

ELFRIEDE JELINEK

## THE MEANING OF THE OBSCENE

I have always been accused of writing pornography. But I would say I write anti-pornography. There is no question that women have to re-appropriate the representation of the obscene and the nude, and I attempt to do so, but in the course of my work I have noticed that the representation of the obscene has been so usurped by men that women have no space for it and must inevitably fail. But pornography by women must be possible, and I don't think it need express contempt of women. Yet the male gaze turned toward women is always contemptuous. Present forms of pornography are not representations of actions; they represent humiliation.

A pornographic representation is always also an ahistorical representation. That is why I attempt to write the history of women's humiliation. I call my work anti-pornographic because my goal is a process of consciousness-raising and not just an attempt to provoke lechery, although I have been accused of that. It is vital to see sexuality as a political phenomenon and not just as some innocent aspect of existence.

In the texts I write there are always sensational parts, but they are political. They have neither the mere innocence of being nor the purpose of lecherous stimulation. They are meant to reinstate the history of sexuality, removing the veneer of its apparent innocence and naming the guilty parties. I name those who usurp sexuality and produce the master/slave relationship between men and women. It is still the case in patriarchy that men and women cannot partake equally of the pleasures they covet. I want to uncover these power relations. The obscene is thus justified in instances where one strips away the innocence from male/female relationships and clarifies these relations.

It often becomes clear, however, that in the representation the characters become wooden figures. The text gets progressively more static and more explanatory because it is evidently not on the agenda