

## **Sounds Beguiling: Franz Hofer's WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN and the Transformations of Music Genres in Early German Cinema**

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Important new impulses for genre theory, especially for early cinema, have come from the shift in film studies away from the individual films as texts, towards the study of spectatorship and with it, towards new models of reception theory and exhibition history. The work of Robert C. Allen on vaudeville theatre and Charles Musser's investigations into early cinema's 'screen practice' have in this respect been exemplary.<sup>1</sup> When one thinks of the many new studies which in almost every country have appeared about the 'building' of audiences, the demographic constitution and gender identity of spectators, then the fact that we are now much better informed about the physical as well as the imaginary spaces created by the cinematic spectacle should also lead to new context-sensitive work on the identity and history of cinematic genres.<sup>2</sup>

If we look more broadly at genre studies, traditional theories often proceeded from the notion that genre is first of all a descriptive category which producers and audience share, such as 'the western', 'the musical', and whose function it is to create a relatively stable horizon of anticipated pleasures.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, genres emerged when critical attention focused retrospectively on a body of work which had previously not been seen under this particular generic heading. Such was famously the case with 'melodrama' and 'film noir' (neither of which was, properly speaking, an industry or consumer category; the genres imposed themselves as the result of critical interventions, driven by an ideological agenda, as in the case of German emigré directors and film noir, or the gender-politics of melodrama).<sup>4</sup>

Psycho-semiotics has also given us models of how to understand the working of generic codes, as in Steve Neale's brief monograph, where apparatus theory, interpellation and enunciation are deployed in order to distinguish mainstream Hollywood genres according to their different subject-effects and modes of address, notably the different regimes of illusion and belief, or the different axes of verisimilitude and credibility by which the spectator's visual pleasure is engaged and his sense of mastery is solicited.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, since genres are the conduits for stereotyping both socially acceptable and transgressive behaviour, they are the most obvious ways in which the cinema interfaces with its public's ideological and historical identities, and thus with the situated knowledge, the prejudices and preferences, in short, with the cultural codes but also the shifting norms and values of a given community. The specificity of a nation's cinema might therefore be most readily accessible via the genres that its audiences preferred, which is why genre is an indispensable category for any sociology of (national) cinema. In the case of Germany, for

instance, the genre of the fantastic - centred on *The Student of Prague*, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and other so-called Expressionist films - has not only been highlighted as the German film genre par excellence; it has also been deemed symptomatic for the nation's secret psychic dispositions, its political fortunes or rather, misfortunes.<sup>6</sup>

My paper takes its starting point from none of these (pro)positions, at least not initially. I shall, for instance, argue that it has become increasingly difficult to talk of the 'origins' of filmic genres - thus apologizing in advance to the organizers for seeming to speak against the title of our conference. However, I trust I am not being too controversial when I say that the more we know about the 'birth' of the cinema, the more indeterminacy, hybridity and intertextuality seem to become the inevitable conditions of generic forms, not only from a historical but a theoretical perspective as well. As to the latter, I shall take a pragmatic approach, in which the institutions intervening between the text-experience and the viewer have an important role in providing the framework for the set of expectations viewers apply in order to make a given film meaningful. In this, my views are broadly in line with Roger Odin's semio-pragmatics,<sup>7</sup> and with Francesco Casetti's recent redefinition of genre.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the historical dimension, one of the questions I am implicitly posing is whether this 'hybridisation' or context-sensitive status of genres in cinema must lead us necessarily to denying film genres their autonomy: in other words, do we have to see them mainly as parasitical on other, historically anterior and economically rivalling arts and entertainment practices (such as music hall, variety theatre, circus, fairground, wild west shows, etc), while they depend on film economics and their institutional discourses for their identity and legitimacy?

In the second part of this chapter, I concentrate on one single film which has entered the history books as an example of a specific genre, but which I propose to read across another set of seemingly 'external' determinants, namely those of sound, which suggests that it belonged to - and should be classified under - another genre. This exercise is obviously not primarily concerned with 'correcting' a possible error of taxonomy; rather, it is meant to raise more general issues in the way we understand generic origins and transformations, once we draw the pragmatic implications of our increasing awareness of how the history of exhibition practice 'situates' not only the film texts, but determines the conditions - and thus the generic identity - in which they were to be understood. A by now relatively well-known example of such re-classification in the recent historiography of early cinema is the debate around Edwin S Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, a film which Charles Musser stubbornly sought to claim as generically belonging not to the Western - of which it had long been seen as the 'blueprint' - but rather, to the genre of the travel film, to the Hale's Tour entertainment ride, in addition to such apparently far-fetched predecessors as imported British crime films like *Daring*

*Daylight Robbery* and *The Life of Charles Peace* (both of which crucially involve a train ride), and even a Victorian stage melodrama on the same subject: the latter intended to warn prospective tourists of the American West to be vigilant of their possessions.<sup>9</sup> By drawing less on the retrospective teleologies of old film history and abandoning the search for 'firsts' or 'origins' typical of, say, Kenneth McGowan and William K. Everson, Musser was able to direct attention to a number of contemporary discourses, thus opening our eyes also to the very different determinants playing around the notion of genre in early cinema.<sup>10</sup>

