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Codes of *Die Marquise von O...*: Modes of Signification in Kleist's Novella and Rohmer's Film

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While most of the scholarly research on Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Marquise von O...* seems to agree that the novella presents "one of the most bizarre and intriguing stories,"[1] very few critics attempt to decipher the pronounced "bizarreness" of the text in structural terms. Most of the research focuses on thematic, socio-cultural, or psychoanalytical readings of the story and tries to give a conclusive meaning to the described characters and events, and, consequently, to the text itself. Ultimately, I believe that the attempts to attach *one* meaning to this multi-faceted novella prove to be a futile undertaking. By posing insightful questions about limits of knowledge and interpretation, the text itself refuses such one-dimensional classifications.

The pluralism of Kleist's text best demonstrates the juxtaposition of the cinematic interpretation of the novella. My intention is not to determine whether Eric Rohmer's *Die Marquise von O...* "does justice" to the literary source. Such a comparison would be very limiting and indeed misleading, since both media, literature and the cinema, use different practices of signification. Instead, I examine not only how meaning is invested in both texts, but also to what degree the varying modes of signification and the assignment of meaning depend on the specificity of the different media. Furthermore, I want to discern if (and in what ways) the narrative changes that Rohmer made in his reading of Kleist impact the plurality of the text.[2]

Film and literature are linked by a fundamental structural similarity — they are both communication acts in which information is encoded by the addresser (writer or film-maker) and decoded by the addressee (reader or spectator) of the coded message. Christian Metz notes that both "literature and the cinema are by their nature condemned to connotation, since denotation always precedes their artis-

tic enterprise."[3] Both the language of literature and the language of film are secondary systems, since prior to literary form there is idiomatic and genre convention, and prior to film, there is perceptual analogy. There is, however, a major difference between the two communication acts. Metz goes on to argue that "[i]n the cinema, aesthetic expressiveness is grafted onto natural expressiveness — that of the landscape or face the film shows us. In the verbal arts, it is grafted, not onto any genuine prior expressiveness, but onto a conventional signification, that of language, which is generally inexpressive."[4] Metz thus asserts that in literature we are dealing with "heterogeneous connotation," which is composed of nonexpressive denotation (first order: linguistic signification) and expressive connotation (second order: symbolic codes of literature). In contrast we are confronted with "homogeneous connotation" in the cinema, since both codes (that of denotation and that of connotation) are expressive because of visual imagery involved in both codes.

The ultimate difficulty in transmitting a written text into a screen version stems from the fact that the representation of the "real" can be executed in film (because of the expressive denotation). Even in the most "realistic" novel, however, the referent has no reality (because of the inexpressive denotation). On the other hand, some features of the literary text which can be rendered by the use of written language (irony, metaphor, self-reflexive play with the text on the level of syntax and semantics) constitute a substantial challenge for the translation into the more representational and expressive medium of the cinema. Benjamin Rifkin defines these ambiguous features of literary texts which cannot be transmitted into film without some kind of distortion as textual indeterminacies (*Unbestimmtheiten*).[5] These, I would argue, constitute the most interesting aspect of the comparison between the two "versions" of *The Marquise von O...*. The inability of the film medium to represent some of the textual indeterminacies which are driving the textual discourse in Kleist's text present a fundamental problem for the translation of this text onto the screen.

Kleist's *Die Marquise von O...* is structured like a detective story, with an enigmatic "crime" at the beginning and a plot which strives to solve the mystery. The mysterious set of circumstances (the marquise's unexplained pregnancy and her search for the child's father) is presented at the outset of the novella in the form of a newspaper an-

