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The tension of translation: Handke's *The Left-Handed Woman* (1977)

Left-handed woman, you've given yourself away!
Or did you mean to give me a sign?

The debate about fiction-into-film will doubtless continue in as many directions and with as many conclusions as it has sustained since Vachel Lindsay and Sergei Eisenstein addressed the question. Few filmmakers or films, however, focus that debate as explicitly and rigorously as Peter Handke and his much-acclaimed *The Left-Handed Woman* (*Die linkshändige Frau*, 1977). Hailed as "that rare thing, a genuinely poetic movie,"[1] *The Left-Handed Woman* is the second feature film by this dramatist, novelist, and poet whose reputation has been based primarily on his literary achievements[2] but whose entrance into filmmaking brought immediate comparisons with the likes of Jean Cocteau and André Malraux.[3] Handke's success with this film was not, though, unprepared. Together with Wim Wenders, he made *3 American LPs* (*3 amerikanische LPs*, 1969). In 1970 he directed the TV-film *The Chronicle of Current Events* (*Die Chronik der laufenden Ereignisse*), a self-styled allegory about two years of recent West German history. The next year he provided the novel and the script for Wenders's film version of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1972). In 1974 he collaborated with Wenders once again, this time on *Wrong Move* (*Falsche Bewegung*), a loose adaptation of Goethe's classical *Bildungsroman, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*).[4]

Handke's literary texts have always been peopled by notorious cinephiles and voyeurs, and, not surprisingly, in *The Left-Handed Woman*, a film produced by Wenders, the novelist's vision is realized by the cinematographer Robby Müller and the editor Peter Przygodda, important contributors to Wenders's lyrical tales of men seeking a language in a world of images. In *The Left-Handed Woman*, however, the dialectic between the visual and the

verbal, so dominant in Handke's career and literary work, becomes concentrated and emphasized as never before. Unlike *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, this film was first conceived as a film and only then written as a novel. This reversal of the usual pattern of adaptation affects both the fiction and the film in crucial and telling ways – ways well beyond the obvious omissions, additions, and alterations which here and elsewhere often describe the main differences between a novel and its filmic adaptation. (In the film of *The Left-Handed Woman*, some of these simple changes include the moving of the setting from Germany to Paris, and the inclusion of a scene from an Ozu film.) Specifically, because of its filmic conception, Handke's literary version of the story contains an unusually cinematic grammar and prose in which the lack of adjectives and adverbs reduces the characters and their actions to unusually flat (even for Handke) representations. Little is attributed to the characters through the connotative force of language, and, throughout the novel, any emotional depth in or between the characters appears only as the indirect product of the static independence of the images. The strictly imagistic quality of the language and the literal significance of the words thus join in the novel across the image's resistance to any narrative or symbolic meaning and the word's insistence that that meaning be made. Ultimately one might argue that the inadequacy of this particular novel follows from just these austere limits which Handke chooses to impose on his language – for it seeks to convey an imagistic order which, by definition, can never really be made apparent in the novel and which, as a function of the work's conception, has preceded it.

At one point in the novel, for instance, the text reads:

> That night the woman sat by the window with the curtains drawn, reading; a thick dictionary lay beside her. She put her book aside and opened the curtains. A car was just turning into one of the garages, and on the sidewalk an elderly lady was walking her dog. As though nothing escaped her, she looked up at the window and waved.[5]

As with much of the novel, the visual dynamics of this scene are its center: as she replaces her reading and dictionary with a gesture as simile, what does not escape the woman is precisely the discrete images which the window as frame makes available to her; she reacts to and with gestures and images, and the prose of the text accordingly seems tensely abstracted from the real drama. The film, moreover, enacts this same tension between an imagistic independence and the languages that seek to appropriate it. But, in the film, the reality of the images and their materially given and authentic status introduce the absent member of the novel's drama, and so make *actually* present the dramatic tension that is at the heart of this and most other works of literature/film adaptation: the dramatic tension of translation itself, of the impossible adaptation of language to image and image to language.

Plate 35 A moment of true feeling: silent until this moment, Marianne (Edith Clever) tells her husband (Bruno Ganz), "I suddenly had an illumination that you were going away, that you were leaving me. Yes, that's it. Go away, Bruno."