Such a move away from the film text to the context of exhibition, to spectatorship and the attraction of audiences' attention not only signals an awareness of the contingent factors necessary to read the contemporary 'place' and identity of films. It also represents a pragmatic turn in a more narrowly linguistic sense: illustrating the conviction that meaning is not inherent in the film's semantics and its articulation across a given generic syntax, but derives from asking oneself what different (groups of) spectators 'make' of a film. Early cinema, then, provides in a very real sense a juncture between film history and film theory in the form of a 'historical pragmatics': to understand how films are understood (adapting a famous phrase of Christian Metz's), by trying to understand how historical spectators might have understood films. That this raises conceptual issues as well as demanding new kinds of/new definitions of 'evidence' is one of the challenges confronting the historian.

Thus, once genre is seen as a category constituted on the side of the recipient and the practice of exhibition, rather than on the side of production and distribution, i.e., once one goes beyond the purposes of taxonomy and marketing, genre becomes immediately a more interesting but also more diffuse category. We know, for instance, that the 'numbers' principle of early cinema (adapted so massively from vaudeville) majorly influenced the way cinematic genres emerged, the way they were named or mis-named, as the case may be, before they were transformed by the cinema - a transformation made necessary by such different exigences as the change from store front cinemas to picture palaces, the move from short films to the integrated feature film, and the imposition of monopoly distribution or block-booking agreements.

In my introduction to *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decade* I chose a 1913 Oskar Messter film about Richard Wagner, in order to show how these exigencies can lead to what must to us appear an almost incomprehensible film. Commissioned for the centenary of Wagner's birth, but made without the cooperation of Bayreuth and the Wagner Estate, the film displays a number of characteristics - such as a sort of re-invention of the short film principle within a full length feature film - that led me to classify it as belonging not to the genre of the musician's bio-pic - which was to become such a mainstay of German cinema both in the Weimar and the Nazi period, but more properly representing an example of the

heroic rebel and national hero genre, already successfully practised by Messter with films about Andreas Hofer and William Tell, now 'hybridized' with the 'artist-as-persecuted-genius' trope. This, however, does not preclude that when the film was shown in New York in September 1913, it was indeed hailed as a breakthrough of how to combine music and cinematic spectacle, while when it premiered in The Netherlands for a monopoly run over the Christmas season in 1913, it was advertised as an illustrated fairy-tale chronicle - ideal entertainment for the whole family during the festive season.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Musser's example of the re-coding of *The Great Train Robbery* also holds another lesson, I think. While he fully acknowledges the debt early cinema owes to other entertainment forms, from vaudeville theatre to medicine tent-shows, for providing most obviously the cinema with a range of well-established 'genres', which the cinema adapted, streamlined or 'digested' like a boa constrictor, in his research into Lyman Howe's exhibition practice, or into the New York reception of some of Edwin S. Porter's films in mixed ethnic communities, he also highlights the specific and local factors affecting exhibition practices of early cinemas.<sup>12</sup> Again, taking the case of *The Great Train Robbery*, we can get a much clearer idea of what might have been at stake in the famous shot of the outlaw Barnes firing his gun at the audience placed sometimes at the beginning and sometimes at the end of the projection. This substantial degree of autonomy devolving on the film exhibitor, for instance, suggests that neither the term 'media-intertext' nor such neologisms as 'intermediality' or 'media-interference' seems quite the right description for the pressures and constraints exerted by the rapidly evolving exhibition sector upon the formation of film genres.

I would therefore propose to give a slightly different inflexion to the 'pragmatic' approach towards genre that I have so far outlined. This centres on the idea of the film as a semi-finished product. What I mean by this term is simple enough: namely, that a film requires a 'performance' for its completion and an 'event' for its actualization, and that both dimensions are also relevant for determining a film's generic identity.<sup>13</sup> Semi-finished, then, because a film in a tin can is not the film projected. Semi-finished because a film performance is an event, which 'takes place' in a double sense: the place is that of interaction between people in an auditorium, as well as that between the individual spectator and the screen. Thirdly, semi-finished, especially in the early period that concerns us here, because of all the factors which were then under the control of the exhibitor, from the speed of the projector and the frames per second, to the sequence of the shots, or the order of the 'numbers' in a short film programme. Practically all the parameters of how a film looked, felt, as well as the social meaning of the film event could be controlled not only by the filmmaker/producer but by the distributor/ exhibitor. Just think of the variables: with piano accompaniment or full orchestra, with the lecturer to the side of the screen, with actors placed