nouncement, and the resolution of the mystery is deferred until the very end of the narrative. However, the genre of detective story is ironically also undermined from the beginning of the narrative. Underneath the mystery, there is an answer lurking behind various statements made by the novella's characters and narrator. Armine Kotin Mortimer writes of a double story within *Die Marquise von O...*.[6] From the beginning to the very end, Mortimer suggests that the juxtaposition of the two stories drives the narrative by placing the reader between the two poles of the "apparent" (or "naïve") and the "real" (or "devious"). According to Mortimer, the second story unfolds at the moment when the reader learns of the marquise's "reines Bewußtsein" and thus concludes that the marquise has (consciously or unconsciously) taken part in a sexual act.[7] I want to argue that the second story begins to evolve at the outset of the novella, with the very announcement in which the marquise's "vortreflicher Ruf" is juxtaposed with her unexplained condition. From that moment on, the *Unbestimmtheit* of the story has been thematised in the text and continues to be referred to by a hermeneutic code "by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed."[8] Because of the paradoxical nature of the novella's narrative (for example, to disclose and to obscure at the same time), the story progresses with (to use Roland Barthes' categories): *snares* (deliberate evasion of the truth, as in the mother's invented story about the servant, Leopardo, admitting to have raped the marquise); *partial answers* (which exacerbate the expectation of the truth, as in the count's swan story); *jammed answers* (as in the count's exclamation in the garden scene "ein einziges, heimliches, geflüstertes -!"[9] where the solution remains 'jammed' at the tip of the tongue); and *suspended answers* (numerous dashes which stop the disclosure on the one hand, but refer back to the initial dash, on the other hand). Through these strategies, the enigma of the text is kept open until the narrative is ready for a disclosure at the end of the story. And yet, even here, as the second, enigmatic, story seems to meet the first, obvious, one, the text leaves something untold. The enigma appears to be resolved, but the forcefully conventional happy-ending leaves the reader wondering what else is being kept undisclosed.

By posing such a question, the novella's plot and its conclusion constitute an ironic critique of the prevalent literary conventions.

It has been suggested that the marquise's revolt at the textual level appears as a protest of "a fictional character against the narrative convention that apparently has her trapped."[10] Moreover, I believe, the reader herself feels entrapped by the textual convention and, throughout the reading process, is constantly being challenged by the discourse to shake them off. Hence, the deferral of the happy-ending until the second, "happier" wedding and many little "Russen, die dem ersten folgen"[11] on one hand ironically play into her expectations, but, on the other hand, do not allow her to accept them. The ambiguous text invites the reader to assume a more active role in the process of reading, or, to go one step further, the reader is challenged to "write" the second story as it discloses, by responding to the textual indicators that point to the hidden text behind the upset literary convention.

Probably the most celebrated motif of Kleist's hermeneutic writing is that of the "pregnant hyphen" that hides the enigma of the conception of the marquise's child. Although the event itself does not errupt into speech, the text gives many clues as to what is being hidden by the ellipsis. For example, the attack by the Russian troops, which precedes the celebrated dash, is introduced with a "Hier,"[12] after which a description of the soldiers' behavior follows, which does not leave much room for doubt about their intentions regarding the marquise. The dash which hides the moment of the marquise's sexual encounter with the count also follows a "Hier."[13] This illustrates a paradigmatic relationship between this event and the previous one. Nonetheless, the absence of the enigmatic event places both the narrator and the reader in a position of creative interpreter of the text. Even if the reader does not recognize the hyphen as the place where the ellipsis occurs, the reader has to question other indices, such as the count's clinical reassurance that the marquise should be fine after what had happened to her, or the fact that he leaves the citadel "sehr erhitzt im Gesicht."[14] As Mehigan observes, in Kleist's text, "the expected celebration of the detective's — that is, the narrator's — rationality is forestalled so that the role of the detective, and the need to supply an interpretation of events, now devolves upon the reader."[15] Since the narrator does not supply the reader with more information regarding the textual clues, the reader must take up the role of an inquisitive interpreter. Shifting the responsibility to resolve the question that the text poses to the reader, the novella allows a plurality of meanings and a potentially endless number of interpretations.

The role of the film's spectator in solving the text's mystery is entirely different. Here, although the initial enigma of the text is not explicitly revealed, it is implied so strongly via cinematic conventions that it does not leave any doubt about the nature of the act or who is responsible for the marquise's pregnancy. Ironically, that which is not represented in the non-expressive medium of literature seems to constitute an insurmountable difficulty for the more representational and expressive medium of film. The absence of representation of the event in the Kleistian text — indeed, the gap that drives the whole story — is transformed in the film into a conventional representation of the sexual act which plays heavily into the spectator's expectations.

