in-law. With her aunt unyielding, Else needs to go and do what is asked of her: beg Dorsday for money.
The inverted irony of the cat-and-mouse-game

A little earlier in the film, close-ups of Else at the dinner table—where she cannot bring herself to eat the fish that looks up at her from the plate, mouth gaping open—pull the viewer in, demanding sympathy and support. A slight variation to the position of the camera will show Dorsday in the background, his eyes resting on Else (who sits at an angle towards him so she needs to turn slightly to the right in order to see him). The deep field and deep focus emphasize the way in which he looms large on Else’s mind, always in the background of her every thought. She is constantly trying to look at him in secret, and every time their eyes meet, Dorsday bows, cutting off halfway as Else abruptly turns away. This visual teasing both lacks and suggests playfulness, depending on the perspective: Dorsday has no idea why Else would suddenly be so interested in him and is understandably amused; yet we as viewers are privy to Else’s motivations, and we know that this game of cat and mouse is anything but carefree child’s play.

This ambiguous juxtaposition of a playful narrative frame with another that is similar in content but has a different tone to it and contradicts the lightheartedness of the former is powerfully reminiscent of the two counter-narratives in Schnitzler’s novella: the playful romantic tale that Schumann’s composition recounts contrasts acutely with the back and forth between Dorsday and Else in the music room (see Chapter 1). While Czinner uses an entirely different frame, namely the visual cue of the child’s play instead of the meta-narrative underlying Schumann’s composition, it works along similar lines of narrative logic: if we were not privy to what motivates Else’s game of hide-and-seek we might find the cat-and-mouse game that mirrors Else’s simultaneous desire and reluctance to address Dorsday entertaining. The same applies to the novella: the romantic
exchange of love letters and playful amorous responses within Carnaval mirror the exchange of glances in the music room between Dorsday and Else. This is not the loving couple of the musical composition but a much darker relative of the lovers. In the following scenes the cat-and-mouse-game continues with a cinematographically strong message: Dorsday commands the camera just like he commands the waiters in the dining room and the lot of his debtors.

The scenes I have discussed thus far show how the camera holds Else captive, calling on the viewer to sympathize with her and establishing the societal forces that work upon her. In the next few sequences the camera will totally switch its loyalties. When Dorsday steps out of the dining room into the hallway, the camera is placed about twenty feet away. As soon as Dorsday starts moving towards the camera, however, the camera withdraws, tracking backwards. After a few steps Dorsday stops to engage in conversation with other hotel guests, and as soon as he stops, the camera, too, comes to a halt. The result is fascinating: while Else seemingly obeyed the camera’s pushes and pulls, it is now Dorsday, large and solidly positioned at the center of the frame, who is in power. He commands the camera’s movement by his mere presence, thus mirroring the societal conditions and the pressure exerted on Else. Dorsday is representative of the patriarchal society that demands of its daughters to be obedient and allows them agency
only so far as it benefits their social standing and/or improves their marriageability. The force that Dorsday exerts on the camera is akin to the societal forces exerted on Else. When Dorsday slowly walks down the hall and toward the camera which is lowering down to an angle as he comes down the stairs we see Else now appearing on top of his head in the shot as she slowly approaches the stairs. The low angle in combination with the deep field and the deep focus of the camera create an irresistible, palpable pull that suggests Else will be brought down by her quasi-pursuit of Dorsday (Figure 8).

The *Schwindelgefühl* is increased by the oedipal implications: Dorsday is her father’s age and interacts with Else as with a child, especially in the ball scene when he comforts her. As mentioned earlier, the many instances of Else doubling for her father also underscore the oedipal dimension of the narrative, an aspect that is hinted at throughout Schnitzler’s text but especially in the final few lines of the novella when Else hallucinates about her father kissing her hand and she admonishes him for the inappropriateness of his action.
The ball scene is yet another scene that asks the viewer to fully engage his or her senses: from a very high angle we see a crowded ball room, revolving couples touching each other as they try to circle about the room. While we as viewers let the sounds of a ball play in our heads, hear the music from the orchestra, feel the heat that dancing engenders and perceive the crowds touching, we are also strangely removed from the scene. This is a very different, more mature form of entertainment than Else has so far engaged in. She and Paul had been roaming the snow-covered environs of St. Moritz which is holding the 1928 Olympic Games. They are observing ice skaters and ski jumpers, practicing skijoring and having fun in the snow. They are outdoors in the cool, crisp air; the viewer can practically smell the wholesome freshness of the Swiss landscape.