behind the screen, with the house lights on or out, in halls where the air-freshener had to be activated every two hours, or which were stale with the smell of sweat. Because the services, the amenities and the environment could vary so much, film historians sometimes call the early period 'exhibition-led', meaning editorial control over the film, the programme, the performance rested with the exhibitor.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, each performance of a film becomes a singular and unique event: often, cinemas rivalled with each other not by the film they were showing but by the size of the orchestra, or the wit of its lecturer: aspects of the film performance known to the audience at the time, but lost to the historian. At the limit, any generic stability - even that derived from the distributors' or manufacturers' catalogues - might vanish in the performance. For instance, in Germany, comedy had several sub-genres, such as 'derb-komisch' (slapstick) or 'herzhaft' (psychological), while drama was divided between 'sentimental' (romantic, full of feeling) and 'rührselig' (melodramatic, meant to produce tears), distinctions which were based on audience response, and thus were rather fragile in the face of exhibition practices where careless music could interfere with such responses, or a lecturer could ironically undercut the pathos of a 'touching melodrama' with appropriately inappropriate jokes at the film's expense. We know for instance, that newsreels or actualities showing the Kaiser in 1909 were often accompanied in Berlin working class districts by very 'seditious' or 'sullen' commentary, and the military command in 1916 was much agitated over reports that the staged combat footage in war propaganda films elicited such derisory laughter from the soldiers on leave that it became counter-productive to morale to show them at Christmas time when soldiers were on leave.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of the semi-finished, therefore suggests that it is above all the audio-aspect of the performance that supplies the missing dimension, turning the screening into a performance and the performance into an event. As I hope to show, this is only partly my intention, and yet, I shall indeed want to focus on sound, and the notion that it is sound which 'completes' the film and thus helps determine its generic identity. In case we did not know it anyway, we have all learnt in the past twenty years that the silents were never silent. Not surprisingly, therefore, that the film studies community has sought to concentrate research energies on filling the gap and supplementing what the film-as-text hermeneutic approach, but also often enough the standard film histories ignore, or pass over in silence, mainly because it has left so few material traces. Of course, given that early cinema scholars are exceptionally good researchers and historians, they very soon found these missing traces, indeed they became overwhelmed by the evidence. For instance, we now have at our disposal a huge amount of material on the different techniques and technologies that - often successfully - attempted to match mechanically produced sound to the mechanically reproduced images: machines such as the Graphophone and the Phonoscope, the Motiograph

and the Columbia Grand, or Oskar Messter's Biophon and Gaumont's Chronophone have all been rescued from oblivion.<sup>16</sup> In fact, so plentiful are the inventions, so extensive their deployment in the early years that a once common assumption about Edison, namely that he invented the cinema as an adjunct to the phonograph no longer seems that far-fetched or eccentric. After all, have we not begun to think of moving images as in any case the by-product of radio-waves (on the way to the invention of television) and the telephone (witness the word wide web part of the internet)? With this knowledge at our disposal, and from the Olympian perspective of hindsight, maybe we can begin to put into perspective the proper dimension of sound in early cinema?

Unfortunately, it turns out that the mass of evidence about sound does not 'complement' the picture of early cinema, but seriously confuses and confounds it. First of all, we are probably likely to succumb to another retrospective teleology: so popular has the screening of silent films with full orchestra become, thanks to Pordenone, to Kevin Brownlow's *Napoleon* and to Enno Patalas' *Metropolis* and many others that we now tend to take this model of the late 1920s into the 1910s and even earlier. But if we compare the available evidence, a very contradictory account emerges of the place, the function and even the presence of sound in early cinema. Put quite simply, there is far too much of it: mechanically produced sound via wax cylinders, gramophone, magnetized wire or pianolas, humanly produced word, sound and music by pianists, lecturers, actors behind the screen; coming from the orchestra pit thanks to an Exela Soundograph, a Wurlitzer Automatic Orchestra or the Deagan Bells; produced by musical instruments or in the form of theatrical sound-effects; programmed by cue-sheets or especially composed music; improvised by dedicated or by absent-minded pianists; orchestrated by conductors either physically present or cunningly projected via mirrors from the film-strip itself; blaring through loudspeakers onto the street, in order to attract hesitant passers-by to the box office, or played to accompany the film performance; or on the contrary, not played during the film, and instead, during the intervals and the intermissions while one set of patrons leave the theatre, and another settles down to wait for the show to commence.<sup>17</sup>

And then, there are the films themselves, suddenly brimming over with sound cues: not just soldiers putting bugles to their lips or telephones ringing insistently. We now notice people ostentatiously tiptoeing over gravel paths, cocking their ears to pick up the words spoken behind a closed door, crouching underneath a half-open window to catch the revealing utterance, or engine drivers blowing steam whistles from their passing train to attract the eyes of pretty girls. In other words, the silents - after having been silent for so long, are now overwhelming us with a veritable pandemonium of music and noise, of voices and commentary, of sounds emanating from all manner of sources and emitted in all kinds of

directions. So it came as a particularly harsh surprise, when Rick Altman tried to shout above the din, to tell us that the silents were indeed often silent, that music and noise accompanied just about everything *but* the movies themselves. Hoping to shock us into silence long enough for his 'revisionist' voice to be heard and for us to digest his article 'The Silence of the Silents' he details in some 70 fact-filled pages the different kinds of evidence he has amassed to indicate that, as far as the sound of silent cinema goes, the more we know the less we understand. His argument is that early cinema had such a 'multiple identity', with such an unstable social use that the confusion over sound is one of our best historical indicators not only for measuring the extent of the chaos, but also for charting its eventual resolution and standardisation. Let me quote a passage from the conclusion of his piece:

