

Caryl Flinn: *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style*

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The New German Cinema encompasses a highly heterogeneous body of films, whose historiography continues to undergo critical reassessment and recontextualization by scholars drawing from an expanding repertoire of theoretical paradigms. Caryl Flinn's recent contribution to the extant literature charts a line of inquiry both ambitious in scope and provocative in its hermeneutics, establishing a productive relationship between history, music, and style. The author locates herself within a certain formalist tradition when she invokes David Bordwell's assertion that style is not simply "window-dressing draped over a script," but in fact "the very flesh of the work." (p. 1) It is certainly true that "the matter of style" has received shorter shrift in the criticism of the New German Cinema (hereafter identified as NGC) than it has in, for example, Italian Modernism or the French New Wave. Instead, the politics of the 1970s and early 1980s claimed center stage, involving an oedipal confrontation with the fascist past and identity politics. Style is arguably a most elusive category of analysis, one that often defies delimitation, even as so

much auteur theory has sought to rationalize its parameters. While style is personal, it necessarily also references cultural and historical trends; a filmmaker operates within certain codes and conventions while also redefining them in a manner that creates a recognizable signature.

In establishing music as one of the barometers of style in the NGC, Flinn redresses an area of glaring neglect, as there is minimal literature available on the role of sound in modernist German film.¹ Deracination, counter hegemony, and aesthetic impurity are among the terms Flinn employs to deftly bind an assortment of film music scores, devoting particular attention to the films of Rainer W. Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Ulrike Ottinger, Rosa von Praunheim, and Werner Schroeter. At a glance, the NGC would not appear to boast an active film music tradition, and indeed, film composers of this era had few native models to follow, for there was no precedent within the German film industry for the scale of resources available to salaried

Hollywood composers.² Among the few original composers in the NGC Peer Raben, Jürgen Knieper, and Claus Bantzer, Flinn discerns the display of a certain "anxiety of influence," as they modified and critically referenced earlier forms and styles through techniques of fragmentation, distortion, interruption, and repetition. In keeping with that film movement's interrogation of inherited versions of history, their musical practices evince a deep-seated suspicion of false unities and claims to authenticity. They herein undermine the narcotizing effects and sense of illusory plenitude for which Adorno once reproached classical conventions of film music. Flinn takes the discussion further by invoking the contentious terms of camp and kitsch as stylistic devices that involve some sort of critical relationship with the past. Camp has been theorized as offering a means to recontextualize outmoded objects or ideas that have outlived their usefulness, hence the frequent reproach of camp as a display of poor taste,

1 Flinn lists the extant literature on music in New German Cinema in footnote 12 of her introduction; I would add to that list Nora Alter and Lutz Koepnick's new volume, *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of German Culture*, released by Berghahn Press in 2004.

2 Financial and institutional constraints account for the frequent reversion to pre-existing music. In France, taxation of ticket sales helps finance composers, but no such system is in place in Germany; German film composers also face reduced earning potential because 50 percent of their salary must be paid into the German equivalent of ASCAP.

i.e., as taste that is historically out of sync with the contemporary moment. Indeed, Flinn's project itself touts a certain self-reflexive gesture of campiness, as she revisits a film movement many regard as passé, as having been worked over and analyzed by theorists to a point of scholarly exhaustion. A camp aesthetic is evinced not only in Fassbinder's less mainstream films such as *Querelle* (1982) with its highly artificial set and monumental phallic structures, but also in his historical melodramas, where Hanna Schygulla's performances invite reflection about the status of stardom in German cinema. Two substantive chapters on Alexander Kluge chart the limit points of camp, i.e., showing where camp ends and another version of archaeology begins, using discarded objects, anatomical fragments, and the detritus of history to make a statement about the terms under which history has usually been written, namely from the vantage point of the survivors or the conquerors. Yet Kluge's agenda, while often ironical, also maintains a redemptive strain antithetical to camp's highly ironical pastiche.

The diversity of the NGC virtually defies the terms of a film movement. Ultimately, these films were unified primarily in being produced within a given culture and historical moment. Flinn maintains they were also united in their politically-motivated suspicion of image production, which accounts for their popularity among international scholars and theorists who zealously deployed Brechtian criticism, Marxist and materialist analyses, and semiotic and psychoanalytic methodologies. Film criticism of the 1970s can be dated by its conviction that negational strategies of

representation of themselves institute ideological transformation in society. A cursory glance at the film industry today, however, indicates that style can be deployed independently of any political motivation, with citations from earlier eras merely signaling that nostalgia so symptomatic of postmodern pastiche. I would aver that one must also take into consideration the historical variability of audience responses to style; the impact of a particular deployment of style correlates with other factors in a given epoch. Consequently, contemporary audience responses to NGC and the hermeneutical strategies applied by today's scholars may not correlate with conditions of reception during the halcyon era of the NGC. This makes it particularly challenging to talk in authoritative terms about style.