In the rape-sequence, the count returns to the marquise's lodging after her rescue. In a shot-reverse shot, the camera captures the count at the door, cuts to the view of the marquise on her bed in an unquestionably erotic position, and cuts again to the count who is looking at her. The sequence ends in a fade-out. Such editing does not leave much doubt about what happens between the two characters. We know that after her liberation from the Russian troops the marquise has been administered a sleeping potion. In the novella, the marquise is rescued by the count and then supposedly loses consciousness. "Supposedly," because the reader must question the narrator's emphasis on "völlig bewußtlos," as though she could have been only partially unconscious.[16] The film, on the contrary, denies such speculations. The spectator is given a more pronounced answer to the question of what had happened between the count and the marquise after the fade-out. First, the procedure of shot-reverse shot establishes the count as the guilty party, and secondly, the narrative change (the trope of the sleeping potion) renders the marquise unconscious and, hence, truly "not knowing" what had happened to her. Consequently, in the novella, the *Unbestimmtheit* that is created by the lack of the rape initiates a crisis of knowledge for all: the characters (all but the count), the narrator, and the reader. The marquise's lack of knowledge and the issue of her conscious or unconscious involvement in the forbidden sexual act remain an unresolved question and point to the problem of "knowing" in general. However, in the film representation, such a problem is not even addressed. Whereas in the novella, the story behind the ellipsis has yet to be "written" by the reader (and the

narrator, for whom the events are also just unfolding), the spectator of the film finds him/herself in a privileged position of knowledge from the beginning to the conclusion.

The remainder of the novella's narrative also demonstrates the workings of the hermeneutic code. Subsequent hints that follow the "pregnant hyphen" appear as indices pointing back to the original ellipsis. When the count returns to ask the marquise to marry him, both lead a "secret" conversation beneath the overt one that is directed at the rest of the family. Throughout the conversation, numerous hints from the count serve to complicate the mystery by outlining it through half-truths, or, to borrow Barthes' terms, *snares* and *suspended answers*. For example, the count appears to "know" more than the marquise herself knows about her physical well-being. He is happy to hear that she "fürchte inzwischen nicht, daß diese (Kränklichkeit) weiter von Folgen sein würde."[17] After his hasty marriage proposal, the count asks the marquise, "ob sie ihn verstanden hätte?",[18] and his subsequent statements still try to get through to the marquise. He claims that he is "durch die Umstände gezwungen"[19] to speak and act quickly, and as he mentions "dringende Verhältnisse jedoch, über welche er sich näher auszulassen nicht imstande sei (...),"[20] he looks at the marquise as if directing the coded message toward her, and, consequently, toward the inquisitive reader. Finally, in another attempt to hint at the "truth," he says "daß die einzige nichtswürdige Handlung, die er in seinem Leben begangen hätte, der Welt unbekannt, und er schon im Begriff sei, sie wieder gut zu machen (. . .)".[21] All these ambiguous pieces of information are indices of the count's guilt and feelings of remorse. Yet, while pointing to the solution of the enigma of rape and the marquise's pregnancy, they come short of revealing everything. The mystery comes close to being solved, but remains jammed, as it were, at the tip of the tongue. The text blocks the truth from being disclosed, although it is deeply desired and awaited: "Man *erwartete* nur, nach den ersten Höflichkeitsbezeugungen, daß dieser *Gegenstand* zur Sprache kommen würde, um ihn mit vereinter Kraft zu bestürmen, den Schritt, den er gewagt hatte, wenn es noch möglich sei, wieder zurückzunehmen. Doch *vergebens* (. . .)"[22] Here, the discourse once again gives a broad hint at what had happened between the count and the marquise, the "Schritt, den er gewagt hatte" in the "apparent" story refers to the Count's impulsive decision to take the family's invitation to stay as

their guest, forfeiting thus his military duties. The discourse points however to the second meaning of the phrase, the step that he had taken during his first encounter with the marquise — the rape, which is, here as elsewhere, not named, but, instead, referred to as "Gegenstand" of the conversation. "Doch vergebens . . .," despite the ambiguous signs, the message is not yet fully decoded, and the truth about the count and the marquise not disclosed.

