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## Theatrics of Sound in Marcel Ophuls' *November Days* and *Hotel Terminus*

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Avi Kempinski

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### I

In the documentary work of Marcel Ophuls much can be said about *mise-en scène*, that cinematic aspect which Timothy Corrigan defines as a "theatrics of space as that space is constructed for the camera" (52). What distinguishes Ophuls' *mise-en scène*, however, is the frequent juxtaposition of and interplay between a "theatrics of space" and what I posit here as a "theatrics of sound": Ophuls' strategic and provocative use of diegetic and non-diegetic audio. The use of sound, I suggest, adds a crucial layer to the spatial composition of the two films under discussion here, *November Days: Voices and Choices* (1990) and *Hotel Terminus: the Life and Times of Klaus Barbie* (1988).<sup>1</sup> Through an analysis of such a theatrics of sound, Ophuls' documentary techniques, and his work as a whole, can be more richly interpreted and understood.<sup>2</sup>

*November Days* was commissioned and first broadcast by BBC 2 to mark the one-year anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall. In the documentary, Ophuls interviews many of the same people who months earlier appeared in BBC news footage of the events of October and November 1989. Adding historical context, the film also includes in-depth interviews with leading political and cultural figures, such as Egon Krenz, Heiner Müller, and Stephan Hermlin.<sup>3</sup> *Hotel Terminus*, completed two years earlier, is a four-hour sleuth-like investigative work that explores the career of Klaus Barbie, head of the German Security Police (SIPO-SD) in occupied France, where he was known as "the butcher of Lyons." Through interviews with his acquaintances, comrades, victims, and apologists, the film traces Barbie's life from boyhood to old age, with locations ranging from

France and Germany to South America and the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

Although the films differ significantly in several manifest ways (subject matter; location; the manner in which they were commissioned; and film length), the repeated presence of a theatrics of sound—combining layers of text, video, and audio—give the two documentaries an unmistakable sense of continuity.

## II

Marcel Ophuls is not a filmmaker easily categorized, nor are his works. He is best known for his monumental *The Sorrow and the Pity* (*Le chagrin et la pitié: Chronique d'une ville française sous l'Occupation*, 1969), a four-and-a-half-hour work that “changed the art of documentary filmmaking.” Ian Buruma, who makes this claim, describes this film’s point of departure:

Instead of the usual mixture of documentary footage and the narrator’s voice, Ophuls offers history as a set of conflicting eyewitness accounts. He turns the talking head into an art form. (224–25)

But by offering history through “conflicting eyewitness accounts”—and whereby “his subjects say more than they mean to, and their discomfort is one of his tools” (Cantor 45)—Ophuls conclusively destroyed the myth of French resistance during World War II and unexpectedly revealed that France, too, was undergoing its own version of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. But even in this dark film of dark times a glimpse of what Nora Alter terms “musical comedy” was already evident. “Thus,” writes Alter,

in the often grueling *The Sorrow and the Pity*, music enters as ironic commentary in the final scene with Maurice Chevalier, the prototypical Frenchman, singing with his patented nonchalance: “Let the whole world sigh or cry / I’ll be up on a rainbow/ Sweeping the clouds away.” (“Ophuls” 35)

The use here of popular song through Chevalier—“invariably ebullient, bouncy and mindlessly optimistic,”<sup>5</sup>—is not only an example of a technique or device, that is, a purely ironic audiovisual “insertion” as discussed by Alter in reference to *November Days*, but goes to the heart of the entire Ophulsian project. Rather than just taxing and lengthy treatments of actual events through interviews, Ophuls’ films are, according to Richard Porton, “critical essays that attempt to prevent the erosion of historical memory.” (Ophuls, “Troubles” 8)

Although the largely unexamined tag “documentary” is almost always attached to Ophuls’ works dating from his path breaking *The Sorrow and the Pity*, a more fitting designation would, in fact, be “essay” and, above all, the concept of “Essay Film.” Whereas the influential modes of documentary developed by the film theorist Bill Nichols (Expository, Observational, Interactive, Reflexive, and Performative) are helpful—through its schematization of the genre—in identifying specific (and chronological) stages in Ophuls’ development as a filmmaker, essay film offers a more inclusive and conclusive conceptual model.