The multiple identity of what we now call early cinema is symptomatically displayed through the diversity of musical traditions on which pre-1910 film exhibition draws. Like lyceum lectures, films may call for the explanation of an elocutionist. Like music hall specialty acts, films may be accompanied by music matched to the singer's movements. Like vaudeville comic routines, film pratfalls may require a drum roll or cymbal crash. Like vaudeville chaser acts, films are sometimes accompanied by whatever popular song the orchestra happens to have on the stand. Like lantern slide shows, films may call for the type of music being played by the musicians represented on the screen. Like travel lectures, films may require live dialogue. Like midway routines, film music may serve primarily as ballyhoo. Or like paintings in a museum, films may be projected in stark silence.<sup>18</sup>

Altman thus locates the motor force of stabilisation in the struggle to wrest control away from the exhibitor and re-centering on the side of the producer, or more generally, he emphasizes the need of the emergent 'institution cinema' to install a division of labour which would make the film-experience a more uniform product and thus a commodity that could circulate universally, while guaranteeing a consistent level of quality: communicated to the audience via the genre label and the star personality. Based on my work on German cinema, I tend to agree with Altman, but with two important provisos. One is that the site-specific and 'embodied' nature of film spectatorship requires that we factor in another change which (although not unconnected with the shift in editorial control) nonetheless demands a different kind of evidence, to be found in the films themselves, namely the 'interiorisation' of narration. The second qualifier has to do with the possibly somewhat different situation in the European cinema, and in particular, with the German cinema, compared to the American cinema. One point that had always bothered me, ever since I heard that the silents were never

silent, were the reasons why this fact had been not just ignored by traditional film historians, but positively suppressed, just as the fact of colour in early cinema had been kept a closely guarded secret in the history books and early film aesthetics.

In the case of early German cinema, for instance, it is now evident that music has always played an immensely important role in the development of both film form and film genre. Practically everything we know about German popular entertainment culture at the turn of the century suggests that it derived its cultural presence from a vast array of musical idioms and musical practices: orchestral, choral, sheet music for pianos and pianolas, Lieder, ballads, chansons, sarcastic ditties, church hymns, Wagnerian opera. If Messter's *Tonbilder* are the best-known and most notorious genre (notorious, because these scenes of now forgotten star performers lip-synching arias from famous operas seem to us so thoroughly 'uncinematic'), there is ample evidence<sup>19</sup> - that the generic make-up of German cinema for German audiences from the very beginnings was defined by musical rather than dramatic genres, for which there exist a bewildering diversity of names (e.g. *Tonbild*, *Filmsingspiel*, *Tanzfilm*, *Gesangsfilm*, *Filmoperetta*, *Operettenfilm*, *Revuefilm*, *Schlagerfilm*, etc).<sup>20</sup>

There is thus a good argument to be made that German popular culture as a force in the development of a distinct national identity has always been more intimately wedded to its music culture than to any of the others arts, including literature or the visual arts, 'Expressionism' notwithstanding. From Messter's filmed arias and his so-called 'conductor-films' spanning the years 1903 to 1913, to the filmed operettas and film-operettas produced in great numbers from 1914 to the end of the 'silent period' in 1929, from the multi-language sound operettas of the early 1930s and the Nazi musicals to the *Musikfilme* of the 1950s and the *Schlagerfilme* of the 1960s, the German popular cinema has relied heavily on music to retain its audiences, to foster genre identity and generate national product-recognition. So self-evident does this now appear that the question poses itself how the idea that the fantastic film constitutes the first and most typical of German film genres could ever come about. From the vantage-point of pre-1913 German cinema, the answer is that it could only have arisen because for too long historians have ignored or suppressed sound and music as a defining element of early cinema in general. We now know how unbalanced the history of German cinema has become because of this emphasis on the 'silent' expressionist film, which would now seem like the imposition of a different stylistic paradigm - shifting generic identity from the register of the ear to the register of the eye.