From the beginning of the film, the central image and measure of this authenticity are clearly the woman herself. In the book and film, she suddenly announces her break with her husband by saying that she has "had a strange idea. Well, not really an idea, more like an – illumination" (p. 13); and her distinction is especially appropriate since what she is claiming is herself as image, not her position as an abstraction in some larger discourse. In this announcement, there is none of the verbal explaining, none of the social and psychological rationale that generally define (in literature and film) this kind of decision to break with a husband and the social world he represents. Her crisis does not concern any search for identity but simply and plainly a claiming of an identity already possessed but unacknowledged. Like the home where she continues to live, her "leaving" is, more accurately, a staying. In this way, *The Left-Handed Woman* is both less than and more than a feminist film, involving little of the social and psychoanalytic work associated with a feminist position today and instead defining her mainly and quite idealistically in terms of her stoic resistance to *any* typing or social positioning.

The course of the film, in fact, could be described as a series of negations or resistances through which Marianne holds off different individuals and different discourses which attempt to coopt her (image) into their language. In the opening of the film, she picks up her husband, Bruno, at the airport and listens passively as he talks continuously about his trip to Finland where, ironically, he had been completely isolated by the language he could not speak. Later, speaking of "the mature beauty of master/servant relationships," he takes her to dinner in order that they may luxuriate in being served by others. After being confronted with her decision to live alone, he explains it with a terminology that has no real bearing on the act, calling her a "mystic." Finally, when Marianne and their son visit him in his office, Bruno acts out the "stare" with which he hopes to exercise enough power to become a member of the board, the stare through which one controls another's image. Several other men whom she encounters come to represent similar versions of this need to appropriate and dominate Marianne: the publisher who hires her uses the opportunity to court her, and, when she resists, he tries to coerce her by telling a tale of a lonely writer whose isolation eventually made it impossible for him to use words at all; her father visits her in a confused and half-hearted effort to reconcile her to a world that grows more hostile with old age; and even the strange unemployed actor she meets one day pursues her with a silent and romantic passion that, for all the two seem to have in common, is entirely inappropriate to a woman whose ultimate desire is not to get entangled with the objects and desires of the world.

Despite its usually male character, this is not, however, only a patriarchal order that threatens her. Marianne's close friend Franziska, while allowing Bruno to live with her, urges Marianne to join her feminist group so that she may locate an image of herself outside the one forced on her by the dominant

male culture. Yet, what Franziska does not realize is that for Marianne the feminist circle offers only another socially and subjectively made image, not one independently isolated in its own integrity. Marianne consistently and stoically remains apart from *any* discourse that attempts to encroach upon her; her placid expression and extraordinarily silent manner are peculiarly non-aggressive and undemanding, bearing witness to a claim for self-possession and nothing more. As Stanley Kauffmann has remarked, she is not violently mute like Elisabet in Bergman's *Persona* (1966) but verbally restrained and sparing in a manner that makes her separation a more confident and less dependent break with the social world around her.[6] If she is part of a woman's film tradition, it is not that of Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) or Agnès Varda's *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (*L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, 1977), but that of Chantal Akerman's *Meetings with Anna* (*Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, 1978). This is not a flamboyant assertion into or against another social order but a quiet departure from the abstracting terms of any social discourse.

In this resistance to discourse, Marianne becomes almost pure image, a negation of social languages.[7] It is more than twenty minutes into the film before this central character utters her first word, and for the remainder of the film she says extremely little, a passive listener in most of her conversations with others. After her husband accuses her of mysticism, she regards herself in the mirror and says, "Say whatever you want; the more you say the freer I'll be of you." This confrontation is, on the one hand, directed at her absent husband and his attempt to bully and manipulate her with language. On the other hand, it is aimed at her own divided self as an image produced by that patriarchal discourse and as an image independent of those words, more distinguished in its difference the more those words attempt and fail to claim that image. The scene becomes a metaphoric reversal of a Freudian mirror state, a negation in every sense, as she identifies an image of herself present before that infantile mirror stage when social/linguistic transformations produced a socialized image of her. She identifies herself, in short, as a left-handed image: free of language and logic *because* she can see herself as an isolated and singular image. Here as throughout the film, she lives according to negations, not contraries; ultimately, her efforts are to claim herself not as an opposite discourse but as an entirely separate presence.

