THE PLEASURE OF PAIN IN *THE PIANO TEACHER*. TRAJECTORY OF A SADEAN PERSPECTIVE: VIOLENCE, PERVERSION AND SELF-DESTRUCTION*

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"Crime, when examined closely, is nothing more than the energy of the passions carried to the extreme."
(Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*)

"Man's desire is the desire of the Other."
(Jacques Lacan, Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*)

BETWEEN DEBORD AND SADE, NARRATION AND SUBJECTIVITY IN *THE PIANO TEACHER*

This article presents a textual analysis of *The Piano Teacher* (La Pianiste, Michael Haneke, 2001) from a narratological perspective, an approach that facilitates the identification of the dramatic strategies that contribute to the construction of the film's discourse. The analysis focuses particularly on the articulation of the narrative across the temporal arc of four of the eight nights that structure the film. Due to the limited scope of this study, only the first, third, fourth and fifth nights are analysed. The first night establishes the context of the story, lays the film's aesthetic foundations, introduces the main characters and creates a stifling, repressive atmosphere. The third night is also a key sequence for the way it distances the spectator from the protagonist's perverse gaze on pornographic videos, while playing with perspectives in a manner that suggests our active participation in the viewing experience. For the fourth and fifth nights, the implied narrator depicts Erika's drive to find pleasure in pain with a cold, bleak tone completely alien to the conventions of mainstream cinema. These four nights are all key to appreciating how the story is constructed in a metacinematic operation that appeals to the spectator through the perverse voyeurism foreshadowed on the third night.

The main objective of this study is to chart the trajectory of Erika's inner world from the perspective of the Sadean universe. The notions of desire, power and the transgression of bourgeois con-

ventions as Haneke interprets them are explored here in dialogue with the universe of Elfriede Jelinek, the author of the novel of the same name on which the film is based. The exploration is informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, which can be drawn on to explain the political and sexual violence endemic to the contemporary world, as well as the relationship between violence and desire.

Based on the above considerations, this analysis will reflect on "freedom and its limits" and "the close relationship between freedom and evil" (Carrera, 2023: 7). Moreover, the importance of Franz Schubert's music in the film will also be discussed, with the aim of unravelling the layers of psychological and sexual violence present in the relationship between the protagonists.

In short, this analysis reveals how the film exposes the signs of decadence in an image-consuming society, a critique that bears commonalities with Guy Debord's notions related to the society of the spectacle. Both Debord and Haneke understand that this society is articulated "around a set of symbols and representations established as a model for living where the spectacle has turned into a nightmare" (Ferrando, 2013: 110). Critics such as Grundmann (2010) argue that Haneke uses the camera to subvert the spectator's voyeurism: what Erika's self-destruction seeks is not compassion but confrontation. On the other hand, López Agulló (2014) stresses that violence in contemporary cinema is a symptom of the loss of real points of reference. In Haneke's film, Schubert's music serves not to enhance the emotion but to underscore the dissonance between the piano teacher's perfect technique and the fragmented nature of her psyche. Her final self-destruction is presented as the only way out for a character who has been unable to find a place in the symbolic order beyond the mark on her own skin, reflecting the close relationship between freedom and evil in the work of the Austrian filmmaker.

A FEW THEORETICAL POINTS

Film text analysis is an approach that interrogates the very materiality of the film. Its origins can be traced back to the notion of displacement proposed by Roland Barthes, who differentiates the *work* (the physical, closed object) from the *text* (a methodological field for the production of meaning). For Barthes, the text is "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, bend and clash" (1977: 146). This means that the analyst has to "dissect" the text in order to observe how the codes are interwoven to generate a plurality of meanings.

In the foundational period of film semiotics, Christian Metz (2002) tried to apply the categories of structural linguistics to film. Metz postulated that cinema lacks a language in the Saussurian sense, but possesses a "grand syntagma" that organises the units of sound and image. However, contemporary textual analysis focuses more on markers of enunciation. As Jesús González Requena suggests, textual analysis involves a "reading to the letter" (2006:14), an effort to take a position at the origins of meaning, where the text ceases to be a mere vehicle of information and becomes instead an aesthetic object that confronts us with our own desire and lack.

Edward Branigan revolutionised this field by connecting the structure of the narrative to the spectator's mental processes. Branigan introduced the notion that storytelling is a process of world-building where concepts such as *focalisation* (who sees or who knows) and *ocularisation* (the relationship between the camera and the character's point of view) determine the aesthetic experience. According to Branigan (1992: 112), focalisation is not merely a question of camera angle, but of a level of subjectivity that filters the diegetic reality. This is crucial in *The Piano Teacher*, where the external focalisation distances us from Erika's tragic pathos.