Up to the arrival of the letter, Else is all wholesome, unvarnished girlishness, a striking contrast to the seductive Cissy Mohr, Paul’s love interest. As the film progresses, Else’s looks change, she turns from the innocent tomboy into a manicured and seductive femme fragile. And it is with her entrance to the ball room that Else finally enters into a realm of lost innocence. The ballroom is a space for adults to mingle and engage in physical contact that is socially acceptable, dancing the waltz which in its beginnings was considered highly immoral, not only because the man would hold his dance partner much closer than was the case with earlier pair dances, but also because the fast pace and the quick spinning around one’s axis in tandem induced a Schwindelgefühl similar to the inebriation of drinking too much wine. And just as after drinking comes the sobering, the intoxicating atmosphere of the ball room holds sobering realizations for Else.
As a bourgeois daughter her upbringing is geared towards becoming what society calls a “good catch,” a marriageable commodity that changes hands from the father to the husband. In Else’s case, though, the exchange is not accompanied by the security and rise in status that a marriage would have provided. This deal instead stresses the commodification of the young woman as it is reminiscent of his usual business ventures—spending money in the exchange for art. Czinner masterfully makes this association by setting up the “indecent proposal” scene as follows: After long takes of medium shots showing Else sitting on the sofa, sobbing, Dorsday trying to comfort her, we get a couple of point-of-view shots. We take on Dorsday’s perspective, looking down on Else’s small frame, her bare neck and arms and the big flower on the shoulder of her dress. This flower, a symbol frequently used in the arts to reference female genitalia, is the first unmistakable indication of Else’s sexual potential and Dorsday’s erotic interest in her. The camera cuts back to the familiar medium shot, Dorsday trying to comfort her, touching her hair and touching the flower on her shoulder. It is clear that he wants her, and he makes up his mind. In a medium shot we see both facing each other, the shadows of the waltzing couples dancing across the wall behind Else, emphasizing the disquieting quality of the encounter. Dorsday agrees to helping out her father, but he has a favor to ask in exchange: “Ich möchte Sie sehen” says the insert (Figure 9). Else does not understand what he means by that, so Dorsday points toward a corner of the room. We see a medium close-up of a small nude statue resting on
a side table. The art dealer lets art speak and name his price. Else turns around and they both look at the statue, Dorsday with his piercing monocle and a look of satisfaction, Else initially uncertain about what Dorsday had indicated. Slowly we can see the look of comprehension and disgust appear on her face.

Czinner skillfully juxtaposes shots of the nude statue and Else in a similar pose, her head hanging low and the face covered with her hands, to make comprehensible what remains left unsaid. Here, too, our attention is brought to the tactile surface, as we look at the small marble statue, a quiet earthen double for the troubled young woman.