Arguably, any study of West German cultural production of the 60s and 70s must take into account the notion of mourning or Trauerarbeit in relation to the fascist past and the Holocaust. Such discussions trace their theoretical origins back to Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," in which he sought to identify normal and neurotic responses to loss and encoded these in gendered terms. Alexander and Margarathe Mitscherlich's famous 1967 study applied this discussion to postwar West German society, which they regarded as too attached to its lost authoritative leader and to phantasms of national wholeness to experience appropriate remorse for the national socialist past. Instead, the Mitscherlichs maintained, the national psyche remained fixed in melancholia. It is Flinn's opinion that the implications of this model of mourning for understanding film style itself have been under

examined in scholarship on the NGC, and her effort to show how the soundtrack engages the discourse of mourning is truly unique and brilliantly executed. She continues the work begun by Eric Santner with his provocative notion of "stranded objects," which he saw staged in the NGC as a means for homeopathic recovery enabling (in his study white, male) subjects to enter into relationship with the historical past and with repressed memories. The illusion of overcoming trauma is upheld through controlled doses of unpleasure – a mechanism Freud regarded as ultimately constitutive of subjectivity itself, and which he found corroborated in the famous "fort-da" game staged by his nephew. Flinn's revisitation of the model of mourning, however, reveals its inadequacies and its problematic assumptions about sexual, ethnic, and national identities. She also shifts the register from that of vision to that of sound, from the realm of the gaze, looking relations, and the image areas which Elsaesser (1996), Mayne (1993), and Silverman (1996) have tied to a willed disempowerment, a relinquishment of phallic and visual authority to a succession of powerful Others to discuss how the soundtrack in NGC is positioned to formulate questions about history, loss, and memory work.

Towards that end, Flinn invokes Walter Benjamin's use of the term "explosion" to metaphorize the work of the historiographer tasked to "blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history."³ Rather than acquiesce to master narratives serving hegemonic interests, Benjamin valorized

3 Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 263.

moments of unacknowledged counterhistory. Flinn detects similar historiographic explosions in Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979), where the third movement to Beethoven's barely audible Ninth Symphony is nearly drowned out by human screams and Allied bombings that blast a photograph of Hitler off the wall as Maria and Hermann Braun scramble for cover. Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Our Hitler* (1977) uses the same symphony to more bombastic effect towards the close of his film, celebrating the cinema itself as Gesamtkunstwerk in the form of a small child wrapped in strips of film to the accompaniment of a chorus singing the "Ode to Joy" Finale. Kluge's *The Patriot*, on the other hand, strips this acoustic icon of German culture of its aura, as evinced in the drunken Gabi Teichert and her friends, who clumsily try to reconstruct the words to the Finale playing in a crackling recording. Flinn contrasts Syberberg and Kluge's approaches to music, arguing that while Kluge uses music to fragment the coherence of inherited narratives of history, Syberberg perceives history as just so much detritus disrupting the unity and cultural coherence which he believes (classical) music possesses and for which he nostalgically yearns.

Flinn finds support for her assertions in films that foreground the materiality or the grain of the soundtrack and its reproducibility, in form of scratchy recordings, distortions of sound, or excessive repetition (e.g., *Lili Marleen*). These fractured soundtracks disclose the NGC to be a cinema of dismemberment, riddled with narratives that foreground broken families, betrayed relationships, shattered dreams, political disillusionment, and bankrupt