Formally, the film is most striking in its dramatization of just this imagistic isolation. Assisted here in large part by Müller and Przygodda, this use of the image as a discrete entity and value follows almost too patently Wenders's sensibility from his first student films to the more recent *The State of Things* (*Der Stand der Dinge*, 1982). But, as in the case of Wenders, and as Handke makes quite clear in this film, the true source of this sensibility is the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu. Cited several times in *The Left-Handed Woman*, Ozu is most noticeably acknowledged when the camera pans from a dimly lit shot of the woman silently crouched against the

Plate 36 The woman and her child, scribblings on an otherwise blank Metro wall: an example of Handke's imagistic isolation. Photo courtesy of New Yorker Films.

wall to a poster of Ozu and then back to the woman. The importance of Ozu to Handke and Wenders is mainly the manner in which Ozu's films valorize the image in itself and formally isolate it from both human and diegetic significance. In Noël Burch's words about Ozu, images and objects as images often appear in his narratives as "pillow shots," and, like his mismatching, they reflect "a culturally and complexly determined sign of dissent from the world-view implicit in the Western mode. This mode, of course, is profoundly *anthropocentric*."[8] In Ozu's films these shots "intervene in a certain kind of discourse, and each de-centering effect possesses its own specificity. These shots cause a suspension of the diegesis. . . . The *space* from which these references are made is invariably presented as outside the diegesis, as a pictorial space on another plane of 'reality'."[9]

Despite these clear connections with Ozu and his compositional methods, there is a difference. The sequence with the poster of Ozu follows shortly after a sequence in which Marianne, seated between her son and his friend, watches an Ozu movie, *Tokyo Chorus* (*Tokyo no Gassho*, 1931). In the sequence from the Ozu film, a family is seated in a circle apparently playing a clapping game of some sort; but, while pretending to enjoy herself, the mother-wife is secretly crying. In one important sense, this sequence describes the tragic isolation of the woman from the familial and social circle around her, and it thus partially reflects the predicament of Handke's own woman. Yet, Handke's woman falls asleep during the sequence, and one way of reading this would be that the predicament of the insert film contains nothing filmically or fictionally interesting (or provoking) for Marianne because she has, at this point, moved outside the tragic pathos of that circle (just as Handke's film recontextualizes Ozu's). Significantly, this image of the mother asleep on the shoulder of her son is one of the two images that Handke says is the source of the film.[10] The image suggests a negation (eyes shut, asleep, and uninterested) of the social bind Ozu's mother represents and, at the same time, it enacts a perfectly passive overturning of the traditional gestures of support in a family hierarchy. Handke's perspective is not, therefore, merely a recreation or appropriation of Ozu's world; rather, his heroine and the discrete images about her describe a different drama, since Marianne has already achieved and now only works to maintain the internal authenticity and harmony that Ozu's characters constantly struggle towards. She inhabits the pillow shots that beckon from afar to Ozu's men and women.

The connection between Handke's woman and Ozu's film is therefore not between the characters of the two worlds but between the extra-human images around Ozu's individuals and the human reality of Handke's woman. Quite systematically, *The Left-Handed Woman* establishes an equation between its protagonist and the extra-human realm of the discrete objects and images that tragically evade Ozu's all-too-human characters. The film opens with a series of these shots: grass rustling as a train rushes by,

newspapers blowing across an empty station platform, a motionless urbanscape, the woman's home depicted in a symmetrically flat frontal shot, and a still life of fruit. Throughout the film, these kinds of static images punctuate its course with a logic which, while breaking with the diegesis, establishes concomitantly a connection with the woman herself. The montage that develops around these shots paradoxically separates them from the realm of human discourse while linking them to Marianne's independent status as discrete image. Among the many examples of this action, perhaps the most explicit are the shots of tulips (at the restaurant meal, for instance) with trembling or falling petals which, after being pictorially disconnected, are graphically linked to the woman herself. As Eric Rentschler notes, these "pillow shots suggest a concrete world existing outside our everyday consciousness, a world waiting to be discovered, a living world beyond the compositional center of the film's narrative."[11] And the strange irony that permeates and controls this film is that this external consciousness is exactly what defines the new subjectivism that Marianne has claimed as her own and works to maintain through the course of the film. She is at once the compositional center of the film and an image at odds with that center.