After her return to her room a similar scene plays out as before (Figure 10): Else has received a message and is devastated by its implications. This time the messenger is Dorsday and Else is both price and prize. Compared to the first letter scene, Else’s dress has changed significantly and speaks visually of Else’s dilemma: while the white tulle skirt still suggests the playful little girl, the big silk flower on the shoulder strap of her sleeveless gown clearly suggests the sexual nature of her distress. As in the first letter scene, Else gets close to the mirror, touching the smooth, cold surface with her face. Before, she rehearsed her lines, asking Dorsday for the money; this time she is looking at her own reflection as if hoping for an answer, a way out of her dilemma. Just when she resolves not to accept Dorsday’s proposal and to return to Vienna as soon as possible, a bellboy delivers a telegram from her mother, urging the daughter to talk to Dorsday, or
else her father’s imprisonment was inevitable. This second letter scene has a much different character than the first. It is faster, more furious and intense, the pressures on Else to act are increasing and mise-en-scène and cinematography reflect this increase. In the first scene the colors of her dress were muted, her movements were slow, and the implications of the letter needed a long time to set in. This time, her senses are heightened, her dress is bright and showy, her movements are quicker and more erratic. She is already in a state of extreme agitation, the arrival of the telegram completely throwing her off balance, like a gyro spinning out of control. The camera shows us in no uncertain terms what will happen to her: after having read her mother’s pleas she drops out of the frame, onto the chair at her desk. The camera has lost sight and hold of her for a moment, just as Else has lost sight and hold of herself and her future. When the camera catches up with her face in a medium close-up, an unusually long take shows her weeping in despair, the flow of her tears welling up and ebbing down and up again. The pull of the tide of her tears has a visceral quality that the viewer witnesses and sympathizes with; we, too, are pulled in, and when she starts to quiet down and her face adopts an expression of remembering and resolve, we know the implications of the close-up that shows us the bottle of Veronal, hidden in the desk drawer which she just opened. In contrast to the novella where the drug is almost another character, referenced many times by Else as a means to escape (possibly only temporarily, as Else doubts the amount of pills would suffice to cause her death), in the film it only appears three times: when Paul hands the bottle to Else, when she takes it out of the drawer, and finally when the camera zooms in on the nightstand with an empty glass on top and the empty bottle beside it.
By visually connecting the empty glass of dissolved Veronal with the medication that Else’s mother hands her husband in order for him to recover from his attack, the viewer experiences a sense of déjà-vu: haven’t we seen this before and if so, where? The camera cuts to an opening door, and the dizzying déjà-vu we feel is mirrored by Else’s demeanor: enveloped in a sumptuous white fur coat that brings to mind Leopold Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus im Pelz*, a reference that emphasizes both the sexual nature of the events to come and the underlying theme of dominance and submission (Figure 11). Yet whereas Sacher-Masoch’s heroine is the dominant figure of the pair in the text, Else is on her way to performing an act of submission so shameful that she does not think she could go on living with its memory. Stumbling and dizzy due to the drugs, she holds on to the door frame and the wall while searching around. We know she is in Dorsday’s room as we have seen him pacing about a few shots earlier, waiting for Else to arrive. Much like Else’s father at the beginning of the film, he is shrouded in wafts of cigarette smoke and exhibits a similar nervousness as Alfred Thalhof. The doubling, of course, is no coincidence, given the oedipal implications of the setup. The Schwindelgefühl now has overtaken Else, naked underneath the white fur coat, and as she makes her way downstairs to find Dorsday she exclaims halfway that she is poisoned, to herself as much as to anyone who is listening. But no one is there, so she stumbles on, finally reaching the bar where Dorsday stands in conversation with a couple of laughing women wearing
flowers on their shoulders. The camera cuts back and forth and stays on Dorsday’s troubled gaze as Else opens her coat to reveal her nakedness. The camera zooms in on Else’s desperate face for a close-up (Figure 12), then tilts and goes out of focus: the dizziness has given way to swoon. The hectic fever that had struck Else now overtakes the entirety of the hotel guests, like ants they are swarming about, not getting enough of the scandal. When Paul finally returns from his tryst with Cissy he is told of the incident by the concierge and hurries to Else’s room, only to find the doctor putting down Else’s lifeless hand onto the bed sheet.

In a last doubling scene, we see Paul at Else’s bedside (Figure 13) much like mother Thalhof earlier on when trying to calm her husband (Figure 14). While she had made sure that her husband recovers from his attack, Paul had failed to be there for Else in her hour
of need. Else has taken care of her father’s unfinished business, both by fulfilling Dorsday’s condition to show herself naked to him and “earn” the loan, and by committing the suicide that he had earlier planned but failed to carry out.