Francisco Javier Gómez Tarín underscores the importance of the subject of the enunciation or the *meganarrator*, arguing that the film narrative is the product of a discursive intent that organises sensory material to guide the spectator's gaze (2011: 45). Gaudreault and Jost (2004) also contribute concepts of importance to this study, such as the notion of the delegated narrator and the distinction between the time of the narration and the time of story, which explains the segmentation of the film into eight nights as a strategy to track the pace of the character's decline.

To understand the architecture of pain in *The Piano Teacher*, it is imperative to consider the distinction Jacques Lacan makes between pleasure and *jouissance* (ecstasy or rapture). While the pleasure principle seeks balance, *jouissance* is located in a realm where the drive is satisfied through transgression and suffering. Lacan connects Kant's position to Sade's, suggesting that Kant's moral law and Sade's will-to-*jouissance* are two sides of the same coin. As López Agulló points out, "perversion is not a mere deviation, but a structure whereby the subject becomes the instrument of the Other's *jouissance*" (2014: 56). In the Sadean universe, crime is the energy of the passions taken to the extreme, a premise that Haneke conveys in the suffocating relationship between Erika Kohut and her mother.

The Lacanian concept of *jouissance* is expressed in Erika as an inability to achieve symbolic mediation. For authors such as Žižek (2012), the contemporary subject is trapped in an imperative of *jouissance* that ultimately nullifies desire. In Erika's case, desire has been petrified in a ritual of pain. By establishing a sadomasochistic contract with Walter, she attempts to regulate her *jouissance*, transforming the chaos of the drive into a structured script of humiliation.

The textual analysis presented here aims to show the film's use of a narratological device that nullifies the spectator's gratification to expose the impossible nature of a shared eroticism in an image-consuming society where *jouissance* is geared towards self-destruction. The working hypothesis is that Erika's downfall lies in her attempt to regulate her *jouissance* through a Sadean contract that the Other (Walter) cannot fulfil, demonstrating that desire has been replaced with a simulacrum of violence that can only find truth in self-harm. The explanation for this approach is articulated in the film's eight-night structure, where the narratological theories of Branigan and Gómez Tarín help expose the workings of the visual trap, and Lacanian psychoanalysis explains Erika's existential emptiness.

THE EIGHT NIGHTS OF *THE PIANO TEACHER*: NARRATION, DESIRE AND CONFINEMENT

The film is set in contemporary Vienna. Erika Kohut (Isabelle Huppert), a prestigious piano teacher, lives trapped between two oppressive worlds: the home she shares with a possessive, domineering mother (Annie Girardot), and the conservatory where she asserts strict control over her students. Behind this façade of discipline, she lives a secret life of voyeurism and sadomasochistic practices.

The arrival of Walter Klemmer (Benoît Magimel), a talented and seductive young pianist, awakens a contradictory desire in Erika: she is attracted to him, but afraid to give herself to him. Their attempts to interact lead to a perverse game of power, humiliation and violence, in which Erika projects her deepest and darkest impulses. Rejected by Walter when she shares her fantasies with him, and consumed by her jealousy of Anna, her brightest student, Erika is set firmly on a path towards self-destruction.

The music of Schubert, which is repeated constantly throughout the story like a tragic echo, serves as musical accompaniment to the private breakdown of a woman unable to reconcile her desire with the rigid structure of her life, until at last her repressed passion turns into an open wound.

In general terms, the film can be described as having an eight-night structure. However, it is important to note that this time-frame is not obviously apparent in a first viewing, as there are no explicit markers of the passage of time. Each night is in turn linked to Erika's daytime life. With no clear temporal delimitations, the days and nights flow together and even blur into each other, as many scenes are filmed indoors in dark, windowless settings. As a result, the spaces have both a nocturnal atmosphere—the film's final sequence also takes place at night—and a claustrophobic feeling suggestive of confinement and repression. Moreover, the film's sequences are long, as the diegetic time of each one is similar to the actual viewing time. This technique strengthens the dramatic intensity and enhances the reality effect. The *meganarrator* accompanies the characters constantly, observing their gestures and actions, without mediating or intervening in the events, in an effort to act as impartial voice.

It is reasonable to argue that the most significant sequences are the ones that take place at night, as it is in these that the relationship triangle of Erika, her mother and Walter is established. Conversely, the daytime sequences in the conservatory depict the events in her classes and her professional routines, such as her rehearsals with her colleagues. In these scenes, we see her other side, characterised by an emasculating attitude towards her students that reflects the repressive influence of her mother. Both the lessons and the rehearsals contribute to the construction of Erika's psychological duality. The remarks she makes to her students about the music of Schubert, Bach or Beethoven ultimately reveal her own inner crisis.