Most of the marriage proposal scene in the film is shot in such a way as to give an impression that the spectator is placed in the middle of the room. Thus the spectator can assume a role of an uninvolved and objective onlooker. Only the secret dialogue between the count and the marquise is constructed via point of view and alternating reverse shots. The marquise is shot here from a higher point of view of the standing count, while the latter is shot from the lower angle which corresponds to the perspective of the marquise sitting on the divan. As Mary Rhiel observes, such editing strategy places the count in the position of superior knowledge about the events to which the secret conversation refers.[23] Here, the film is consistent with the representation of the sexual act during which the marquise was clearly represented as unconscious and unknowing. At this point, it becomes obvious that the film's attempts to recreate the secrecy of the dialogue through editing procedure does not make much sense since the film had already established that only one of the interlocutors is in full possession of the knowledge about the facts to which such secret dialogue would refer. Moreover, the spectator, also in the privileged position of knowing more than the marquise knows, remains passive and merely consumes what is shown on the screen.

It is important to note that in the novella, the scene of the marriage proposal is written in indirect speech with the help of mounting *daß*-sentences. The repetition of the same grammatical construction (23 dependent clauses with *daß*- conjunction) for almost two full pages gives an additional impression that the text engages the reader in a linguistic game that consists of multiple use of the same form of language. This gives the impression of having exhausted the potentially infinite number of signifiers of one and the same signified ("the count's guilt"). Such repetition and variation of the signifier affirms then, to use Barthes' notion, "the plural existence of the text."[24] In the film, on the other hand, as the role of the narrator is assumed by the

camera, the whole conversation is transcoded into indirect speech, which robs the filmic text of the playfulness that the literary source has to offer.

Finally, the Count's feverish day-dream of Thinka, the swan, appears as a tale of purity, desire, and rape, which might be read as a symbolic condensation of the whole story. Because of its importance for the analysis, the passage deserves to be cited in its entirety. The count describes:

> [W]ie er die Vorstellung von ihr, in der Hitze des Wundfiebers, immer mit der Vorstellung eines Schwans verwechselt hätte, den er, als Knabe, auf seines Onkels Güter gesehen; daß ihm besonders eine Erinnerung rührend gewesen wäre, da er *diesen* Schwan einst mit Kot beworfen, worauf dieser still untergetaucht, und rein aus der Flut wieder emporgekommen sei; daß *sie* immer auf feurigen Fluten umhergeschwommen wäre, und er Thinka gerufen hätte, welcher der Name *jenes* Schwans gewesen, daß er aber nicht imstande wäre, *sie* an sich zu locken, indem sie ihre Freude gehabt hätte, bloß am Rudern und In-die-Brust-sich-werfen; versicherte plötzlich, blutrot im Gesicht, daß er *sie* außerordentlich liebe (. . .)[25]

The shifting between grammatical and biological gender creates undoubtedly a powerful index to the person of the marquise. Furthermore, the play with different textual levels demonstrates another attempt to involve the reader in a creative collaboration with the discourse by filling the gap created at the outset of the text. Interestingly, Rohmer's film shifts the most significant part of the dream to the end of the narrative when the question of fatherhood has been resolved and followed by the reconciliation between the marquise and the count. Before that has been accomplished, the count abruptly ends the retelling of the dream, a break which in my view attempts to recreate the "pregnant hyphen" from the novella. The difference is that at this point within the film's narrative, this break does not point to anything secret, since the act of the rape has been already established in visual terms at the beginning of the film. Moreover, the pronoun *sie*

employed in the novella, which referred only implicitly to the marquise (complicating the enigma of the text, rather than outright disclosing it), is changed at the end of the film into *du*, thus leaving no doubt as to whom the swan represents. Hence, the plural meaning of the dream is lost, as it does not move the reader to question the events in the same way as it does in the novella. When the dream is retold in the film, it serves to illustrate the already-disclosed truth.

An important aspect that points to the plurality of Kleist's text is the multiplicity of narrative perspectives. Transcoding of the multiple narrative position of the literary text creates one of the hurdles for the cinematic adaptation which, in my view, proved too difficult for Rohmer to overcome. While in the novella, the narrator assumes various positions, in the film, where the camera appropriates the role of the narrator, such plurality of positions is practically denied. Thus, whereas the novella in some way disconnects the authorial voice from its origin (language, not the "author" speaking) and thus allows a multiplicity of readings, the film reinstalls the authorial voice, and enforces one conclusive reading.