Czinner’s use of cinematic tools—an eloquent camera, superimposition and fast cutting, a rigid frame that captures Else without hopes for escape, and techniques like doubling—all serve to relate the core issue of the story on a visceral level. His medium is visual, but by engaging the audience’s senses and sense memory he creates a haptic experience that makes us understand the struggle she is facing. We relive her haptic experience, we embody her *Schwindelgefühl* and understand what it means to encounter this kind of parental betrayal and have the rug pulled out from under our feet.
CONCLUSION

This study has shown how literature and film can harness our senses to communicate their artistic goals, taking advantage of the embodied nature of the reading and viewing experience and thereby affecting the audience’s process of meaning-making. By engaging the reader’s/viewer’s physical and emotional being through their respective tools, both art forms are well suited to capture the audience’s imagination in its entirety—intellectually as well as physically—by engaging the senses and the sense memory that provide the foundation for a more complete reading of a text. I have looked at the conditions in Vienna at the time of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that provided fertile ground for a turn away from reason as the primary vehicle of knowledge toward a more encompassing notion of the human mind and how sense experiences play a role in meaning-making and cognition.

Arthur Schnitzler employs visual cues like musical notation, typography, and also literary tools like quick jumps from one voice to another in Else’s endopolyphonic self-narration—a technique very similar to jump cuts and quick cross-cutting in cinema—to elicit in the reader a Schwindelgefühl that is instrumental to the reader’s understanding of the text and to embody the protagonist’s dilemma. Schnitzler juxtaposes the textual narrative of words with the musical narrative of Robert Schumann’s Carnaval, which results in a tension that gathers speed—a back and forth with a spin that pulls the reader
into a cognitive maelstrom which grounds our intellectual interpretation of the text in an embodied experience. He creates a protagonist with narcissistic and exhibitionist tendencies to form an interesting layer of friction between the nature of her character and Dorsday’s demand. Schnitzler emphasizes the oedipal aspects of the narrative and spins a tale of betrayal (*Schwindel*) for which *Schwindelgefühl* is the appropriate embodied reaction and a vehicle for a visceral comprehension of the text.

Paul Czinner’s tools are cinematic and range from superimpositions and violations of the rules of contiguity editing to an eloquent camera that serves to capture the societal conditions and restraints that Else finds herself in, whose recognition leads to her breakdown and suicide. While the camera pushes and pulls on Else, capturing her without letting go, Dorsday is the one who commands the camera and steers it with his mere presence. Although *Fräulein Else* is a so-called “silent” film, the experience of viewing it is anything but silent in that the images evoke aural memories and associations: our mind provides the appropriate soundscape, for instance when we see a crowded street scene or a lively brass band playing in a busy ballroom. We imagine the sound of a gong when we see a close-up of one, but we also recognize the absence of sound at the sight of an alpine landscape covered by a pristine layer of snow with no trace of human existence.

The 1920s, also known as the “Golden Twenties” were a period of economic prosperity in the Western world and a creative, liberal phase in the arts and in society. Old morals were being questioned, and artistic traditions challenged; audiences had gotten used to the edgy work of artists like the painter George Grosz or the writer/composer-duo Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, designers and architects of the
Bauhaus and painters of Der Blaue Reiter, or the director Fritz Lang. They were largely not interested in seeing a bourgeois daughter struggling with a seemingly insignificant act of frivolity. Few recognized Czinner’s brilliance as an original filmmaker, and saw it instead as yet another conventional adaptation of a successful literary work with the best actors of the time. Yet he was anything but conventional in his skilled use of cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing to affect the viewer’s whole being via the visual sense alone. As Lotte Eisner wrote in her book on German Expressionist film, Dämonische Leinwand, “[Czinner] bringt Pausen, die beredt wirken, die keinerlei erklärender Zwischentitel bedürfen, und die ganze Atmosphäre vibriert von dieser schweigenden Beredsamkeit […]” (quoted in Wolf 94). Czinner engages the viewer’s sense memory not only to enrich the cinematic experience, but also to underscore the opposing forces that pull on the protagonist to effect a visceral understanding of her predicament.