The imagistic singularity of Marianne also helps explain her imperviousness to the temporal pressures directed at her. Several times in the film different characters attempt to remind her of how her retreat into a new subjectivism will be eroded and destroyed by time. In a speech that Marianne deflates as rehearsed posturing, an overdetermined social discourse, her husband taunts her with the fact that she will "grow older and older and then hang herself." The publisher tells her of the "ghastly old age" that awaits an author who has inexplicably stopped writing. The theme of her father's visit is primarily the pathos of growing old and the struggles of memory. Likewise, the narrative of the film itself is marked with titles announcing the changes in months from March through May – months of birth but, as T. S. Eliot has made us aware, also months of cruel growth. Against these movements stands the woman in her imagistic isolation, resisting temporal patterning just as she resists social and patriarchal discourses. She retreats into herself against the pressures of time and, more importantly, against the action of a narrative temporality which necessarily threatens to inscribe her in its own conventional scheme.

In this dialectic with narrative itself, one sees the most significant connection between *The Left-Handed Woman* and other feminist films which, in their different ways, confront the patriarchal order in the very structure of narrative cinema, whose temporal ordering purportedly reflects a male mode of seeing and organizing experience.[12] Specifically, these films aim at a non-narrative disengagement from the fetishizing action of the male perspective which has dominated filmmaking since its historical beginnings; and the resistance of Handke's pillow-shot woman to a temporal composition thus takes on a larger political character as it works to separate the image of the

woman (and her image-making activity) from the formal temporality of another order.[13] For her, the fears of an old age must be incidental threats; for her, the imagistic stasis of an extra-human perspective always detaches itself from the human (and male) dynamics of narrative film. Like the windows seen from the inside and the outside of the speeding trains in the film, the perspective of this woman and this film places such a radical emphasis on the frames of the image that its course through time becomes a truly secondary and separate context.

Where then is this woman's place in the public sphere? Does she in fact have such a place, and is it defined only by her separation from the other discourses (of men, of temporality, of any group consciousness) that surround her? Here lies the central tension in the film. For, if this woman defines and maintains herself through an imagistic isolation in the extra-human, the second direction of the film is her translation of herself slowly and subtly back into the human realm, a translation of the image she has claimed into a language for its communication.

Appropriately, her first foray into the matters of the social world is to take a job as a translator, and much of the film evolves around this first assignment of translating Flaubert's *A Simple Heart* (*Un Coeur simple*, 1876). The signs and significance of this movement from a state of singularity to that of human discourse appear again when she pulls her husband from the path of a truck after he has been pleading "I exist too"; and later in the film a shot of her in a café shows her face partially covered by a newspaper, the first she has read for some time and one aptly titled *Le Quotidien*.

The image of another woman and child which drifts now and then across Marianne's course is an equally crucial symbol of a potentially less enclosed relation with the world, and Marianne's own strange son comes to dramatize both the problems and possibilities of a social relationship which could preserve her own image while communicating it with others. As a natural bond that potentially both constricts and opens her, this son represents and crystallizes a dialectic with an outside order which she must separate herself from yet needs to respond to, which she moves toward but only in the tentative hope of establishing a new relationship with it. It is the intrusion and badgering of her son and his friend that make her toss her typewriter and translation off the table in anger and frustration. Often these two Kafkaesque children play strange communication games – with walkie-talkies or with vaudevillian gestures of violence – which at once mirror and stand in ironic contrast to the mother's strained efforts to establish her own idiom for communication. As a reversal of the conventional structure of family and society, individuality in this family must begin as an outside image and can only then start to work its way into the communicative framework of a fresh language and restructured social relations.

With the full scope of its implications for film, this crisis of translation means, for Handke and his characters, finding a language to speak an image

not as a language but as an authentic image. It means in effect creating a language as a negation of all that conventional language implies. Like the unemployed actor whom Marianne and her father meet at the photo booth (Rüdiger Vogler, a regular in Wenders's films), this image would have to discover the impossible formula for communicating intimately and naturally while being controlled by conventional rules. As Marianne's father tells the actor, "You always seem embarrassed by your lines. . . . You're posing." To show that he has understood this message about making a filmic image speak a natural language, the father asks the actor to make the image communicate intimately: "In your next film signal me that you understood." He concludes by suggesting that with these changes an authentic image can harmoniously enter a temporal order: "I look forward," he says, "to watching you grow older on the screen." Here as throughout the film, to become a viable language, the image must aim at a radical and discrete movement back into the human world: a movement by which the singularity of imagistic identity would use yet resist the conventions of discourse, a strained and balanced movement such as this barely visible and relatively static narrative structure which nonetheless remains very much a narrative and temporal order.