There are two broader types of a narrative position that can be discerned in Kleist's *Die Marquise von O...*. In the first one, the narrator appears as an omniscient consciousness that tells the story from a superior point of view. This type of narrator narrates either as a disembodied voice or from within the characters, sometimes also judging and interpreting their thoughts and actions. Such narrator, Klaus Schwind points out, "interpretiert selbst in scheinbar *neutraler* Aussensicht die erzählten Vorgänge, und der Autor manipuliert durch die Sprachverwendung den Leser, der nur als *Eingeweihter* das ironische Spiel mitspielen kann."[26] Mehigan proposes that the writer projects into the novella a narrator who on the one hand "seeks to interpret the events he describes and on the other wishes to remain passive and impartial."[27] For example, in the passage mentioned above which describes the count's return and hid unexpected marriage proposal, the whole conversation is rendered mainly from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, yet, at times, the narrator's discourse slips into the perspective of the marquise. Although she is denied speech, the narrative voice refers to her perceptions and interpretations of the unfolding events. Narrative references such as "schön wie ein junger Gott,"[28] "die Marquise, durch die Herzlichkeit, womit er dies

vorbrachte, gut gestimmt,"[29] "die Marquise wußte nicht, was sie von dieser Aufführung denken solle"[30] represent the narrator's wavering between disembodied voice and interpretation.

In the second type of narration employed in the novella, the perspective of the narrator seems to be limited to only that what the characters can see and know. At times, it seems that the events unravel before the eyes of the narrator in the same way as before the reader. One of the examples of such limited narrator's perspective is the scene of the reconciliation between the marquise and her father. The scene is presented from the voyeuristic perspective of marquise's mother, which limits the reader's perception to that what this particular character can see:

> Sie vernahm, da sie mit sanft an die Tür gelegtem Ohr horchte, ein leises, eben verhallendes Gelispel, das, wie es ihr schien, von der Marquise kam; und, wie sie durchs Schlüsselloch bemerkte, saß sie auch auf des Commendanten Schoß, was er sonst in seinem Leben nicht zugegeben hatte. Darauf endlich öffnete sie die Tür, und sah nun - und das Herz quoll ihr vor Freuden empor: die Tochter still, mit zurückgebeugtem Nacken, die Augen fest geschlossen, in des Vaters Armen liegend; indessen dieser, auf dem Lehnstuhl sitzend, lange, heiße und lechzende Küsse, das große Auge voll glänzender Tränen, auf ihren Mund drückte: gerade wie ein Verliebter![31]

The mother's perspective is introduced by the dash following "und sah nun." If the dash, as numerous other dashes within the text, stands for that which is not representable, it would appear that the text struggles with the representation of that what the mother actually sees. Moreover, the reader's perspective is limited even further since she is first given the information about the mother's reaction ("und das Herz quoll ihr vor Freuden empor") to what she perceives. Only here, the colon, a textual keyhole, admits the reader as the spectator of the events. But even then, the picture that the reader is confronted with is tainted by the mother's subjective perception. Interpretive descriptions like "lange, heiße und lechzende Küsse" and "gerade wie ein

Verliebter!" belong to an ironic discourse, perhaps mixed with the implied marital jealousy. The mother's perspective appears to slip out of the grasp of the objective narrator who, like the reader, is trying to make sense of the story.

In this and other examples of a limited narrative perspective, the narrator's apparent lack of control over the characters projects onto the reader who, throughout the reading, tries to assume control over the text by interpreting it. One of the signs that the text slips out of the narrator's grip is the disquietude of the syntax (multiplicity of dependent clauses with conjunctions *während, indem, daß*, extensive use of non-verbal signs such as colons, exclamation marks and dashes, and the predominance of indirect speech, again with mounting dependent clauses, like in the marriage proposal scene). This tense syntax leads to frustration of the fluidity of narration — the text does not "read" easily, but instead requires continuous work on the part of the reader.

In the cinema, the narrative position is being constituted mainly through the camera work. Generally, only the camera can assume the role of an unseen narrator. This is due to the lack of verbal cues which render the subjective narrative perspective in a literary text. The spectator in the cinema might also look for a point of view shot or change in camera position and focus (blurry images for dreamy sequences, for example), textual voice-overs, or editing procedures (flashbacks and flash-forwards). In Rohmer's *Die Marquise von O...*, such available cinematic maneuvers are used very sparingly. Instead, the norm of the camera position — long takes and medium shots — is already established at the outset of the film. The shot of the men in an inn talking and laughing about the marquise's newspaper announcement refuses the spectator any kind of identification with the characters. Instead, the camera demonstrates the gaze of an uninvolved but omnipresent observer — the men are shot from far away, there is not shot-reverse shot procedure. Here, and in most of the film's sequences, the camera is placed in front of the profilmic event, thus creating a theatrical atmosphere where the camera, and, by implication, the viewer, assumes the role of a "fourth wall."