In brief, Nichols sees all modes of documentary (from the work of John Grierson in the late 1920s) as “essentially arising as a “response to fiction,” that is, to the “absence of ‘reality’” in Hollywood films (94–5). More will be said of Ophuls’ complex and rich connection to Hollywood; in reply to Nichols, however, Ophuls’ project is far less a response to the absence of ‘reality’ in Hollywood than a response to the absence, indeed abnegation, of ‘spectacle’ (i.e., Hollywood) in documentary.

Nichols’ categories, each of which subsumes aspects of previous ones, can be to some extent applied to Ophuls. Most suggestive is Nichols’ notion of performative documentary:

This window-like quality of addressing the historical world around us yields to a variable mix of expressive, poetic, and rhetorical aspects as new dominants [...] This shift blurs yet more dramatically the already imperfect boundary between documentary and fiction. It also makes the viewer rather than the historical world a



primary referent. (94)

The early example from *The Sorrow and the Pity*, where mixing and blurring "expressive, poetic, and rhetorical aspects" through, for example, Chevalier singing "I don't care what's down below/ Let it rain/ Let it snow/ I'll be up on a rainbow,/ Sweeping the clouds away" in the closing moments of a film on collaboration, is unsettling, placing the viewer (and listener) in the uncomfortable space between "documentary and fiction." In *November Days*, performance is even more evident through Ophuls' cajoling his interviewees as though he were a director on the set of a feature film, rather than simply engaging his interlocutor in conversation.

As noted earlier, more satisfying in offering a conceptual grasp of this often disturbing juxtaposition between the severity of documentary subject and its discordant soundtrack is the concept of essay film. In her overview of the genre, Alter sees essay film as a "hybrid medium which falls between, and to an extent combines, the two dominant film categories: feature film and documentary" ("Essay Film" 262). Further, and with the closing scene of Ophuls' occupation documentary in mind, the essay film

readdresses, from a new *audiovisual* perspective, several basic questions raised by earlier forms of cinema about the tension between verisimilitude (documented reality) and artifice (free imagination)...and calling into question all simplifying binary categories of representation. (262, my emphasis)

Although Ophuls' lengthy films (*November Days* being the exception at just over two hours long) exceed considerably the one-hour average which Alter assigns to these films, much else within her conception of what an essay film is, and does, so closely evokes aspects of Ophuls' works that the rubric itself (as examined by Alter) could have been conceived with him in mind. Even the transnational character of the genre, which makes it "impossible to categorize the essay film on the basis of the nationality of the filmmakers," addresses directly Ophuls' dual nationality (French and

American) and multilingualism; he speaks, and indeed interviews his subjects in English, French, and German ("Essay Film" 262). Offering a suggestive symmetry between multi-nationality and its effect on the filmmaker's work, Alter further writes:

Falling themselves between categories, more or less finding a home in multicultural lands, they have been inspired, if not forced, to look for their inspiration to a similarly multilayered practice of filmmaking. (263)

It is in between categories where Marcel Ophuls can indeed be located. Born in Frankfurt am Main in 1927, Ophuls moved with his filmmaker father, Max Ophuls (1902-1957), and actress mother, Hilde Wall, to France upon Hitler's ascension to power. In France, where he became a citizen in 1938, his father continued making films, adding to his German productions half a dozen movies in French. In 1941, the family fled Europe to California, where Marcel attended Hollywood High School and befriended the daughter of a fellow exile, Barbara Brecht. In 1949 Max Ophuls, after a brief career in Hollywood, moved back to Europe, where he made four more films and worked for German radio through the mid-1950s.