More specifically, this effort to translate the image takes the form of a tension between identity and allegory. Throughout the film there are obtrusive marks of allegory, such as street names like "rue Terre Neuve" or "rue de la Raison" (on which the woman lives). And Handke has remarked that these allegorical planes are central to the film's project, as they appear alongside those striking moments of imagistic identity to create a kind of friction. In his words: "The fact that names of this kind, completely casually, appear in the story, was not used as a device to show symbolic constriction – but rather served as a kind of distortion correcting pleasantness through the gestures of allegory."[14] This tension and dialectic is in short the tension of translation. Its unconstricted balance is clarified further when, in describing the image of the suburban houses that inspired the film, Handke uses the term "a separate togetherness."[15]

On the one hand, this tension between allegory and identity involves the life of the image itself which, for Handke, exists as a sort of pure and romantic identity, a self-sustaining pleasantness outside the abstractions and weight of any discourse or structure. On the other hand, there is the communal or social order which represents itself and its elements in terms of allegorical discourse, a language to be read and spoken through larger patterns of meaning, but one here without the stability and semantic unity of symbol. Unlike a symbolic discourse, with allegory there is no interpenetration of image and language; rather there is a slight distortion which in a curious way fits together the language and the image it appropriates, so that meaning lies in the dramatic gap between the two and the image speaks only as a slight negation of the language that surrounds it.

At one point in the film, Marianne walks down rue Elise and from a neighboring house we hear Beethoven's "Für Elise." Earlier, just after she has told Bruno of her illumination, she rushes home and, without explanation, walks around her living-room on stilts. In both cases, the image and action vibrate with a significance that comes from literal, allegorical *props* (romantic pathos, escape, etc.). Yet, in both cases, the singularity of the image and the artificiality of the allegory generate an attraction and repulsion which allow the image to speak through the allegory but as significantly more than it. In a way central to Handke's entire aesthetic, translation becomes a negation of its vehicular language (as allegory), since in appropriating the image the main service of this language is to create a friction (like balancing on stilts) between the allegorical props and the referent image, calling that image forward as meaningful while testifying to its own basic inability to claim that meaning. In *I Am an Inhabitant of the Ivory Tower* (*Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms*, 1972) Handke explains this in different terms: "It is not only a question of unmasking clichés . . . but of entering into, with the help of clichés of reality, new conclusions concerning reality."[16] In translating the image, this negation therefore insinuates a positive meaning: like the shot of Marianne sitting in a small shed, looking defiantly up and shutting the door on the eye of the camera, the act of negation becomes a positive claim to the fundamental value of the image as self-contained meaning.

Stylistically and structurally, the most salient action with which Handke establishes this dialectic of translation is an imagistic montage, what Rentschler has called a "collision" of elements.[17] Thematically, this collision is present in the central predicament of the film: a German woman in a French city, displaced in her place. But usually this montage or collision works through a narrative or visual jolt, a surprise or friction, whose immediate consequence is a static charge. Connected with the abrasive stasis of those pillow-shot images set against the narrative flow or the friction created by the tension between allegory and identity, the indirect purpose of this charge is to generate meaning. More specifically, it locates within its tension and along its surfaces either a character depth or a radical interaction between characters. As a dramatic illustration of this, there is again the sequence at the photo booth. The actor and Marianne move tentatively toward each other to shake hands as they prepare to part, but, just at that moment, a static electric shock anticipates their fingertips. They quickly look up at each other, smile uncomfortably, and, in this way, communicate silently beyond the formal gesture that initiated the contact.

