



Caryl Flinn. *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. viii + 323 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-23823-7.



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Film: The Stylization of History

The New German Cinema by Caryl Flinn appears at a timely point in the history of German film. As questions of form and style are subsumed under the demands of profitable mass entertainment, as the perspectives of authorship and film art are marginalized by the cult of diversion and celebrity, and as the dreams of cinema as an alternative public sphere are crushed by the powers of economic and cultural globalization, the aesthetic and political project of the New German Cinema appears both hopelessly old-fashioned—and shockingly new. And it is the provocation of this otherness that motivates the kind of textual re-readings offered by Caryl Flinn in her new book. Flinn’s contribution to the process of remembering and reclaiming belongs to a growing body of work in film studies on the role of music and sound, a trend that has found a particularly fertile ground in German film studies and cultural studies, given the central role of (classical) music in definitions of national identity and the constitutive tension between visual and auditory traditions in German culture as a whole. At the same time, her study intervenes in the (post-unification) remapping of German film traditions by arguing against the gradual forgetting of the New German cinema which, from the

mid-1960s to the 1980s, became closely identified with a particularly creative and critical approach to working through or “coming to terms with the past,” an approach that remains distinguished by its heavy reliance on, and close awareness of, style as an integral part of history, memory, remembrance, and commemoration.

Sustained by a combination of close textual readings, informative historical contextualizations, and evocative theoretical digressions, Flinn’s argument departs from the crucial insight “that memory and history do not exist without style” (p. 1). Music, whether diegetic or non-diegetic, must be considered a constitutive element of stylization and hence an essential part of all forms of (historical) representation. Especially in the New German cinema, music cannot be separated from the nineteenth-century project that elevated to a key site of identity formation and that found powerful echoes first in the musical culture of the Third Reich and later in the numerous films about this period and its libidinal structures. Not surprisingly, the New German filmmakers (e.g., in their formal and thematic self-reflexivity, their openness to ambivalence, and their rejection of totality, linear-

ity, and closure) found the sound track particularly well-suited for their own aesthetic and critical sensibilities. In exploring this connection, Flinn focuses on their creative use of original film scores, famous operas, popular songs, assesses their heavy reliance on montage, citation, and other strategies of deconstruction and reconstruction, and analyzes their often ironic, self-reflexive approach to character development, narrative structure, visual style, and mode of address.

The argument of *The New German Cinema* consists of three parts, which roughly correspond to three distinct ways of thinking about music and style in the cinema. In the first part, Flinn uses the Freudian model of mourning and melancholia, including its adaptation in the Mitscherlich's notion of *Trauerarbeit* and its subsequent filmic appropriation by Eric Santner, Thomas Elsaesser, and others to sound the reverberations of melancholia's subversive force in Peer Raben's scores for Rainer Werner Fassbinder, from the intimate *Chinese Roulette* to the monumental *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The second part concentrates on Alexander Kluge and the fragmented terrain of both his archeology of history in *The Patriot* and his deconstruction of opera in *The Power of Emotions*. With the third part, Flinn enters more untested terrain as she traces the role of camp and kitsch in the historiographical explorations of Monika Treut, Ulrike Ottinger, Rosa von Praunheim, and Werner Schroeter.

The strength of her argument derives from the multiple connections to larger debates in contemporary German culture. Flinn's reading of this period is highly sophisticated, critically astute, and full of provocative insight. She moves easily among psychoanalytic criticism, critical theory, and feminist film theory and offers illumi-

nating digressions on 1920s theories of montage, 1990s debates on queer sensibilities, and so forth. Occasionally, the complexity of the textual references obscures the overarching argument, and the critical triangulation of music, history, and style takes a backseat to the many smaller points. At times, the central problematic of historical memory appears to be identical with the Third Reich and the Shoah. At other times, the survival of the past in the present seems to extend to a feeling of nostalgia and sense of loss that must be considered all-pervasive and inevitable. The resultant integration of the filmic representation and stylistic legacy of the Third Reich into a post-traumatic film aesthetics is not always fully convincing. Equally debatable is the blurring of the boundaries between music and style throughout the book. Is music to be absorbed into the larger category of style or is music distinguished through particular qualities (located in its non-representational form and its particular relationship to emotionality, auditory pleasure, and aesthetic enjoyment)? Here less complexity and more focus (e.g., on theories of auditory pleasure) would have made the argument much stronger. More careful copy-editing could have eliminated the many misspellings of names; a select bibliography would also have been very useful.

Hopefully Flinn's study will inspire others to take a second look at the German films of the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps the contemporary obsession with retro-styles can be used to redirect attention to a time when films were formally innovative and politically provocative. It is the main contribution of *The New German Cinema* to remind us of a body of films just waiting to be reclaimed for new strategies of re-reading. Here Flinn has done us an immeasurable service.

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