In the few exceptions from this norm, the camera assumes the point of view of one of the figures. For example, in the scene when the marquise first encounters the count, the latter is shot from below, where

the marquise is supposedly lying on the ground, undeniably from her point of view. The count is clad in white and back-lighted in such a way that he appears angelic against the background of the night air. At this point, the recreation of the marquise's perspective demonstrates a successful transcoding of the same position established by the novella's narration, where the narrator comments on the marquise's perception of her rescuer: "Der Marquise schien er ein Engel des Himmels zu sein."[32]

In very few instances, the editing procedure of shot-reverse shot is employed, like in the implied rape scene mentioned above. There, the (otherwise very rare) use of alternating point-of-view shots emphasizes the importance of the encounter between the two characters. However, as analyzed above, by robbing the marquise of consciousness (even if only speculated consciousness), Rohmer portrays her as a passive victim of the male predator. More importantly for my purposes, the change of the narrative instance from the unknowing narrator (who strives to understand the events as they unfold) to the omniscient camera (who sees enough of the scene to come to conclusions very early on within the narrative) has a far-reaching impact on the role of the spectator in the process of the active deciphering of the story.

As mentioned earlier, cinematic message is composed of elements of two signifying systems. According to Roland Barthes, in the denoted system, photography or film strives to appear as a perfect "analogon of reality" (due to the visual nature of images.)[33] The code of the connoted system, on the contrary, is constituted either by a universal symbolic order or by a period rhetoric, in other words, by cultural stereotypes (schemes, imagery, colors, gestures, expressions, and spatial arrangements). Barthes argues that every photographic image strives to present itself as lacking this connoted code, which is seen as "tainted" by cultural influences, and professes instead "to be a mechanical analogue of reality, (as though) its first-order message in some sort completely fills its substance and leaves no place for the development of a second-order message."[34] Naturally, it is important to note that even the visual codes of denotation that are employed in the art of photography are so enshrined in the web of signification we call culture that the viewers consider them to be "natural" representations of the "real," while actually they are nothing more but cultural constructs.

Rohmer's film clearly expresses a desire to pass for the analogon of the literary text — a purely denoted translation of the novella rather than an adaptation which employs a variety of cultural and symbolic codes. Such an aspiration is discernible from Rohmer's comments about his film. In an interview for the *New York Times*, the director stated: "I wanted to use the text as if Kleist himself had put it directly on the screen, as if he were making the movie."[35] The suggestion that the viewers should "read" the film as a collaborative effort of Kleist and Rohmer is already evident in the opening titles. The names of both "co-authors" constitute here a bracket for the name of the product of their collaboration *Die Marquise von O....*The purely denotative status, to which the film appears to aspire, would give it an objectivity and authority through the trope of "Kleist" and the place of the novella in the literary canon.

Yet the film text is definitely far removed from the literary original. In general, the hermeneutic code which is prominent in the novella, as the analysis above has shown, is employed minimally in the film. Instead, there is an abundance of cultural and symbolic codes, which are used in order to invest the cinematic text with ideological meaning. Importantly, whereas in the case of textual indeterminacies, the medium specificity might have been "guilty" of the distortion in the transcoding procedure, here the choice of cultural codes points clearly to the film-maker's intentionality. For example, in the interpretation of the count, the film subscribes to a naive romantic ideal of courtly love and heroic knighthood. The idealistic reading neglects the variety of clues that indicate the count's guilt and remorse. In Mortimer's view, "Rohmer's remarkably close reading is also a thoroughly romantic, angelic, and idealistic interpretation."[36] The count is portrayed as a romantic lover and a perfect gentleman, heroic and knightly throughout the film. In one of the few departures from the original text of the novella, Rohmer inserts the marquise's explanation for why she cannot conceive of the count being the sought-after father of her unborn child. During a family conversation, the marquise's brother jests that the tone of the newspaper response to the marquise's announcement points to someone of aristocratic origin, possibly the count himself. The marquise impulsively rejects such accusations and explains that the count is the only person who cannot be under suspicion because of his courtly behavior on the night of the battle. In her