The narrative of *The Left-Handed Woman* is, in fact, disrupted continually by these jolts and collisions. The two children leaping unexpectedly from the suitcases, the awkward and peculiar confrontation with the publisher's chauffeur at her door, the café scenes with their disparate figures and angular visual planes, and especially the final party scene at Marianne's house: all describe simple social or visual shocks and unexpected collisions

within the diegesis which make disturbingly apparent a world into which isolated characters and images must integrate themselves. The party scene is especially pertinent in this regard, for here one sees a gathering of all the character-images that have somewhat randomly gathered around Marianne through the course of the film. As alienated figures, these characters confront each other for the first time, and, in the clumsiness of their separate identities, they make an abrasive contact like the friction between the actor and Marianne. As summary of this contact and the communication it represents, the party ends with a fumbling fight between Bruno and the actor, which leads to the two men comforting each other as they leave. A more strictly visual version of these and other scenes is the striking shot of Marianne walking a path that parallels the path of a horse and rider which, in turn, forms a parallel with a speeding train: each moves along its own imagistic lines but in the contiguity of those lines there appear dramatic fissures which define both their differences and their shared space, their separate togetherness.

In *The Left-Handed Woman*, these moments of visual strain, friction, and confrontation become the film's center. They illustrate the action by which an identity (self and image) is distorted through the pressures of allegory (the discourse of society). They dramatize, above all else, how the pleasant integrity of the image – observed most readily in the stunning beauty of so many shots – becomes profitably distorted through the communal sense of allegory. In these distortions, the film and its images speak.

In *The Left-Handed Woman*, consequently, the singularity of the image continually and, at least from Handke's perspective, unavoidably translates itself through the force of its negations, into a discourse of meaning. More accurately, the pure image in Handke's film always teeters with a visible friction on the edge of a larger allegorical sense that, even in the ironic inadequacy of that sense, redeems the image from isolation. Usually, in this drama of the visual and the verbal, the static charge which is at its center serves, through its speaking, to illuminate the different sides of the dialectic. But, at least once, the film introduces a strange merger of the subjective and the objective, of allegory and identity. Here one witnesses Handke's dream of translation, an impossible and utopian making of image into an integrated discourse, freed of friction.

Of the significantly few times this utopian translation actually appears in Handke's work, the most striking in *The Left-Handed Woman* is a medium-long shot of Marianne looking out of a second-story window below her son who is in a parallel window on the third floor. It is a night shot, and the windows are brightly illuminated as sharply defined images of the two characters. As with much of the film, the shot is dramatically silent. Suddenly, the son tumbles from the window, across the gaze of the mother, and lands miraculously on his feet. The shot is unsettling since, like many of the shots in the film, it has a very tangential relation to the diegesis, but, more

importantly, because the unexpectedly surreal nature of the shot makes it extremely difficult to locate in terms of the film's studied realism. This narrative jolt is clearly part of the disturbing friction that surfaces throughout the film, but the exceptional status of the shot indicates that it is also a central anchoring point in the film – against which the tension between allegory and identity can be measured. The content of the shot suggests itself a kind of wish fulfillment: a vision of the son, Marianne's potential link with new social relationships, saved from the disaster and tragedy this son and society could represent.[18] Formally, moreover, the same type of salvation is represented: just as Marianne's vision here metaphorically gathers up the image of the son as it crosses hers, the tension between the two internal frames is ultimately diffused into a very different image with an obviously new (surreal) look, an image which teases with the human significance of a *natural* discourse. Across the tense juxtaposition of these frames-within-the-frame, the extra-human vision of Marianne gives way to an imaginative interaction, a new kind of image which connects and integrates those previous oppositions. With this single shot, the collision between identity and allegory reconciles temporarily in a startling example of the utopian state that Marianne quietly seeks to translate herself into: where the self as singular image finds an apposite and *positive* idiom with which to speak that image to others, where image retains its identity while yet expressing itself in a social discourse. This, then, is a rare moment of true feeling.

Whether as a negative dialectic or a positive drama, this rigorous effort to translate an authentic image into a social discourse is the best indicator of Handke's distance from Bresson and Antonioni, two filmmakers to whom Handke is often compared. Despite resemblances between the work of Handke and that of these other filmmakers, Handke's style is not transcendent. As Rentschler has pointed out, observers who miss this point fail to recognize the socio-historical dimension in Handke's powerful individualism.[19] If Handke regularly focuses on the extra-human, it is only to return his characters and audience to a human integrity. Aptly, the publisher who gives Marianne work translating Flaubert is played by Bernhard Wicki, who once appeared in Antonioni's *La notte*. There Wicki plays a writer whose death early in the film introduces a dismally stark world of rigid images which overwhelm speech and any possibility of human society. Here, in Handke's film, Wicki is resurrected; and, fittingly, as a symbolic messenger of translation itself, he points the way to bringing those images of alienation back into human discourse. In brief, he brings the possibility of finding words to suit the radical difference of the image. Wicki, as the integrated presence of actor and man, thus indicates Handke's path through the alienation of Antonioni and Bresson (and, for that matter, Ozu) and toward a world where the individual subject isolated in images can translate him or herself back into history and social discourse.