However, this duality is diluted—or rather, contradicted—every time Walter Klemmer enters the scene. His appearance provokes a psychological conflict that reaches a climax in the final part of the film: Erika gives into her feelings for the young student, but her perverse side clashes head-on with the rigid self-censorship imposed by her mother.

In general terms, the film's eight-night structure can be broken down as follows:

Night	Description of the narrative action
1.	Setting the story–context: first domestic fight between Erika and her mother
2.	Erika meets Walter: private recital at the Blonskijs' House (11:20)
3.	Erika visits an adult video shop (23:38)
4.	Erika is at home with her mother; cuts her genitals with a blade (33:53)
5.	Visit to the drive-in: another perverse voyeuristic experience (46:05)
6.	Walter invades the family home and discovers Erika's sadomasochistic tendencies (1:20:33)
7.	Walter rapes Erika in the family home (1:46:32)
8.	Moments prior to the jubilee concert; Erika substitutes for Anna. She stabs herself in the chest and leaves the conservatory (2:01:24)

Erika's solitary wanderings at night reveal the trajectory of her perverse sexual practices. On all these outings, she wears her characteristic beige trenchcoat and brown gloves; in addition, in certain key scenes she also wears a headscarf with pictures of keys on it. This choice of attire evokes the conventional image of the *voyeur* or the flasher. Only towards the end of the film is there a significant change to her outfit: on the sixth night, after returning home, she appears wearing a red hat, a dark brown coat and an orange blouse. The contrast with the dull colours she wears in the first hour of the film (black, grey, brown) suggests an external expression of her emotions associated with falling in love, beginning in the conservatory bathroom scene when she has her first sexual encounter with Walter.

Later, Walter's rejection of Erika after she gives him the letter—an anachronistic act of communication—drives her to retreat into herself: she starts wearing her trenchcoat again, like a protective shield over her inner world, "dominated by the desire to be subjugated, humiliated and abused, in accordance with the standard definition of the sadomasochist." As their relationship develops, the gaping chasm between Erika's and Walter's ideas of romantic love is revealed, explicitly exposing her deviations from "normal affective expression" (Von Sacher-Masoch/Sampedro, 2000: 9; 21).

The first hour of the film thus constructs a recognisable image of the visual prototype of a sexual exhibitionist, highlighting the trouble Erika has interacting with the Other's body without projecting her own erotic ghosts onto it.

FAMILY, POWER AND REPRESSION: THE FIRST NIGHT IN *THE PIANO TEACHER*

The film's opening sequence constitutes a veritable statement of intent in both formal and discursive terms. At the very beginning, Haneke foreshadows the key narrative theme of the mother-daughter relationship and introduces us to the Hanekian universe, characterised by its reconstruction of the extreme abnormalities of the bourgeois family.

In the first scene, the camera is positioned in the semi-darkness of the entrance hall: Erika enters wearing her trenchcoat and brown gloves, shown in a medium shot. Haneke places mother and daughter in the same visual frame, thereby underscoring the symmetrical and oppressive tension of their relationship. Erika's action of closing and locking the front door hints at her confinement in a claustrophobic space with no real possibility of escape.

Their struggle over the bag and the brown dress accentuates the conflict between the two women. The clinking sound of the keys in Erika's gloved hand, which she then throws onto the chest in the hall, symbolises her submission to her mother's power. The fight reaches its climax when it turns physical, as Erika pulls her mother's hair in a close-up that places the violence right in front of us. Haneke inserts an action match-cut here that takes us suddenly from the clash between mother and daughter to a scene from a German TV hospital drama. This abrupt cut creates a disturbing contrast: physical violence in the family gives way to another kind of violence, now verbal, in a television drama showing a nurse severely rebuking a sexist patient.



Image 1

Haneke thus articulates a sequence that presents us first with the television program footage and then shows Erika's mother watching it. The sudden replacement of a real conflict with a fictional one tells us something of Mrs. Kohut's daily life, which is limited to watching Erika's musical performances and spending long hours in front of the TV. The cut also serves as a dramatic ellipsis that resets the emotional climate between mother and daughter: the violence is over and a truce has been called. The two women make up to one another in tears: Erika behaves like a repentant child, while her mother resorts to emotional blackmail, portraying herself as the victim of a temperamental heritage.