ideologies. In Flinn's exegesis, the relationship between sound and bodies becomes one of analogy, resulting in a compelling and highly original heuristic device. In support of her reasoning, she draws upon Judith Butler's (now theoretically overhauled) notion of identity as produced through a series of repetitive acts that constitute a performance rather than tracing their origins in biological determinism. However, it seems to me that the presupposition that identity is produced through volitional desire overlooks the manner in which the post-Lacanian psychoanalytical frameworks of Slavoj Žižek and Joan Copjec assert that drive, most especially the death drive, needs to be taken more earnestly as a force of contention. I would certainly concur that the New German Cinema often utilized the bodies of characters to metaphorize or metonymize the national body politic as evinced in Lena's teeth falling out in Helma Sanders-Brahms' *Germany, Pale Autumn* (1980), Ali's stomach ulcer in Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), Oscar's stunted growth in Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum* (1979), or woman as nation in Fassbinder's historical trilogy. According to Flinn, these bodies find their corollary in the damaged music fragments of many soundtracks: both bodies and sound are inscribed by personal recollections of the national past. However, what remains yet to be resolved is to what extent the language of the corporeal symptom operating within a subject split by the operations of repression as well as by untrammelled drive - really correlates with the signifying system of music or the broader aural soundtrack.

Caryl Flinn's ambitious project is divided into three parts whose

subdivisions simultaneously reveal and belie the challenges of coaxing rhizomatic analyses into the systematic linear form demanded by scholarly convention, according to which a series of theses must inexorably progress towards an inevitable conclusion. But retracing the intertwined strands of thought is a rewarding challenge for the reader in search of original thought. In Part I, "Historical Predecessors: Melodrama and Modernism," Flinn revisits the genre of melodrama, both to explore its appropriation in the 1970s by German cinéastes, particularly by Fassbinder, and to assess the theorization of that genre by film scholars of the same era. She reads melodrama as about irretrievable past losses that inform the present. Conveyed through the affect of sentimentality, melodrama served as an ideal vehicle for the melancholia saturating so much of the NGC. However, Flinn also depathologizes this affect, loosening it from its Freudian legacy to suggest that melancholia, in acknowledging the impossibility of "overcoming" the past, may be the only appropriate response to such extreme trauma as the Holocaust. In a fascinating analytical maneuver, she takes particular attributes Freud claimed to observe in the melancholic, such as "an insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure,"⁴ and links these to the exhibitionism displayed by Fassbinder's melancholic characters, who seem to rely upon the gaze of others for acknowledgement. She suggests one might visualize the melancholic as alternately prone to sullen, withdrawn moods or to outbursts,

4 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 247.

screaming, and exhibitionist display, character attributes widespread among Fassbinder films ranging from *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* (1969) to *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972). His films constitute a performative model of introjection, symbolizing grief by acting it out and exhibiting it for others under the pretext of its conquest. That Fassbinder inserted himself in his own films, as did occasionally his film composer Peer Raben, would seem to accentuate this exhibitionist tendency.

This exhibitionism arguably represents the flip side of melodrama as a genre dictated by the mechanisms of repression. Loss and grief are subserviated to the dictates of patriarchal law and a capitalist economy, only to return as displaced histrionics and articulations seeking nonlinguistic expression. The soundtrack and the *mise-en-scène* become central venues for discharging emotion or, alternately, for indicating the impossibility of doing so. However, in the NGC, Flinn maintains that such displacing strategies were complicated by a deep-seated distrust of representation itself, placing even sound into question as a means to articulate the ineffable. Peer Raben's scoring for *Fear Eats the Soul* or *The Merchant of Four Seasons* (1971), for example, repudiates the sweeping scores and unifying function of classical cinema; instead, sparse snippets and undeveloped phrases function to maintain a certain detachment from the unfolding drama. In *Beware of a Holy Whore* (1970), Flinn maintains the steady stream of pop music by American artists Ray Charles and by Leonard Cohen flies in the face of the cinematic convention of lyrics that comment upon actions witnessed on the screen. Instead, the foreign lyrics and their mass-produced

character signal the presence of the foreign within Germany; not only does the music not exteriorize internal emotional states of film protagonists, it refuses to unify characters or emotionalize particular actions.

In the chapter, "Modernism's Aftershocks," we benefit greatly from thoughtful conversations and interviews Flinn conducted with Peer Raben, whose deceptively simple compositions mask his actual debt to modernism. There couldn't be a better time for her meticulous engagement with this overlooked musical genius, as the Fassbinder Foundation is now releasing even the lesser known films into commercial distribution. Flinn discerns a stylistic signature among the scores Raben composed for Fassbinder's anti-melodramas as well as for other contemporaneous directors, which feature much oboe and piano, the use of children's instruments, and travel scenes generally accompanied by his own original compositions. Due in part to budgetary constraints, early Fassbinder films lacked nondiegetic music, but this absence is problematized productively: music's inadequate presence is foregrounded in *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* when Herr R. unsuccessfully tries to recall to a salesclerk the melody of a musical hit "about love" that he hoped to purchase for his wife. The lack of utopianism in Raben's scores is also evident in *Fear Eats the Soul*. Here, the characters' imperfect mastery of the German language and of bourgeois conventions finds its correspondence in jukebox tunes that offer no reprieve from the characters' inadequacies, their lyrics offering only hollow promises to the doomed dancing couple. In melodramas of the New German cinema, Flinn observes,