naiveté, she insists on seeing the count as an honorable knight, whereas the rapist who had answered to her advertisement can be only a villain. In the novella, by contrast, even after the count returns to claim his paternity, the marquise rejects him as "Teufel!" and refuses to provide the family, and the reader, with reasons for this rejection. Thus, although the mystery of paternity has been resolved, the reader is still left with unanswered questions about the marquise's involvement in the unrepresented sexual act as well as about the reasons for her refusals to know. Clearly, the conventions and stereotypes against which Kleist's text struggles are reconstructed with full force in its film interpretation. Moreover, such conventions play into the desired interpretation of the film as a tale of romantic love being born out of the ashes of the forgiven act of rape. The narrative closure that is denied by the novella, transformed instead into an unresolved question, is achieved in the film thanks to the director's changes to the narrative and the narrative stance.

To conclude, I want to return to Kleist's text. When, on the agreed day, the count appears before the family, the mother asks the hysterical marquise matter-of-factly: "Was fehlt dir? Was ist geschehen, worauf du nicht vorbereitet warst?"[37] This question is directed also to the reader who must be well prepared for this disclosure since the discourse of the second story has led her to it throughout the narrative. The same question is featured in Rohmer's film, but here, it does not have the same implications. The spectator of the film text is ultimately denied any kind of *Aha!-Erlebnis*, since his/her privileged position of knowledge has been established when the rape act had been implied by the use of cinematic conventions. Hence, the reader is involved in an entirely different interpretive process than the spectator. Whereas the written text involves the reader from beginning to end in the "writing" of the story and in questioning persisting literary conventions (thus allowing multiple interpretations stemming from each reader separately), the film offers answers to the viewer and imposes upon his/her the closure of the film text. Borrowing Barthes' notions, the novella can be termed a "text of *joiussance*," which, by resisting one-dimensional interpretation and escaping closure, presents the crisis of the writer's (and the reader's) relationship with language and knowledge. Comparatively, Rohmer's film as a "text of pleasure" unfolds accordingly to the spectator's expectations, and thus makes him/

her happy (pleasured) by confirming his/her relationship to language and knowledge as stable and firm. Undeniably, some of the changes in interpretation are closely bound to the medium specificity as the information that could have been only hinted at in the written text must be more or less explicitly shown in the film. But in the majority of the instances when the message delivered by the novella has been distorted by the film, not only medium specific factors can be blamed. Rohmer's use of cultural codes and his narrating procedures testify to conscious choices made by the film-maker aiming to deliver a very specific message. Barthes' distinction between the "classic" and the "modern" novel captures well the difference between the film and novella, respectively: "[I]n the former we have a view of History which is harsh but coherent and certain of its principles, the triumph of an order; in the latter, an art which in order to escape its pangs of conscience either exaggerates conventions or frantically attempts to destroy them."[38] The novella, although chronologically preceding the film by almost two centuries, thus appears more "modern" in its attempts to play with the straight-jacket of literary conventions, and in its questioning of our relationship to knowledge and the limits of interpretation.

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Notes

[1] John M. Ellis reviews the state of Kleist scholarship up to 1976 in his book *The Stories of Kleist. Studies in the Meaning and Character of His Writings* (Chapel Hill, 1979).

[2] The existing research on the comparison of the two texts is rather limited, and the few scholarly undertakings to date deal with different questions than those I am posing. For example, in a detailed essay informed by semiotic theories, Thomas Bauermeister poses the important question of the "medienspezifische Kommunikationsebene." Bauermeister examines the texts very carefully by concentrating on units of language(s): signs, words and sentences for literature, and shots for the film, and structures of narration. However, he limits his inquiry to only one text passage and one corresponding film sequence. The result is a very thorough analysis of one specific moment within the narrative; however, he does not give much insight into the final "meanings" that are delivered by the novella and the film. For more see Thomas Bauermeister "Erzählte und dargestellte

Konversation" in Klaus Kanzog, ed., *Erzählstrukturen — Filmstrukturen: Erzählungen Heinrich von Kleists und ihre filmische Realisation* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1981).