Taken on its own, however, such reasoning risks providing too mechanical an explanation for a very complex situation. One needs to see the paradoxes and contradictions of sound practice in early cinema, as expounded by Altman, within a wider framework, namely as an integral part of another problematic: that of the transformation or coexistence of

two distinct types of spaces -- the physical space of the auditorium and the imaginary space of the screen. We know that in early cinema up to about 1907, the films thought of their audience as physically present: the dominant mode was, in Noel Burch's terms, 'presentational' rather than representational, the staging was often frontal, and the regime of looks included a look outward at the spectators. To this corresponds, one might add, a sound and music practice that was similarly exteriorized, in the form of commentary, or at any rate, one that valorized the auditorium space as a space distinct from screen space, but with which it nonetheless 'communicated'. Music, voice or sound effect thus in a sense spoke *to* and *with* the images, as much as they 'made the images speak'. This brings me to what I have called the 'interiorization of narration'.

With the establishment of the narrative multi-reel or full-length feature film, the spectator was gradually trained to 'enter' the film, to inhabit it not in a physical but a metaphorical way. This in turn necessitated that the film provided the possibility of an imaginary viewpoint for the spectator within the action. Thus, the Biograph films of D.W. Griffith became, by their complex staging and editing (i.e. their form of narration, with its subtle creation of different levels of knowledge) the supreme examples of how to put each and every spectator at once 'inside' the action, while still respecting a certain degree of frontality and thus an awareness of the auditorium space as a necessary condition for the formation of this 'imaginary' spectator. The challenge, once one factors sound into the film experience, is to try and identify what film forms and film practices in the cinema of the 1910s similarly required and at the same time assumed an imaginary spectator. This imaginary position requires a re-coding of space both cognitively (insofar as narrative comprehension depends on the spectator appreciating an uneven distribution of knowledge among the characters) and perceptually (insofar as the spectator is privileged in sharing the protagonist's moral point of view while not necessarily sharing his or her optical point of view, as in the later, classical Hollywood style). In such a re-coding, or shifting of attention from the audience space including the screen space, to an audience space suppressed in favour of screen space, sound practice seems to me to take on an especially crucial, but also contradictory role: the 'interiorization' of the image and the possibility of narrational perspectivism depend on sound, or rather, on 'representing' sound in the image.

This brings me finally to my specific film example: Franz Hofer's WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN (Christmas Bells), from 1914. The film is not unknown, and indeed already has what one might call a double generic identity. Given that Franz Hofer has been canonized, in the past ten years, as one of early German cinema's more outstanding directors, WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN can be considered an auteur film, finding its place within the overall body of Hofer's work to which applies the label of 'Autorenfilm'. It is in these terms, for

instance, that the film is discussed by Elena Dagrada.<sup>21</sup> However, WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN also features in German film history as a prime example of the war-time propaganda film, the so-called 'field-grey kitsch melodramas', in which a particular ideological message is wrapped up in a family-based plot, in this case, one that revolves around class-collaboration and the effacement of social status. The story concerns two families, one well-to-do and with numerous children, the other poor: a single woman with an only son. It is Christmas eve, and the two mothers are anxiously awaiting news from their sons who are both serving at the Front. The eldest daughter of one household comforts the widow of the other household, eventually bringing her the glad tidings that both soldiers are coming home for Christmas. The daughter and the widow's son fall in love, under the mistletoe, and her brother, whose life the other soldiers had saved, plays the matchmaker, after having persuaded his father that, in the face of mortal danger, there is no place for class distinction, or even for a paternal veto of a possible *mésalliance*.

The German film historian Helmut Korte reads the film as the direct illustration of Kaiser Wilhelm's most famous motto from the start of the war: 'von heute kenne ich keine Parteien mehr' - from today we no longer recognize different political parties [since we are all united in the face of a common enemy].<sup>22</sup> In addition, the film's message of class reconciliation reflects the optimism of the first winter during the war, when it was assumed that the conflict would soon be over, and German soldiers would return home victorious. Christmas time thus seemed doubly propitious for such a propaganda effort, with feel-good movies welcomed by film exhibitors seeking to attract a family audience. Several other films were made in 1914 to seize this moment, with titles like *Michael's Christmas*, *Christmas Dream of a Reservist*, *The Dream of Christmas Eve* and *New Year's Eve in the Trenches*. As with RICHARD WAGNER's exhibition run in The Netherlands alluded to above, we have traces of a genre constituted and motivated by the timing and the temporality of exhibition: a good example of the semi-finished status, with the 'event' designating or redefining genre identity. Genre is here doubly determined: internally by the referent around which the plot turns, and externally by the seasonal business cycle of the emergent 'institution cinema'.<sup>23</sup>

WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN is divided into three acts of almost exactly equal length, with the first part setting out the similarity and difference between the two families having to celebrate Christmas without their respective sons. The second part brings the two families together, and prepares for Hans and Lo to fall in love with each other, while the third part shows the son overcoming the doubts of his father about his sister's union with his friend, as well as the obstacles which the lovers' own shyness puts in the way of their eventual happiness. In this respect, the narrative strands are fully integrated, and one can speak of an almost 'classical' story: the formation of the couple symbolically filling a double lack - that of

the incomplete families and that of the potentially divided nation along class lines.