This game of dominance and submission between mother and daughter recalls what Bataille



Image 2

refers to as "intimacy in the extreme" (1988: 63), where the affective bond is inseparably mixed with cruelty. At the same time, the claustrophobia of the scene evokes Haneke's description of the bourgeois family as a "sounding board for repressed violence" (2012: 45). It is relevant to note that Sade himself suggested that "power is exerted more strongly in domestic spaces, where the victim has no escape" (1990: 212). This idea is central to Erika's confinement in her family home.

BODIES, GAZES AND SCREENS: FROM EROTICISM TO OBSCENITY ON THE THIRD NIGHT

On the third and fifth nights (23:08), what has been concealed up to now is revealed. From the first sequence, when the camera enters the family home, it offers us a privileged view of Erika's vicissitudes. However, we gradually discover the other side of her life: what happens behind closed doors, after classes and rehearsals. In this context, the sequence articulates an *external ocularisation* (Gaudreault & Jost, 2004: 72), following Erika from the outside in order to portray her inner turmoil without ever penetrating into her thoughts or feelings.

The knowledge we gain about the protagonist is thus limited by *external focalisation* (Gaudreault & Jost, 2004: 75). The implied narrator adopts a distanced perspective, observing the gestures, movements and actions of Erika's body without intervening in them or offering us direct access to her mind. This type of focalisation has a critical distancing effect whereby the spectator bears witness to the protagonist's inner tension through her actions and her interaction with the space rather than through a direct subjective narrative. The combination of an external ocularisation with a distanced implied narrator creates a dual dynamic, bringing us closer to Erika in the sense that it enables us to observe her gestures and behaviour in detail, but maintaining a cognitive distance from her inner world, reinforcing the tension and the mystery that surrounds her private life.

On this day, Erika goes first to the house of some friends to rehearse. As soon as she enters their apartment, her friend reminds her to phone her mother, hinting at the extreme level of parental surveillance she must endure. Erika makes the call from the bedroom of her friend's young daughter. She explains that she will need at least three hours for the rehearsal, in a conversation that makes it clear why she was seeking time to get away on the first night. The phone call reinforces the oppressive atmosphere: Erika's mother insists that she take a taxi home. This dialogue conveys the constant infantilisation to which her mother subjects her.

After the call, the musicians rehearse Schubert's famous piece *Piano Trio No. 2, Opus 100*. However, the direct visual cut that follows—showing Erika walking through a shopping centre while the music continues—establishes a decisive expressive contrast: the *diegetic* music becomes *extra-diegetic*, accompanying the protagonist as she walks. A lateral tracking shot follows her as she walks on, lost in thought, dressed in her beige trench coat and brown gloves. When a passer-by accidentally bumps into her she reacts with disgust, rubbing her shoulder twice, as if trying to wipe off the stain the contact has left on her body. Haneke thus indicates the imbalance between Erika's body and the world around her: she is in a daze, engrossed in the Schubert melody that fills her mind.



Image 3

Her self-absorption ends abruptly when she enters a video shop. The camera keeps its distance: the *implied narrator* observes without intervening. The *extradiegetic* music continues, drowning out the ambient noise and becoming a *marker of enunciation* that distances us from what we see. Schubert's music is still playing when footage from four different porn videos appear on a multiscreen. The spectator shares Erika's experience, hearing Schubert's music while seeing the obscene images, creating a radical contrast between high culture and consumer culture. This technique recalls Guy Debord's description of the *society of the spectacle*, in which "every social connection is transformed into a relationship mediated by images" (Debord, 2002: 45). Haneke turns the spectator into an accomplice in this indiscriminate consumption of images. Schubert's music functions as a distancing device in the Brechtian sense, but also as a critical question posed by the *meganarrator*: how do we react to this bombardment of images?

When the music stops, Erika continues to watch the video with calm indifference. First we see the split screen, then her inexpressive face. The match cut between the two maintains continuity but also highlights the emotional fracture: Erika is unmoved. The repeated overhead shots—a woman performing fellatio filmed from above, showing the man's point of view—echoes other overhead shots in the film, particularly those that show hands on the keys of a piano.[1] In this way, Haneke constructs a visual connection between mechanical eroticism and piano technique. As Bataille points out, "transgression always links eroticism and death through the gaze" (1988: 117). Sade reminds us that "true sensuality demands the humiliation of the object" (1990: 212), and in this scene the pornographic device deploys this logic of domination. But Haneke does more than merely reproduce it: he films it from a distance that exposes the mechanical, almost banal nature of obscenity. As the filmmaker himself explains: "I show violence not to excite, but to make the viewer think about the gaze that consumes violence" (2012: 62).