I have drawn on theoretical approaches from reader-response to adaptation theory with a focus on the embodied nature of the reading and viewing experience, using the “haptic” as a mediator between the distance senses of vision and hearing and the proximal sense of touch and visceral response. My attention in analyzing the film was entirely turned to the experience of the moviegoer who finds herself in the black box of the theatre. In recent years, of course, technology has greatly evolved, and so have the possibilities of film-viewing. The cinema is only one place for watching films, albeit the only one designated for that purpose. We can access films from dozens of platforms, like YouTube, Roku, Netflix, or Amazon; we view them on screens greatly varying in size, from the oversize projection screen of the home theatre to the pocket-size smartphone;
and we can do all that whenever and wherever we choose. We can pause, rewind, fast forward, even view several films at once on a split screen. All these factors greatly influence our reception of a film, and many filmmakers take the medium into account on which they expect their audience to consume their product. Long takes and extreme long shots do not work on a small screen, to give just one example.

For literature, too, the medium of distribution has evolved, a factor that I did not elaborate on in studying Schnitzler’s novella, as my focus was less on the tactile experience that the reader has when holding a book in her hands as opposed to a digital reading device, but to the sensuous responses that are evoked by the text itself. Shifting the focus to these changes in film technology and how they affect the embodied reader is certainly a valuable topic for future research.

Another worthwhile endeavor would be to turn back to fin-de-siècle Vienna. The quest for truth was at the heart of many academic and artistic undertakings, philosophy and the arts cross-fertilizing; long-held positions on the value of certain forms of artistic expression were questioned. It would be fruitful to take a wider interdisciplinary approach, examining the interplay between philosophy and the arts—visual, literary, and performing—and how they sounded out the senses as vehicles of knowledge beyond the realm of language. The modernists in literature and music tried to find new ways of interpreting a modern world for which old artistic strategies seemed insufficient. A persistent distrust in words as carriers of universal meaning and a need for a fresh look at language was common to all disciplines. Ludwig Wittgenstein investigated the limits of language as the limits of our world, and Arnold Schönberg invented a whole new language for musical expression, the twelve-tone system. Hugo von Hofmannsthal
immortalized his (and his fellow poets’) language crisis in his famous Chandos Brief and was greatly interested in pantomime, film, and Ausdruckstanz (expressionist dance).

My wish is to position this paper as a point of departure for a closer examination of how the reality of embodiment affects the reading and viewing experience, and especially how this embodiment can transgress borders and limitations of all kind. Both Arthur Schnitzler and Paul Czinner tell a story of societal structures and conventions, of desire and helplessness, but to an effect that makes these issues more universal and relevant to the viewer. By engaging the senses, they affect their audiences on a visceral level that enables a kind of meaning-making that is subliminal and can overcome cultural limitations such as gender, social sphere, or—to a certain degree—language. As readers of the novella and viewers of the film, we have embodied Else’s trauma and partaken in the Schwindelgefühl that is so essential to her experience. We do not need to be or know a lot about what it was like to be a young woman of the upper class in Vienna in the early twentieth century to feel for her, because we have—felt with her, that is. This visceral empathy leads us to a more direct understanding and also an identification with the character that transcends the character itself. We are Else, whoever we are.
WORKS CITED


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*Fräulein Else*. Director: Paul Czinner. Cinematography: Karl Freund. Cast: Elisabeth Bergner (Else Thalhof), Albert Bassermann (Dr. Alfred Thalhof), Albert Steinrück (Herr von Dorsday), Else Heller (Frau Thalhof), Adele Sandrock (Tante Emma), Jack Trevor (Paul) and Grit Hegesa (Cissy Mohr). RaroVideo, 2009. DVD.


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