"Music retreats rather than reassures, appearing in fragments without resolution, much as the historiographic assumptions upon which the films operate." (p. 48) In many instances, this assumes the form of a circular musical structure that never fully achieves closure, much as melancholia itself implies an inability to let the past be past.

Flinn regards shock as an important device for inducing affect in the melodramatic genre. Whereas tragedy involves catastrophes that develop with a degree of inevitability out of the original dramatic situation, in melodrama events are always somehow unexpected and accidental, inducing sentiments of loss, regret, and melancholia. That desire for things "to have happened differently" also defines the NGC as a movement preoccupied with national history. Flinn maintains that its musical scores counter the cinematic tradition that banks on music's transcendence or invisibility. Peer Raben himself disabuses music of its nostalgic potential or innocence when he argues that film music should function as a series of "shocks." (p. 71) This modernist sentiment ties the NGC to the broader European movement of the interwar years a favored historical reference point for German filmmakers who preferred to bypass the Nazi era when situating themselves within a film historical genealogy. Films of the 1920s acutely documented the shock associated with the sensory stimuli, conflicts, attractions, and collisions attending industrialization and urban life generally. It was, moreover, Hanns Eisler who argued that music serves to lend the motion picture an element of surprise and estrangement so that the public will not confuse it with reality.

Raben adopted a similar function for music, using standardized songs in a clichéd manner which empties them of their original appeal or ideological valor. Both composers valued shock over seduction; like Eisler, Raben used anti-naturalist sound-image pairings, interruption of songs or their fragmentation, matched pitch relations between sirens, screams or other noises. Raben also established a relationship between music and political or physical violence, as when the *Lili Marleen* song is repeatedly played by the Nazi officials to torture Willi's Jewish lover, or when the female protagonist in *Martha* (1975) is forbidden by her sadistic husband to play the opening act of *Don Giovanni*, an operatic tale of forced marriage, only to finally find the record, like her cat, destroyed. In *Merchant of Four Seasons* (1972), Hans smashes his favorite recording which had been cathected with his desire for true romantic love and maternal affection, and herein presages his immanent self-destruction.

However, Raben also rejected certain elements of his musical forbearers, maintaining that Eisler's basis in New Objectivity was often too rationalized and unfeeling. Although Raben's music contains moments of deep poignancy and beauty, Flinn regards this beauty not as a fixed aesthetic property but as part of an overall personal style. This observation bears out in Fassbinder's stories, which betray intense emotion even amidst the Brechtian distantiation devices achieved through wooden acting and the relay of unrequited gazes. Arguably, then, for many directors of the New German Cinema, shock is less something homeopathically administered through music to help the audience adapt to modern life than it is an acknowledgement

of its limits, as indicated in characters who collapse from shock (Hans in *Merchant of Four Seasons*, Mendelson in *Lili Marleen* (1980), or the eponymous protagonist of *Veronika Voss* (1980). In contrast to modernist shock, postwar shock is induced by a recognition that modernism's emphasis on estrangement and fragmentation itself needed to be estranged. Consider, for example, early Fassbinder film characters numbed by anomie and quotidian banality. Emerging from a war ravaged Europe and an artificially induced economic boom, West German film was, according to Flinn, "marked with a particular (massively delayed) 'aftershock,' which included changing notions of nation and nationhood, the United States as physical occupier and cultural colonizer, and expanding patterns of global capitalism." (p. 97) In support of this unusual association between shock and utopia, Flinn calls upon Thomas Elsaesser and Kaja Silverman, who suggest that the repudiation of phallic sexuality in Fassbinder's work is symptomatic of a negatively constructed utopia, as the director criticized all manner of political affiliation, whether capitalist or communist. Indeed, Flinn maintains that qualities of negation and unpredictability in postwar shock need not necessarily be understood as oppositional or contrapuntal in nature. After all, sound theorist Michel Chion (1994) vigorously rejects terms like "counterpoint" or "opposition," maintaining that film music need not necessarily replicate visual or narrative information. Instead, music can provide a "backdrop of 'indifference'" not dissimilar to a sort of psychotic regression, one intimately related to the cinema's mechanical nature, as film is

automatically and robotically spooled through a projector.