But what is a propaganda film as a 'genre'? It may be the genre par excellence whose identity (whose 'intentionality') the producer defines, yet it is also the genre most obviously dependent (for its success) on how it is constructed and received by the spectator. Two types of clues as to generic identity seem to be embedded in the film, which may help clarify if not classify the intent of *WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN*. One is centred on vision and the composition of the image. Hofer, as Elena Dagrada, Heide Schlüpmann and Yuri Tsivian have all noted, is a stylist with a keen eye for symmetry. But more crucial, it seems to me, is that Hofer self-consciously works an entire history of pre-cinematic projection and imaging devices into his film, notably magic lantern performance (for instance, in the way he handles inserts and superimpositions), but also the use of silhouettes and the iconography of Christmas as it was familiar to his audience from 'views', the picture postcards and other popular artefacts. He thus preserves a certain exteriority, indeed he plays with frontality in a particularly subtle way. There is, for instance, an almost 'stereoscopic' division of picture planes in *WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN*, as in the scene where the family is finally united, and the daughter sits by the piano at the far end looking directly at the viewer, or the extraordinary scene where the small children watch the Christmas tree being decorated through a pair of frosted doors, which are suddenly flung open when the daughter receives the telegram announcing the imminent arrival of her brother. It is as if we are placed in front of one of those Christmas or Advent calendars, and were given permission to open the final 'window', revealing the splendour of the big event. This window motif is repeated several times, giving the action the sort of spatial divisions that thematize the position of the audience as located on the outside looking in, a division which, as the romantic plot develops, is folded inward, drawing the spectator progressively into the space of the feelings and growing intimacy between the lovers.

However, yet another clue, or rather another dimension of spectatorship attaches itself to (the signifiers of) music. What is so striking about *WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN* is the way in which it puts in place a number of very distinct sound spaces, starting with the Church bells of the title and the opening shot. This is followed by the organ inside the church, which is again divided between the organ loft above, and the space of song and prayer for the congregation below. Lo, the heroine, is the figure that links these spaces, and she is also the one who introduces another sound space, that of the domestic grand piano, on which she will be accompanying the Christmas carols. The narrative structure of the film is thus articulated around a series of repetitions, marked by song and musical intermezzi, where the church music from the opening is taken up by the music sung under the Christmas tree, until it modulates into the music of a dance minuet which becomes itself the prelude to something

we neither see nor hear, but which forms the natural 'rhyme' with the opening shot, namely the return to the Church and the wedding bells, now chiming for the couple.

WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN thus poses the question of domestic vs public space, of cinema and pre-cinema, of the 'cinema of attraction' and the classical cinema of narrative integration, while the diegetic role of the music is centred on the notion of the film as a performance, as event. Proof and example of a film as a semi-finished product, also in respect to its national(ist) mission, WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN can achieve its ideological purpose only insofar as it is able to negotiate the different spaces of performance and spectacle. Thus, it is careful to differentiate and redefine the roles among the characters on screen, who in the diegesis divide up between performers and audience, depending on whether they make music, or listen to it, and also between the screen and the auditorium (the performers on-screen, the spectators in the auditorium gradually 'drawn' into the action). This is what the opening scene achieves to perfection. The rhetoric of Christmas as the rhetoric of the domestic and the familial find themselves extended to include the issue of spectatorship: what it means to be active and passive. The event-character of the film is thus doubly embedded in the seasonal and the topical as both place and space, each acting as a kind of relay for the historical audience: for if Lo is the mistress of ceremonies in the first and second part, she becomes a 'character' in her own drama of love, while in the third and final part, her brother takes over as 'narrator', slipping out of his role as 'character' into that of the 'match-maker', at once inside and outside the fictional space, bridging the gap between the characters' space and the audience's space.

Crucial is thus not only the alternation between public space (the Church organ) and private space (the piano in the home), but also the way in which the film creates a very special place for its audience: halfway between spectators and participants, kept at a distance by the frontality of the staging (which Hofer motivates by his excessive allusions to the paraphernalia of imaging and image-making associated with Christmas) and at the same time, drawn into the fiction by the constantly deferred promise of the musical cues which suggest to the audience how easy it would be to join in, to sing along and thus to become part of the family as the ideal community in this hour of the nation waiting for a happy ending.

I used to think that WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN would surely have had a musical accompaniment in the theatres, but now I am no longer sure, in fact I have my doubts and am rather inclined to the opposite view: is it possible to assume that the silent cinema had to *learn* to become in some sense silent again, in its progress and transformation towards interiorization, invisible narration and the imaginary spectatorial point of view? This in turn would reflect the struggle of one part of the cinematic institution wresting control from another institution - that of exhibition - or more properly, the different entertainment cultures in which the moving image had found its first home. This home, where sounds proliferated,

and which may well have been the 'cacophony' that Rick Altman speaks about, is characterized by a great degree of generic instability and fragility, so much so that at the limit case, each performance and each programmed sequence of (short) films changes and transfigures the generic identity of even the iconographically most unambiguous visual representation. The semi-finished character of WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN would thus be the opposite of 'lacking sound'. Here, the music is less an aural than a semantic element, charged with shaping and developing the narrative, but almost on condition that it is no longer physically present in the auditorium space, and instead, becomes the music we 'see' in the film and thus *imagine* hearing, while cognitively identifying its structural function in driving the story towards its resolution, as one musical genre transforms itself into the next, from Christmas carol to wedding song. 'Semi-finished' here becomes the division the mind's eye and ear.