    In one of the more interesting examples of this scholarship, Mary Rhiel comparatively analyzes the film and the novella on the level of authorial discourse. She claims that thanks to the spectatorial expectations created by the " . . . pre-textual discourse (Kleist's novella), the film text is constructed around a phenomenological center and privileged point of view created through the textual figure of the author, Kleis."(Mary Rhiel, "The Author-Function as Security Agent in Rohmer's *Die Marquise von O...*" *The German Quarterly* 64.1 (Winter 1991: 7). Rhiel adds that Rohmer's rendition of the *Marquise von O...* delivers a very "un-Kleistian" message: "Whereas Kleist's novella disrupts the stability of any coherent understanding of reality and final resolution of the narrative crisis, the idealistic realism of Rohmer's mise en scène subscribes to a belief in the unique ability of film to capture reality." (Rhiel,13) Although I agree with Rhiel's conclusion, I believe that her examination of the film and the novella lacks a very important issue of the specificity of the two very different media of communication. One cannot assume that meaning can simply be shifted from one text to the other, but, instead, it must be seen as "transcoded in the process of projection of elements from one system into the other"(Benjamin Rifkin, *Semiotics of Narration in Film and Prose Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 47.

    [3] Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) 76.

    [4] See Metz, 77.

    [5] In his analysis of two Soviet filmic adaptations of literary works, Rifkin draws on the theories of Soviet semioticians and practitioners of the cinema, most importantly Eisenstein and Lotman. See Benjamin Rifkin, *Semiotics of Narration in Film and Prose Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

    [6] Armine Kotin Mortimer, "The Devious Second Story in Kleist's *Die Marquise von O...*" *The German Quarterly* 67.3 (Summer, 1994) 293.

    [7] Ibid.

    [8] See Barthes.

    [9] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise von O...*, In: *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2 :171.

    [10] Anthony Stephens, *Heinrich von Kleist: The Dramas and Stories*. (Oxford/Providence: Berg, 1994) 215.

    [11] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 186.

    [12] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 144.

    [13] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 145.

    [14] Ibid.

    [15] Timothy J. Mehigan, *Text as Contract: the Nature and Function of Narrative Discourse in the Erzählungen of Heinrich von Kleist*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 313.

    [16] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 145. In fact, throughout the novella, the text gives also additional hints to the fact that the marquise might know more that she would like to admit. For example, after the visit of the doctor and his confirmation of the marquise's pregnancy, the latter exlaims in despair:

    Was kann dieser Mann, der uns bis auf den heutigen Tag schätzenswürdig erschien, für Gründe haben, mich auf eine so mutwillige und niderträchtige Art zu kränken? Mich, die ihn nie beleidigt hatte? Die ihn mit Vertrauen, und dem Vorgefühl zukünftiger Dankbarkeit, empfing? Bei der er, wie seine ersten Worte zeugten, mit dem reinen und unverfälschten Willen erschien, zu helfen, nicht Schmerzen, grimmigere, als ich empfand, zu erregen? (162)

The reader cannot help but wonder who is meant by "dieser Mann" who was "empfangen" by the marquise. The double meaning is obvious: in the apparent reading of the story, the passage refers to the doctor, but in the hidden 'second' story, the text clearly points to the count, and, by implication, to some kind of knowledge on the part of the marquise.

    [17] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 150.

    [18] Ibid..

    [19] Ibid.

    [20] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 151.

    [21] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 152.

    [22] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 156.

    [23] Rhiel, 10.

    [24] See Barthes, 58.

    [25] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 156-157.

    [26] Schwind, 110.

    [27] Timothy J. Mehigan, *Text as Contract: the Nature and Function of Narrative Discourse in the Erzählungen of Heinrich von Kleist*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988) 126.

    [28] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 148.

    [29] Ibid.

    [30] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 149.

    [31] H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 180-181.

³² H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 144.

³³ Roland Barthes, *A Barthes Reader.* Ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) 196-197.

³⁴ Barthes, *Reader,* 197.

³⁵ Alan Spiegel, "The Cinematic Text: Rohmer's 'The Marquise of O...'" *Modern European Filmmakers and the Art of Adaptation* Ed. Horton, Andrew and J. Margetta (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981) 316.

³⁶ Mortimer, 297.

³⁷ H. v Kleist, *Die Marquise,* 183.

³⁸ Barthes, *Reader,* 51.

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