In Part Two, Flinn resumes this "explosive historiography" via Alexander Kluge's *The Patriot* (1973) and *The Power of Emotion* (1983). Kluge blasts the various tools, institutional frameworks, and lacuna with which German history had been documented for the postwar generation, and critiques inherited methods of visualizing this history. The collage structure of his films blends cinema verité with staged fiction, art historical documents with moving images, high art with mass culture and speech with song, hereby both enacting explosion and signifying its effect. Flinn revisits the feminist critiques exacted by Helke Sander (1990) and B. Ruby Rich (1993) and applying these to the materialist exegeses elaborated in Kluge and Negt's formidable tome, *History and Obstinacy* (1972), where women exist within a feminine economy clearly bound to the body and to reproductive potential. Bodies do figure prominently in Kluge's work, speaking the language of the symptom, of repressed trauma that seeks enunciation. Flinn argues that the two Kluge films in question are governed by traumatic representation, exemplified in interview sequences that constitute nonsequiturs to previous diegetic material, in character silences, in direct address to the camera, in intertextual characters such as Gabi Teichert, who resurface incongruously in other films. This "traumatic style" offers evidence of the psychological phenomenon of incorporation, of going through the motions of engaging psychical trauma, drawing it into the self without acknowledging its foreign origins. Flinn sees repression perhaps most acutely at work when *The Patriot* acknowledges

the slaughter of German soldiers in Stalingrad or the bombing of German villages (politically foreshadowing Bitburg) but stops short of acknowledging the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. Without discounting these pronouncements, I am wondering if there isn't a more radical rhetoric at work when Kluge suggests that the knee or the fallen Nazi soldier is the repressed or reviled. Other of contemporary humanist culture, possibly embodying the death drive; alternately, one could turn to recent scholarly precedents such as that of Kriss Ravetto, who complicates inherited oppositions of victim and oppressor to pursue complex analyses of controversial film representations of violence, fascism, and the Holocaust.⁵

Where *The Patriot* literally digs through the rubble of discarded objects of history, Flinn regards *The Power of Emotion* (1983), as primarily concerned with feelings, especially those that become explosive because they have not received proper societal acknowledgement. She builds upon Miriam Hansen's discussion of music to render legible a rich and densely layered film that undertakes a multifarious deconstruction of opera as an institution manufacturing or territorializing human sentiment along codified channels. Most of Kluge's excerpts are from tragic opera of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, whose melancholia and fatalism are more often celebrated than placed into question. Indeed, Kluge's voice-over remarks upon the lack of correlation between supply and demand in the libidinal economy of opera, for opera rarely offers the happy endings audiences seem to seek, instead building its narrative

potential on a predictable trajectory that begins with passion and ends with political battle or internecine feuding. Producing "overheated" emotions like an industrial power plant gone awry, there are linkages or Zusammenhänge between opera, emotions, and other machineries of war, industry, and capital, in which deadly outcomes are not merely inevitable but even desirable. As Miriam Hansen has also pointed out, romantic trajectories seem complicit with the catastrophes of German history, perhaps because the tropes of romance are possessed of a fatalism that disallows any alternative course of action, leading to mass delusion and war.

To defetishize the institution of opera, Kluge creates incongruous pairings between image and operatic sound, assembling fragments of the silent film version of Verdi's *Aida* out of chronological order and out of sync with their screen presentation. He undermines conventional spectatorial perspective through atypical camera angles at live operatic performances or rehearsals, and roams behind the stage where our view is obstructed by ropes, wires, and workers. A close cut of frayed electrical cords betrays both the frailty of that power plant cum opera house, as well as one of the material sources that upholds the façade of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Kluge further undermines identification with narrative plot by giving away the outcome of dramatic moments; his voice-over to an excerpt from *Carmen* informs us that our heroine has just hours to live just as Don Jose is about to stab her. Elsewhere he offers metacritical commentaries, as when he points out that *Aida* is really about war between two nations, Ethiopia and Egypt. He also critiques the

thirst for cruelty underpinning librettos that prolong or heighten the suffering of their protagonists while simultaneously sublating this agony into musical beauty (e.g., Radames and Aida should be screaming in pain when they are stoned to death, not singing to one another!). Flinn regards Kluge's material perspective on history as reinscribing lived bodily experiences back into opera's sublime narrative discourses. In the process, the systems of exchange and economies of value that regulate spectatorial desire in the opera are revealed to operate similarly as those of the cinema. While some critics experience Kluge's films as cerebral and devoid of passion and feeling, Flinn attributes this to Kluge's unwillingness to cater to notions of romantic love, or to believe that heterosexual love will end wars; instead he foregrounds how love, sex, and emotion are contractually regulated. Despite the criticism by B. Ruby Rich (1993) and Helke Sanders (1990), Flinn defends what she terms "a lambent psychic and emotional economy" in *The Power of Emotion*, where compassion and empathy intervene in meaningful ways into the course of events.