As a hypothesis I would suggest that the history of sound and music practice in early cinema must indeed take account of the auditorium space, but in the perspective of its (historical) transformation. Part of the outcome of the struggle between exhibitor and producer is thus not only the creation of what Altman terms the 'homogeneous audio-visual experience', but also the creation of a newly 'silent' space, necessary to locate the spectator 'in' the picture, by providing not only an imaginary visual field, but to conceive of the means whereby the sound space, too, can be perceived as an *imaginary space within representation*, and thus to structure the mental and emotional space of the spectator. Hofer's film would therefore be an example where, despite the absence of point of view editing and a prevalence of typically European tableau shots, a new kind of perspectivism of sound is introduced, once sound is no longer at the mercy of the vagaries of the kind of musical or auditory accompaniment that an exhibitor may choose to provide.

To conclude: I know that I may have polemically overstated my case of the German cinema having to be 'muted' in the 1910s, before it could become the 'silent' cinema of the 1920s and the 'sound' cinema of the 1930s. My suggestion that sound could be re-introduced only once it was economically, technologically and semantically under the control of the producers' side of the institution cinema is so far based on too many inferences from too limited a sample to deserve the name of a hypothesis, let alone pass for historical evidence. There are huge variations in the national as well as the regional practice of sound and musical accompaniment in the 1910s which we are still trying to document, and the struggle for this control is almost as old as the cinema itself, especially in Germany, where Messter's experiments and applications are decidedly producer-driven, which is one of the reasons perhaps why they were only partially successful: they came too early, when the balance of power was still more evenly distributed between the contending parties for him to be able to

successfully impose any of his systems as a binding standard on the exhibitors.

To return to our case study of WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN: if it does indeed, on textual evidence, make sense to classify it as belonging to one of the musical genres, does this mean that its previous generic identity as 'war propaganda' is thereby cancelled? Hardly: rather, the former genre is the precondition for the latter, which once more proves that when it comes to genres, the notion of intermediality is perhaps not the most useful one. For ultimately, the genre of the war propaganda film is clearly a retrospective one (as *film noir* used to be): it is not one across which the institution and its audiences 'communicate' with each other. Indeed, the generic label 'propaganda' only makes sense once we understand what made its rhetoric effective, and once we understand who or what it made propaganda for? As I have tried to show, alongside and inside the standard melodramatic and operetta plot of incomplete families from different social backgrounds finding together by means of the formation of a romantic couple, we discover in WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN, thanks to its unheard instruments and virtual melodies, the staging or 'performance' of an imaginary community of cinema spectators. United by a common heritage of its musical culture, at once religious and secular, at once liturgical and profane, they have a proleptic identity: they are the German people, in its hour of anxious expectancy. We can speculate whether, by the end of the war, this precarious balance was broken not only on the screen: precisely such a conflation of imaginary community and imagined auditorium no longer had 'the nation' as its addressee, but simply 'audiences'. By the same token, it is fair to assume that by 1918, the delicate silence of Franz Hofer's unheard sounds had also been shattered.<sup>24</sup>

In this perspective, WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN does indeed belong to a transitional period, with traces of site-specific, location-dependent and seasonally-timed spectatorship still very present, but also on the way to that form where the 'sounds of the silents' were no longer a din of noise, but 'sounds beguiling': meaning that they appealed more to the mind's eye than to the bodily ear, and thus helped to turn an audience of rowdy spectators into the disciplined community of the nation before the screen. If it made propaganda for the Kaiser, it also made propaganda for the cinema: was it not the cinema itself that emerged victorious, and with more justification (as well as more survival skills) than the Kaiser, it could say of itself: 'von heute kenne ich keine Parteien mehr' - 'from now on, I no longer recognize either politics or class' - only spectators and consumers?