On this third night, romantic music, pornographic banality and critical distance all converge on a space that exposes the tension between desire and spectacle. Erika thus becomes the epicentre of a dialectic that swings between intimate voyeurism and a direct appeal to the spectator.

BETWEEN MASOCHISM AND VOYEURISM: THE MANAGEMENT OF PLEASURE AND THE GAZE IN *THE PIANO TEACHER* ON THE FOURTH AND FIFTH NIGHTS

While on the fourth night we witness self-mutilation when Erika cuts her own genitals with a blade (an action that her mother confuses with menstruation), on the fifth night we are shown another abnormal form of sexual behaviour. In this case, Erika adopts a passive role, becoming a *voyeur* as she spies on a couple copulating inside a car. She witnesses the sexual act indiscreetly—as we do, as the spectators who share her point of view—but she also becomes aroused by it and masturbates shortly before the young man (played by the well-known Austrian actor George Friedrich) becomes aware of her indiscretion. Thus, in this new sequence we are left with no doubt that "Erika's attitude towards her body is negative, clearly masochistic, and completely impulsive, which she inscribes on her own flesh in the form of self-mu-

tilation: a wounded body that abuses itself, a body that denies itself pleasure but does not renounce it, that can only watch it but not experience it or let others experience it" (Imbert, 2010: 133).

With a bleak mood obviously influenced by the murky atmosphere created by Jelinek in the novel on which the film is based, Haneke introduces us to a woman who simultaneously plays the role of victim (of her mother) and executioner (of her young lover) in a perverse balancing act. It is precisely her refusal to accept her own body as a vehicle for satisfying her carnal desires that leads her to take refuge in her sordid fantasies and to experience pleasure through the *jouissance* of others, as is made clear in the sequence at the drive-in. In this way, the body is constructed in accordance with "the staging that Sade used for his own philosophical ideas", as it opens "the door to radically new ways of dismantling social and sexual norms, gender hierarchies and the independence between freedom and evil... and without seeking forgiveness for it" (Mahon, 2023: 17).

After the encounter with her pupil, Erika shuts herself in the bathroom to cut her genitalia with a razor blade, shown in a wide shot. This scene lasts for three minutes, during which Haneke devotes much more time to all the ablutions she carries out before and after her self-mutilation than to the act itself. Erika cuts her genitals with the aid of a small mirror; only she can see the wound inflicted on her body clearly. We only see it from afar. The camera maintains a discreet distance so as not to turn the image into an obscene display similar to the inserts that are so common in pornographic productions. Erika does not experience any sexual pleasure or satisfaction from the self-harm she inflicts. She experiences the *jouissance* of the masochist. As Gérard Imbert astutely points out, Haneke exposes "a ceremony of pain [...], an act of absolute denial of pleasure, a way of cutting it off, of preventing it from becoming a reality" (2010: 133). This type of punishment of her own body manifests itself as a symptom of a malaise of the subject, a denial of life itself, but above all a rejection of sexuality, constituting a personality disorder.

The scene at the drive-in similarly points to this denial of pleasure while at the same time revealing Erika's *scopic drive*, which replaces what



Image 4

she might experience and feel with the *Other*, separating her from her relationship with the *real*. It is important to note here that Haneke does not adapt the original scene from Jelinek's novel, which takes place on the Prater in Vienna. Instead, he relocates the scene at a drive-in cinema, thereby creating a projection that transcends the framework of the story. He is thus able to create a "shifting of frames of reference" as Oliver C. Speck (2010: 1-3) points out, with the purpose of vesting the succession of images with new meaning.

On the one hand, we are the sole witnesses to Erika's sexual acts and desires. On the other, with the help of the editing, we are also invited to participate in the *jouissance* of the scopic drive by looking at the couple making love inside a car, while always being aware that throughout the scene a film for commercial consumption is being projected in the *diegetic* space. Throughout this narrative sequence, Haneke alternates the shots of Erika at the drive-in with images of her mother watching television at home. The voyeurism of spectators at the cinema has always had a forbid-

den quality. In the context of the excitement of big cities, where audiences gather in the darkness of the theatre, it also constitutes a transgressive act. The *mise en abyme* created by the filmmaker throughout the drive-in sequence hints at "the cinemagoers' furtive desire for a kind of vicarious phallic *jouissance* [...]. Erika is here identified with the motif of the key and the keyhole. As she leaves the snack bar to wander around, the medium close-up of her head, juxtaposed against numerous screens behind her, makes the pictured keys on her headscarf distinguishable" (Naquvi, Koné, 2010: 132).