Kluge's early interventions in the 1970s and early 1980s gave impetus to critical opera studies (Clément 1988, Abel 1996, Leonardi & Pope, 1996), which began interrogating inherited narrative conventions (e.g., must female characters die?) and focusing on the materiality of the form, including the bodies of opera singers. Queer theorists have also explored the extravagance of the diva cult and the sheer excess of opera's vocal performance matters addressed in Part Three, where Flinn explores camp as a means of restaging history as fantasy played out upon prop laden bodies

⁵ Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2001.

that enact gender and ethnicity. Although camp is a contested stylistic device that resists facile definition, there is some consensus to the effect that it denaturalizes objects and ideas through a playful reworking of codes, conventions, and appearances. While these characteristics locate camp as a postmodern phenomenon, Flinn points to its earlier emergence under modernization along with the stylistic excesses of opera and melodrama, thus linking it with the expansion of capital and the rise of middle class leisure culture. Camp was consolidated by such fin-de-siecle figures as Oscar Wilde in gay and lesbian urban cultures, where artifice took precedence over nature, surface over substance, pleasure over function, and where sexual dynamics that bypassed procreativity energies were privileged. Qualities that link the camp aesthetic with the NGC include the desire to deconstruct transcendental signifiers within German culture, and the distrust of the aura of authenticity, which is replaced by a celebration of surface and artifice. Even as Andrew Ross reads camp as a style that gleans or scavenges discarded surfaces of preexisting cultural icons, Flinn hastens to distinguish between this rendition of camp and the Trümmerarchäologie so evident in Kluge's *Patriotin*. She points out that it is also important to ask whose trash is being recycled and echoes the query posed by queer scholars as to why camp should merely "react" to or work with the materials discarded by heterosexual cultures; many would argue that icons such as Marlene Dietrich and Zarah Leander have inherently structured into them a queer aesthetic, in the philological sense of *quer stellen*, of setting askew inherited normative practices.

To add to the complexity of the debate, most directors of the NGC whose work is now subjected to queer readings actually reject any sort of label that would ghettoize them as gay or lesbian. It is indeed difficult to ascertain whether the term "queer" should only be applied to films in which the director has self-designated the term, or whether the term can also refer to certain multivalent gender ambiguities evident even in Weimar exemplars such as Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) which predate this neologism. Flinn declines to actually identify the aforementioned directors as producing queer cinema as such, arguing that it is not a German phenomenon. Yet that assertion conflicts with the reality that films of Fassbinder, Treut, and von Praunheim surface on syllabi and in scholarly presentations at academic conferences, where they are alluded to as part of an emerging canon of texts cited in queer theory. Ultimately, Flinn concludes, queerness is a relation rather than a position, one seeking to sublimate the inherited dualities between oppositional and mainstream culture. She turns to Alice Kuzniar's discussion of the emancipatory potential of Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory for queer readings of cinema. Because it represents a disjuncture between sign and referent, allegory points towards an incapacity to establish specificity of meaning, which Kuzniar regards as a challenge to the productive drive underpinning not only inherited textual hermeneutics but also capitalism and reproductive heterosexuality. (Here I have to interject that Kuzniar's book itself constitutes a productive drive to bring textual coherence to queer cinema, thereby establishing at least a

temporary limit point for the fertile indeterminacy she heralds for allegory). Flinn argues that the camp aesthetic operates with a similar indeterminacy of meaning and fetishization of the partial object, especially in the realm of music. Like other characteristics attributed to the NGC—melancholia and shock—Flinn regards allegory as self-referential and drawing attention to its own representational inadequacies. She places Lacan's ghost beside Benjamin's to maintain that the same indeterminacy that defines allegory also underpins the Lacanian theory of subjectivity grounded in misrecognition. However, when she maintains that the NGC drew energy from these types of false identifications, it is difficult to not feel that this is pointing out the obvious and the universal is not all cinema fundamentally anchored in misrecognition as inherent to the apparatus itself? At times, the confluence of camp stylistics with queer hermeneutics herein legitimizes the widest swath of interpretations, celebrating certain films as "having something for everyone" in all their plurivocal polymorphism.