For Handke, this possibility is an extremely tenuous one, its appearance often as tentative and awkward as any attempt to move between images and language. Yet, at the end of the film, Marianne does, through patience and endurance, finish her translation of a novel about human transcendence won through suffering. Shortly before, she makes a first, a prosaic gesture of friendship toward Bruno by buying him shoes. The final shots recall the opening pillow shots: blossoms on the sidewalk, Marianne watching her son swing, a train passing through an empty station, and commuters walking through a subway tunnel. But, in this ending, the images have begun to fill with a human and social content, not appropriate, strictly speaking, to a pillow shot. The final shot of the two children parting at the end of the tunnel to go their separate ways, moreover, is explicitly a summary image of promise: figures of a future dividing in the middle of the frame yet joined by the symmetrical tension of the otherwise static borders. The children move out of the frame, allegorizing a path for the spectator, and Handke underlines the direction of that path by closing the film with a written quotation from Vlado Kristl: "Have you noticed there's only room for those who make room for themselves?" Besides the telling irony of a verbal text having the last word in this film about imagistic identity, here is the central paradox and hope of *The Left-Handed Woman*: a definition of a *social* space only as it is produced by an individual's demand for a private space.

If *The Left-Handed Woman* has been (correctly) seen as a feminist film made by a man, it consequently can equally and perhaps more profitably be described as a story of images made by a man of prose. If it is a film of aggressive isolation and negation, it is also a social film precisely in the aggressiveness with which it speaks those negations. In this purposely difficult film, translation is achieved only by being adamantly and literally faithful to the original. Images are capable of joining the social allegory of language only by resisting as an identity apart. The chief, ironic revelation of the film is that the left-handed eccentric of the title is, in fact and by nature, a right-handed everywoman.

Notes

1. J. Hoberman, "She vants to be alone," *Village Voice*, 7 April 1980.
2. A list of Handke's literary achievements includes *Kaspar* (1967), *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1972), *Short Letter, Long Farewell* (*Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, 1972), and *A Moment of True Feeling* (*Die Stunde der wahren Empfindung*, 1975).
3. See Stanley Kauffmann, "Notes on Handke's films," *The New Republic*, 8 March 1980.
4. Recently Handke and Wenders attempted another collaborative effort, a rendering of Handke's *The Slow Return Home* (*Die langsame Heimkehr*), but were unable to gain either government funding or television support.

5. Peter Handke *The Left-Handed Woman*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977), p. 25.
6. Kauffmann, op. cit.
7. Given Handke's own social actions and his semi-autobiographical writings, it is not difficult to see the author as a reflection of his protagonist. See Eric Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time* (Bedford Hills, NY: Redgrave, 1984), p. 169.
8. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 161.
9. ibid., p. 161.
10. Handke, quoted in the press booklet prepared for the film by New Yorker Films.
11. Rentschler, p. 169.
12. The most celebrated analyses from this position are: Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," *Screen*, 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975), 6–18; and Stephen Heath, "Difference," *Screen*, 19, No. 3 (Autumn 1978), 51–112. See also Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).
13. See Ruth Perlmutter, "Visible narrative, visible woman," *Millennium Film Journal*, No. 6 (Spring 1980), 18–30.
14. Press booklet from New Yorker Films.
15. ibid.
16. Peter Handke, *Iche bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 28.
17. Rentschler, p. 171.
18. In the novel the son to some extent parodies this utopian state when he reads a passage he has just written: "My idea of a better life: I would like the weather to be neither hot nor cold. There should always be a balmy breeze and once in a while a storm that makes people huddle on the ground. No more cars. All houses should be red. . . . I would know everything already, so I would not have to study. Everyone would live on islands. . . . Everything I don't know would disappear" (p. 4).
19. Rentschler, p. 173.

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