Afterwards, the *meganarrator* returns to take us back to the Kohuts' house. This change of setting interrupting Erika's actions is introduced to suspend the piano teacher's story for a moment in order to build the suspense for the spectator. Its inclusion may also be intended to show how boring life is for her mother, whose only domestic activities consist of drinking a few glasses of white wine and watching TV, when she is not monitoring her daughter's comings and goings. In addition, it enables the spectator to retroactively fill in the protagonist's backstory: at this point, we begin to understand that what Erika is looking for on her nighttime outings is liberation.

After the brief scene of Erika's mother watching television, we return once again to the drive-in. The camera trucks left in a medium POV shot as Erika weaves through the cars. For a few moments, we are struck by the silence of her surroundings; all we can hear in the foreground are her footsteps. In this way, we see what Erika sees as she walks across the car park. Haneke aligns our point of view with Erika's, allowing us to imagine that we are as indiscreet as she is. Then we cut to a medium shot of Erika herself, wearing the scarf with the pictures of keys wrapped around her head. After approaching the car, she watches the couple having sex inside in a hypnotic state and becomes aroused as the couple's moans of pleasure grow more intense. She squats down while she watches them, and at the same time begins to urinate. She closes her eyes and appears to become excited. Her face shows all the signs of an orgasm, as if she were ejaculating. Her lips part, and for a moment it seems as if the sound of the woman's panting is emanating from Erika's mouth. Tears run down her face. Her expression at this moment is significant because until now she has not revealed any kind of any kind of emotion, except when she picks up a used paper towel in the booth at the adult video shop to smell the semen on it. She identifies with the sexual object of the same gender during the act of penetration; that is, with the anonymous young woman copulating in the vehicle, who moans with pleasure, oblivious all the while to the presence of the piano teacher. Of relevance to this point, Fatima Naqvi and Koné Christophe cite an insight offered by the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel on the role of identification in the process of the gaze: "Anyone who desires to witness the sexual activities of a man and woman really always desires to share their experience by a process of empathy, generally in a homosexual sense" (2010: 68).

While in Jelinek's novel this identification is embodied in the figure of the Other through the character of a Turkish man having sex at the Prater amusement park, in the film adaptation it is represented by a well-known star of Austrian

Image 5







Image 6 and 7

cinema, George Friedrich, who often plays lower-class, proletarian characters.

This whole narrative sequence serves to maintain the linear progression of the story, although the order of narrative causality is disrupted here as the effect is placed before the cause. Erika arrives home late because of her sordid wanderings, and when she does we witness her mother's fury. We then bear witness to the daily love-hate ritual between mother and daughter that we already had the opportunity to see in the first sequence of the film. When Erika comes home, we recognise the same framing and similar lighting (the dark entrance hall). The scene ends abruptly right after her mother suddenly announces that Erika's father has died. It is an announcement that catches us by surprise because at the private recital Erika has mentioned her father's death. This confession leads her to ruminate on the decline and death of musicians, but she also projects her family experience onto Adorno's reflections on Schumann's *Fantasie in C Major*. These comments are contributions inserted by Haneke that are not included in Jelinek's novel. They stand in contrast to her mother's deranged and paralysing attitude, since the erudite words spoken by Erika to Walter convey a great emotional intensity and, in turn, offer a glimpse of the *meganarrator*'s voice.

Despite her emotional imperviousness, Erika is able to convey intimate thoughts through classical music. Only in this way can we appreciate her emotional dimension. She projects her feelings about her late father onto her artistic heritage through her identification with musicians whose death she experiences on the same emotional level. It is the only way she has of freeing herself from her repression. Music helps her to exert control over the Other, to exploit her privileged position of power. However, when she has to express herself with her body, music nullifies her authority. She is unable to control and subdue her own gaze, as becomes absolutely clear whenever Walter appears. The final part of the film expands on this idea.

Unlike the servile Turkish man in Jelinek's novel, who quickly falls silent again and gives up his futile search for the stalker, the boyfriend at the drive-in cinema explodes with anger and furiously pursues Erika. We thus bear witness to the moment when the piano teacher's and the young man's gazes meet at close range. His anger has been triggered by her observation of him, usurping, according to the narrator, the natural role of the male spectator. This space becomes the site of Erika's perverse voyeurism, as beneath her designer trenchcoat lies a desire to control the male gaze and make it public "by displaying herself as keyhole" (Naquvi & Koné, 2010: 133).