Flinn observes a significant departure in queer cinema (or among films which lend themselves to queer readings, even if their producers reject the term) with regard to their relationship to the historical past, as these films seem less overtly preoccupied with questions of national identity and so-called *Trauerarbeit*, and more preoccupied with gender bending. Ottinger and Treut entered the film scene at the close of the halcyon era of the NGC, when Germany witnessed a significant regime change and the country was en route to "normalization" and receiving international

validation in putting the past behind it. Would it then be fair to read queer cinema as a sort of sideways (*quer gestellt*) form of resistance to normalization, I wonder? Disengagement with the fascist past is reinforced by filmmakers who bypass Nazi cinema, instead invoking stylistic or cinematographic techniques of the Weimar era in order to situate their work in relation to a more valorized moment in German film historiography. But I would maintain that even omissions or repressions actually prove that cinematic style has in fact, evolved as a counter-response to significant cinematic works made in the maligned era of Nazi cinema. For example, Kluge's visual reference to *Triumph of the Will* in the opening sequence of *Power of Emotion* evinces that film has historically operated as an avowedly intertextual enterprise. If, as Andrew Ross (1989) has maintained, camp produces "surplus value from forgotten forms of labor,"⁶ then part of that labor may be the labor of remembering and forgetting Germany's past. In contrast to the passivity of mourning or melancholia, camp restores a sense of spectacle and performance that denaturalizes history. The preoccupation with the ephemeral, with that which is swiftly expended and expelled, moreover robs history of codified master narratives.

While camp has traditionally been associated with gay subcultures and thus gendered as a form of male authorship, Flinn suggests that women's appropriations of the camp aesthetic upend conventions by which women have served as its

often misogynistic object, e.g., in which certain forms of femininity are "lovingly assassinated," as Leo Bersani (1984) expresses it.⁷ Flinn's close readings of Ulrike Ottinger's *Madame X* (1978) and Monika Treut's *The Virgin Machine* (1988) limn the possible parameters of a feminist form of camp, one that involves fantasy and role play. She invokes Laplanche and Pontalis' (1973) definition of fantasy as a structure or dynamic in which the subject participates in order to experience different identificatory positions. Fetish objects such as Madame X's prosthetic hand/knife or Susie Sexpert's suitcase of sex toys play a significant role but their erotic allure does not invoke the aura of authenticity so common to classical cinema. Rather, Flinn continues, the fetish functions as a psychically heightened form of allegory, one that can also extend to the sound track, which figures prominently in the camp aesthetic. Both *Madame X* and *Virgin Machine* foreground via amplification the materiality of sounds, be they dripping faucets, telephones, or television sets. Ottinger uses recorded sounds of animal as a kind of metonymic substitute for vocalized human desire. She treats film music as just another sound effect rather than a means to underscore affect, so that language, song, and sound become coeval, often deployed asynchronously to unsettle realist assumptions. *Virgin Machine* also uses a heterogeneous mixture of music, including lyrics that alternately comment on diegetic events or unsettle facile notions of linguistic clarity, as when Pearl Harbor sings in pig latin.

Musicology has been significantly reshaped by queer criticism, so as to reveal how

chromaticism, flourishes, and weak phrases that threaten tonal structures can signify deviancies, sexual and otherwise. Even Adorno ([1973]; 1996) sought to politicize chromaticism, maintaining that dissonant chords are more differentiated and progressive (p. 40). However, Flinn concedes that "queering" music is a vexed enterprise; some object to the idea that gay musicality inherently deviates from some fixed musical standard, as this equates homosexuality with outsiderdom. She uses Rosa von Praunheim's *Anita: Dances of Vice* (1987) as an example of the manner in which musicological norms may be possessed of both sexual and national attributes. The musical clips of Stravinsky, Weill, and popular American Jazz encompass a variety of high and low cultural forms and compositional styles, from serial, to cabaret, to avant-garde work of the 1960s. When combined with an international panoply of visual references ranging from *Reefer Madness* (Louis Gasnier, 1936), to Peter Brooks *Marat/Sade* (1966), to Rosa Luxemburg, and to AIDS activism of the 1980s the effect is a montage that militates against silence, a performance waged against institutions that try to regulate or remove disobedient desires. Flinn demonstrates that while classical cinema has tended to wed deviancy to individual characters, von Praunheim's soundtrack functions as part of a broadly sustained aesthetic of fragmentation. The many historical references to German Expressionism (canted angles, painted sets, chiaroscuro lighting, cragged hand-lettered intertitles, etc.) establish a specific setting but not a coherent diegetic work, as the story moves between present and recollected past, while leaving

⁶ Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 240.