In a 1982 interview Ophuls exclaimed, "I'm my father's son and I love the tinsel of show business. I'd much rather be making fictional films" (Ophuls, "In a Way" 48). And indeed the younger Ophuls' entry into movie making in the early 1960s was not as a documentarian but as a feature filmmaker. One of his first films, made in France under the aegis of Francois Truffaut, was the feature *Peau de banane* starring the well-known actors Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jeanne Moreau. In 1964 he made his second feature film, *Feu à volonté*. It is conjectured that the failure of this film turned Marcel Ophuls from a director of features into a maker of documentaries (Sarris 362). Yet if Ophuls' subsequent work can be conceptually defined as essay film, which according to Alter, "ignores generic borders or chooses to transgress their norms conceptually and formally" ("Essay Film" 262), it can be argued that Ophuls never left the "tinsel of show business" fully behind and further that many of its qualities and aspects resurface in the documentary



realm. Documentary filmmaking is "a prison," Ophuls once admitted. "But I don't think that has to be inevitable. I'm aware of its bleakness, its grayness, its artistic limits. Because I'm aware of it, I probably make more attempts to entertain than others might" (Ophuls, "In a Way" 48).

### III

Entertainment for Marcel Ophuls very often takes the form of, *à la* Chevalier, song, and above all, popular song. Perhaps the embodiment of *popular* song in the modern age is "The International." Conceived in exile by Eugène Pottier following the defeat of the Paris Commune, it became, from the 1890s on, the song accompanying all major revolutionary and protest movements. Significantly, this *hymne du peuple* appears in all three of the documentary films mentioned here, spanning twenty-one years from *The Sorrow and the Pity* to *November Days*.<sup>6</sup>

In the earliest work, the song is alluded to but not sung. There two French farmers recall in an interview that they sang "*L'Internationale*" during the occupation; yet their motivation, they admit, was less an ideological commitment to the labor movement than it being the counter-hymn to the Vichyist anthem, "*Le Marechal*." In *November Days* precisely an ideological commitment is signified, although coming as it does on the final days of the East German regime betrays an anachronistic, if not outright ironic, intrusion. Here an elderly couple is interviewed at their home a few months after the Berlin *Lustgarten* rally in autumn of 1989. The discussion revolves around their participation at the rally and whether they had approvingly waved their Party cards, as Ophuls maintains. This sequence cuts to a BBC newsreel, where a close-up reveals that the elderly man, in fact, was not waving his Party card, but his clenched fist, the Party salute, and singing, in unison with the large crowd, "*Die Internationale*."<sup>7</sup> The scene conjures the final gasp of not just the reformers of socialism but of this man's long and sincere belief in the lyrics he sings in the newsreel: *Die Internationale erkämpft das Menschenrecht! / Völker, hört die Signale! / Auf, zum letzten Gefecht!*

Through the (oral, aural and visual) presence of "The

International" in *Hotel Terminus*, we can more fully understand not only its various functions in all three films, but the significance popular song, in general, has for Ophuls. For it is in *Hotel Terminus* that Ophuls reveals his own intimate knowledge of the workers' anthem, sharing the lyrics with his interlocutor, and, in turn, his audience. There the interviewee is Erhard Dabringhaus, one of the American agents who had been in charge of 'handling' Nazis (including Barbie) immediately after the war. On camera, he sits beside his pool in retirement and recounts for Ophuls that Barbie began to distrust him "because I knew the first verse of the Communist national anthem in German." Without missing a beat, Ophuls begins with the words "Völker, hört die Signale!" while an overdubbed soundtrack plays a musical rendition. Dabringhaus, lying on his lounge chair, immediately joins the refrain, "Auf zum letzten Gefecht! Die Internationale erkämpft das Menschenrecht!" As the two men, interviewer and interviewee, sing heartily to the accompaniment of the soundtrack, the camera, to underscore the irony between lyrics and location, moves to a long shot of the backyard with its lush vegetation before coming back to the two men sitting beside the swimming pool.

Forming an audio nexus between *The Sorrow and the Pity* and the two works under consideration here, this sequence comments, in part, on the importance of "*Die Internationale*" for Ophuls.<sup>8</sup> The song, of course, is an integral part of the workers' conditions and aspirations (as revealed, at least partly, by the farmers in *The Sorrow and the Pity* and the elderly couple in *November Days*). But even in *Hotel Terminus*, where the juxtaposition of song ("Wacht auf, Verdammte dieser Erde, die stets man noch zum Hungern zwingt!") and poolside location brims with irony, there is a hint of self-reflexivity in Ophuls' readiness in singing the lyrics himself. Like his interviewee Dabringhaus, whose knowledge of the song stems, presumably, from his father's years, he discloses, as a Krupp steel worker, Ophuls' knowledge of the song seems also to have a familial (though not a similar class) origin, as becomes evident in a conversation with the "spy master" Markus Wolf in *November Days*. There, Ophuls reminisces, "in the 20s and 30s our fathers shared the same views. In the Weimar Republic who wasn't on the Left? Who wasn't Communist?" Rather than being only an ironic