Erika's voyeurism links the scenes at the drive-in and at the adult video shop through a sensory shift from sight to touch and smell. In both cases,

the *jouissance* of pain and sensory stimulation are synaesthetic experiences exclusive to Erika. The spectator, on the other hand, is excluded from this pleasure due to the presence of an implied narrator that imposes a distancing effect using the camera and the editing. This detachment is evident in Erika's sexual encounter with Walter at the conservatory. After he closes the door and puts on the "locked" sign, the camera denies us a view of what is going on inside. In the act, Erika demands that Walter look only at her, while the mise-en-scène, based on medium shots and the contrast between Walter's dark clothing and the blinding whiteness of the bathroom, undermines the scene's visibility. This visual and spatial coldness foreshadows Erika's loneliness at the skating rink after her failed romantic encounter.



Image 8

Erika possesses the ability to master and challenge the gaze, while the implied narrator denies us access to the depiction of desire. This break with the syntax of classical cinema prevents us from being able to identify with the camera, undermining our expectations and turning us into excluded witnesses. Through this dynamic, the film "thematizes the process whereby the spectators are shut out from the image. They are often aligned with Erika [...] and her desire to control the view as well as her inability to do so is abundantly obvious. The melodramatic tragedy of this woman is that she wants to be the subject and the object of the gaze at the same time [...]; she wants to see without being seen [...]; she wants to be seen while directing and controlling Walter's (and our) gaze. In this, she is very much like the director himself" (Naquvi & Koné, 2010: 137).

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of The Piano Teacher confirms that Michael Haneke constructs a narrative device aimed not at satisfying the spectator's scopic drive, but at interrogating it. Over the course of the eight nights that form the basic structure of the film, Erika Kohut embodies the tension between desire, power and repression, in a context dominated by observation, violence and the impossibility of reconciling pleasure with everyday life. In this sense, the film engages directly with the Sadean tradition. Sade argued that "crime, when looked at closely, is nothing but the energy of passions carried to the extreme" (1990: 212). Erika represents precisely this unbridled energy which, unable to find normative channels of satisfaction, leads to self-destruction. It is not pleasure that Erika enjoys but its denial: self-mutilation, clandestine voyeurism, humiliation as the full extent of desire. Haneke updates Sade's legacy for contemporary times, revealing how freedom can be distorted into something evil, how desire can be transformed into a machinery of suffering, and how intimacy can turn into a battleground.

From a Lacanian perspective, the relationship between Erika and Walter illustrates the dead end that desire leads to when it is articulated in sadomasochistic terms. Lacan points out that "man's desire is the desire of the *Other*" (1991: 235), and in *The Piano Teacher* that *Other* becomes an agent of domination or submission, but never a romantic partner. Erika's masochism expresses an attempt to become the object of the Other's *jouissance*, erasing her own subjectivity to find recognition in humiliation. However, where love—un-

derstood by Lacan (2011) as "giving what one does not have to someone who does not exist"—might have arisen, violence emerges instead, because the sadomasochistic dialectic impedes reciprocity. Love assumes an acceptance of lack and an openness to otherness; conversely, the connection between Erika and Walter reveals the impossibility of such an experience, as they become trapped in an economy of power and pain that precludes any genuine encounter with the Other.

It might therefore be argued that Haneke contrasts sharply with Antonioni's aesthetics when it comes to exploring the relationship between sex and the world today. In his analysis of certain behaviours in Antonioni's filmography, Deleuze wrote that "we are sick from Eros because Eros himself is objectively sick: "what has become of love if a man or a woman must end up so defenceless, withered and grieving, and act so badly at the beginning and the end in a corrupted society?" (Hernández Les, 2009:127).

Georges Bataille helps explain this liminal dimension of erotic experience, suggesting that "eroticism is assenting to life even in death" (1988: 63). Indeed, for Erika, sexuality is confused with pain and self-destruction. The scene with the blade on the fourth night, the scene of her humiliation in front of Walter, and even the film's final scene where she stabs herself in the chest express a central paradox: the body is not a site of pleasure, but a territory of atonement. What Erika seeks is not a shared eroticism, but a *jouissance* that can only be consummated in suffering, in the closing up of her own body. The "ceremony of pain" (Imbert, 2010: 133) replaces the act of love, confirming that in Haneke's work eroticism is shaped by the death drive.

At the same time, Guy Debord offers a theoretical framework that is essential for contextualising the implicit social criticism in Haneke's film. In The Society of the Spectacle, Debord argues that "[e]verything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (2014: 2). The scene in the video shop on the third night is a perfect illustration of this diagnosis: the contrast between Schubert's music and the banality of the pornographic images exposes how spectacle has colonised intimacy and turned desire into a commodity. Erika consumes obscene images with the same indifference with which her mother consumes television; both are trapped in a regime of representation that nullifies the authentic experience of the body and of human connection.