⁷ Bersani, 208.

ambiguous how much of the past or the present is accurate and how much is the result of distorted memory or fantasy. Particularly intriguing is Flinn's rhetorical maneuver to the effect that von Praunheim's campy focus on the aging female body of actress Lotte Huber (a former exotic dancer in the Weimar era) constitutes part and parcel of an oppositional political economy. Huber on the one hand becomes associated with extravagant consumption and thus also with capitalism, but this is undercut by the fact that her body operates outside of the productivity associated with the sexualized and potentially reproductive female body, not unlike the bodies of aging film stars such as Brigitte Mira and Karl-Heinz Böhm, whom Fassbinder resurrected from the discarded popular culture of the 1950s.

Our author resolves her densely scored opus on an unusual chord by introducing a director whose work is not widely available. Werner Schroeter's *Bomber Pilot*, which utilizes the Nazi and Adenauerian eras as historical backdrops, affords an opportunity to revisit and synthesize a number of motifs. Flinn regards it as one of the most effective displays of how introjection (as opposed to projection or rejection) of Nazi kitsch can be used as a homeopathic working through of the less desirable politics, history, and cultural artifacts of Germany's past. In revisiting the theorization of kitsch by such diverse intellectuals as Benjamin, Bourdieu, Friedlander, and Greenberg, she concludes that kitsch merits our attention because its valence seems to be both historically and ideologically variable, referencing cultural artifacts that constitute trash, debris or otherwise expelled

matter in relationship to high culture, yet which nevertheless are variously appropriated by alternately the lower class, the upper class, urban cultures, rural cultures, gays, lesbians, queers and straights. In her intelligent exploration of a reviled art form, Flinn exhibits a nonjudgemental sensibility and a capacity to inquire into abject artifacts with a degree of compassion that mirrors Schroeter's own attitude, expressed in his remark, "there's no great divide between kitsch and art. It's just stupid to look for traditional values in art and culture one should only try to find a vitality in them."⁸ Many critics refer to Schroeter's films as operatic because of their stylistic and emotional excess, and indeed, the connection between kitsch and opera runs deep, as opera has lost much of its elite pedigree and prestige. However, Flinn maintains that Schroeter's films do not so much originate in the world of opera and high art as partake of it in a strategy of disidentification. One of his signature techniques is to dissociate expression from source, so that emotions take on a life of their own, independent of character. Cameras, for example, are placed close to figures, to diminish spatial context or any sense of narrative continuity. Further, his use of asynchronous sound dramatizes the irreconcilability of image and sound and renders ambiguous whether his actresses are syncing their own recording or that of a nonprofessional singing painfully off key. Women's voices become effectively disembodied and visibly indeterminate in a strategy destabilizing of classical cinema's desire to visually contain the female subject. But lest one should

try to over-psychologize this effect, let it be known that Schroeter apparently placed no credence in psychoanalysis or psychological readings and rejected the notion of deeper unconscious motivations for human behaviors. Disinterested in the etiology of human emotions, he focuses exclusively on the expression of those emotions as an end in themselves.

In conclusion, Flinn's highly original, engaging, and ambitious monograph succeeds in interfacing film studies with a nexus of interrelated disciplines including musicology, gender theory, German cultural studies, and psychoanalysis. The discussion of that elusive realm known as "sound" in combination with the equally elusive terrain of "style" arguably requires nuanced communicative skills with which to bring coherence to a very wide cross-section of filmic examples; Flinn undertakes that labor with jaunty flair and a palpable affection for the material at hand. Although it takes a reader already conversant in the major debates around the Holocaust, memory work, and psychoanalysis to negotiate discourses to which Flinn can only briefly summate as she forges new connections between discourses and texts and charts her innovative historiography, any committed reader will be richly well-rewarded for these efforts.

⁸ Gérard Courant, *Werner Schoeter*. (Paris Goethe Institute/Cinémathèque, 1982), 19.

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