## Notes:

1. Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film 1895-1915: A Study in Media Interaction* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema I: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1991) and Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).
2. Suffice it to recall in this context Yuri Tsivian's study of Russian audiences in the 1910s *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (London: Routledge, 1994), Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), or Richard's Abel's chapters on French audiences and film spectacle in his *The Cine Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).
3. For succinct accounts of genre theory, see Steven Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), Rick Altman, 'An Introduction to the Theory of Genre Analysis', *The American Film Musical* (New York: Knopf, 1992) and Francesco Casetti, 'Les Genres cinématographiques', *Ca Cinéma*, no 18, 1980, pp 37-43.
4. On melodrama, one can consult C. Gledhill (ed.), *Home is where the Heart is* (London: British Film Institute, 1992) and on *film noir*, see special issue of *iris* (Paris/Iowa), no 21, Spring 1996 (European precursors of *film noir*).
5. Steve Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).
6. See Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968). For a historical reading of the fantastic as genre, see Thomas Elsaesser, 'Social Mobility and the Fantastic', in James Donald (ed.), *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp 23-38.
7. See the essays by Roger Odin in Warren Buckland (ed.), *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994).
8. Francesco Casetti, *Communicative Negotiation Processes in Cinema and Television* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2002), pp 21-36.
9. Charles Musser, 'The Travel Genre in 1903-1904' in T. Elsaesser (ed.) *Early Cinema- Space Frame Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp 123-132.
10. Richard Abel's paper on the 'origins' of the Western suggests yet further 'intertexts' for this famous film, at once complementing and complicating Musser's argument.
11. Ennio Simeon, 'Guiseppe Becce and RICHARD WAGNER: Paradoxes of the first German film score' in T. Elsaesser (ed.) *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 219-224. See also the publicity material on Richard Wagner held at the Nederlands Film Museum, Amsterdam as well as Ivo Blom, 'Filmvertrieb in Europa 1910-1915, in *Kintop* 3, 1994 (Special Issue Oskar Messter), pp 73-92.
12. Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-class Moving Pictures: Lyman Howe and the Forgotten Era of Travelling Exhibition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
13. The term of semi-finished is derive from the German, where the word *Halbfertigprodukt* is usually applied to manufactured goods that are sent halfway round the world to be assembled somewhere other than where they were designed or where the markets are located for which these goods are destined. It is used in a sense similar to mine in Karel Dibbets, *Sprekende films* (Amsterdam: Otto Cramwinckel, 1995).
14. See Charles Musser, 'The Nickelodeon Era Begins' in T. Elsaesser (ed), *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative* (London: Brituish Film Institute, 1990), pp 256-273.

15. Cited in Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, 'Newsreel Images of the Military and War' in T. Elsaesser (ed.) *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 180-181.

16. On the last two, see Ennio Simeon, 'Messter und die Musik des frühen Kinos' in M. Loiperdinger (ed.), *Oskar Messter Filmpionier der Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt/M: Stroemfeld, 1994), pp. 135-148 and Alison MacMahan, *Alice Guy* (unpublished PhD Thesis, 1997).

17. This summary draws on Rick Altman's 'The Silence of the Silents', discussed below.

18. Rick Altman, 'The Silence of the Silents', in *The Musical Quarterly*, vol.80, no.4 (1997), p 690.

19. 'One thing I am almost sure about is that these music films normally tell very simple and well-known stories because its attractions lay not in the story-telling (in this respect they are very un-classical) but in linking silent images to live sound. Like the earlier Tonbilder (mainly by Messter) the story is drawn from opera, operetta, folklore, famous incidents - almost no original story material.' Malte Hagener, in correspondence.

20. See, for instance Michael Wedel, *Max Mack* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1997).

21. Elena Dagrada, 'Un magico guardone alla corte di Guglielmo II', in *Immagine* (nouve serie) no 17, 1991, pp 23-30.

22. See Werner Faulstich/Helmut Korte (eds.), *Fischer Filmgeschichte Band 1: 1985-1924* (Frankfurt, 1994) pp 306-311.

23. To my knowledge, nothing has been written about the genre of the Christmas film in an international perspective, and yet, there were in every country typical Christmas film. Thus, Richard Abel discussed a Pathé Christmas film in his lecture at the Bradford '1895' conference and Charles Musser mentions a number of 'Christmas' films, such as Edwin Porter's NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS. Musser also points out that audience familiarity was crucial in films based on well-known songs, as in Porter's WAITING AT THE CHURCH, where the narrative both paraphrases and counterpoints the lyrics. 'The Nickelodeon Era Begins' in T. Elsaesser (ed), *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p 258.

24. Yet the story of the sounds of the silents does not end here: When we look to the 1920s in Germany we note that the birth of one of the most successful genres, the historical film, is intimately connected with the suppression of the knowledge of its musical source. How many film histories have forgotten - before Barry Salt reminded us of it - that Ernst Lubitsch's MADAME DUBARRY (Passion) was based on an operetta and that likewise, many of the notorious Fredericus Rex films, from DIE TÄNZERIN BARBERINA to DAS FLÖTENKONZERT VON SANSSOUCI were successful operettas before they were national propaganda films? It almost seems as if, at least in Germany, the 'birth' of certain genres as genuine film genres and typically national genres might have entailed an act of sacrifice - a musical sacrifice - in what seems to have been a dynamic if not outright murderous struggle for dominance. See also Michael Wedel, 'Schizophrene Technik, sinnliches Glück' in H.M.Bock and Katja Uhlenbrok (eds), *Operettenfilm -Filmoperette* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1998).