Haneke thus articulates a filmmaking approach that calls into question the role of the spectator. As the filmmaker himself explains: "I show violence not to excite people, but to make them think about the gaze that consumes violence" (Haneke, 2012: 62). In The Piano Teacher, this approach translates into a constant frustration of our expectations: sexual acts are shown from a distance, climaxes are replaced with uncomfortable silences, and the narration eschews any explanatory psychology. What we are offered by watching the film is not a catharsis, but an appeal that forces us to reflect on our own desire to look.

In short, The Piano Teacher can be read as a point of convergence of the concepts of Sade, Bataille and Debord, filtered by Haneke's aesthetic and ethical sensibility. Sade contributes the idea of a desire that can only be realised in transgression, while Bataille offers the conception of eroticism as an extreme experience, and Debord denounces the spectacularisation of the body and of intimacy. Haneke weaves these conceptual threads together and transforms them into a cinematic discourse that questions both contemporary society and the position of the spectator. His filmography thus serves as an uncomfortable mirror where desire is shown to be inseparable from violence and where the gaze is never innocent. ■

NOTES

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1 It is important to note that the film, like Jelinek's novel, includes constant, explicit allusions to hand mutilation. At the beginning of the film, for example, Erika's mother is watching a hospital drama on television, while sitting on a sofa crying and rebuking Erika: "*You should cut your hands! Hitting your own mother!*" Later, Erika cuts her own genitals with a blade, then cuts her student Ana's hands with broken glass, and finally stabs herself in the right side of the chest.

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THE PLEASURE OF PAIN IN *THE PIANO TEACHER*. TRAJECTORY OF A SADEAN PERSPECTIVE: VIOLENCE, PERVERSION AND SELF-DESTRUCTION

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of *The Piano Teacher* (Michael Haneke, 2001) from a narratological perspective, focusing on the eight-night structure that articulates the film and the representation of the desire of its protagonist, Erika Kohut. The methodology adopted combines textual analysis with concepts drawn from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, as well as the works of the Marquis de Sade, Georges Bataille and Guy Debord, while also establishing a dialogue with Elfriede Jelinek's novel of the same name. The findings shed light on Haneke's construction of a narrative mechanism in which the protagonist, trapped between maternal control and institutional rigidity, engages in sadomasochistic and voyeuristic practices that reflect the impossible nature of shared eroticism. Far from expressing love, her relationship with Walter Klemmer constitutes a game of power and humiliation that culminates in self-destruction, echoed gloomily by the music of Schubert that accompanies it. Key sequences reveal that the film eschews erotic spectacle in favour of an interrogation of both desire and the spectator's gaze. In short, *The Piano Teacher* combines cinematic storytelling, social critique and philosophical reflection, while situating intimacy on the boundary between pleasure and pain, and demonstrating that in Haneke's oeuvre, the gaze is never innocent.

Key words

Marquis de Sade; Society of the Spectacle; Sadomasochism; Desire and Pain; Voyeur; Scopic Drive; *Jouissance* of the Other.

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EL GOCE DEL DOLOR EN *LA PIANISTA*. ITINERARIO DE UNA MIRADA SADIANA: VIOLENCIA, PERVERSIÓN Y AUTODESTRUCCIÓN

Resumen

El trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar *La pianista* (*La pianiste*, Michael Haneke, 2001) desde la narratología, atendiendo a la estructura de las ocho noches que la vertebran y a la representación del deseo de su protagonista, Erika Kohut. La metodología del artículo combina el análisis textual con algunos conceptos del psicoanálisis lacaniano, así como las aportaciones de Sade, Bataille y Debord, construyendo un diálogo con la novela homónima de Elfriede Jelinek. Los resultados permiten ilustrar cómo Haneke articula un mecanismo narrativo donde la protagonista, atrapada entre el control materno y la rigidez institucional, desarrolla prácticas sadomasoquistas y vouyeristas que expresan la imposibilidad de un erotismo compartido. La relación con Walter Klemmer, lejos de materializar el amor, se traduce en un juego de poder y humillación que culmina en la autodestrucción, acompañada por la música de Schubert como resonancia melancólica. Las secuencias clave revelan que el film rehúye el espectáculo erótico para interrogar tanto el deseo como la mirada del espectador. En conclusión, *La pianista* se erige en un punto de encuentro entre narración fílmica, crítica social y reflexión filosófica, situando la intimidad en el límite entre placer y dolor, y evidenciando que en la obra de Haneke la mirada nunca es inocente.

Palabras clave

Sade; Sociedad del espectáculo; Sadomasoquismo; Deseo y dolor; *Voyeur*; Pulsión escópica; Goce del *Otro*.

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