audiovisual device within films treating rather serious subjects, "The International" as popular song reveals not only Ophuls as the son of a prominent (Hollywood) director-father and actress-mother, but also something of the *Zeitgeist*, encompassing pleasure and politics, central to his formation.

Expanding Ian Buruma's above description of the Ophulsian method, Alter views it as a "signature version of the montage" whereby the filmmaker intersplices, often with disruptive ironic effect, clips from old feature films, documentary footage from various periods of history, and other devices that undercut the verisimilitude and empathy commonly exuded by live interviews. ("Ophuls" 34)

Especially disruptive and ironic is the documentarian's own singing voice. Like the poolside duet (trio, if we include the overdubbed soundtrack) singing "Die Internationale" in *Hotel Terminus*, Ophuls' lyrical intrusions become most evident in *November Days*. This film, which Ophuls characterized in a 1995 interview as "the picture I had the most fun making" (Ophuls, "Troubles" 9), begins with a recitation of the precursor, if not prototype, of all popular song: the children's rhyme. Yet before a child's voice, and then the filmmaker's own, recites lines from *Alice in Wonderland* (the apt "Humpty Dumpty"), we have a sequence of shots of a smiling and upbeat Erich Honecker waiting at Schönefeld airport for the arrival of Gorbachev in early October 1989. Undercutting the verisimilitude, and impending doom, of this historic meeting between the two Eastern Bloc leaders, each moving politically in an opposite direction, is the intrusion of popular medley.

The first is "September Song" a Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill number sung by Lotte Lenya, and which features the lines "It's a long, long while from May till December and the days grow short when you reach September." Certainly an appropriate choice for a film entitled *November Days* (and in which the events themselves are referred to as "Oktoberstage"). As such, this slow and soothing autumnal song echoes the winding down of the old regime. Yet the next refrain divulges a love song, its lyrics alluding to erotic promise

and hope: "When the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame, one hasn't time for the waiting game." The autumn "waiting game" is only one element of Ophuls' *November Days*. The season has yet another dimension, made evident in Ophuls' recitation, soon after Lenya's "September Song," of these lines from "Humpty Dumpty": "In autumn when the leaves are brown/Take pen and ink and write it (all) down." The concurrence (in one season)—through two popular forms of entertainment—of the political (the demise of the GDR and the Berlin Wall), the aesthetic (via the directive "take pen and ink and write it all down"), and finally the erotic (of "the waiting game") points unmistakably to the "disruptive ironic effect" characteristic of Ophuls' work and to the genre, essay film, in general. In describing the inclusion of popular song, particularly of the Hollywood type, in, first, *November Days* and, second, *Hotel Terminus*, I would like to highlight the erotic dimension in such forms of entertainment and, more to the point, elaborate upon how this dimension addresses and reflects Ophuls' own views of popular culture and the tension between it and 'high' culture. Thus, cannot the hope and fraternity offered by the *hymne du peuple*, the "Internationale," be equally offered, Ophuls seems to ask, through the even wider appeal (through diversion and entertainment) of the Hollywood show tune? As Alter insightfully remarks, "in virtually any musical comedy, song and sex form a momentary bridge between different national and class identities" ("Ophuls" 38).

In one of the first interviews in *November Days*, Ophuls asks a young West Berliner (who is shown in the accompanying BBC clip scaling a fence into the Eastern sector) about her experiences that night in October 1989. "Wonderful," the well-spoken woman replies in English. "What did you mean 'it's wonderful'?" prods Ophuls. Without waiting for the woman's reply he breaks into song, with the opening lines of George and Ira Gershwin's "'S Wonderful": "It's wonderful. It's marvelous, you should care for me." Ophuls' voice soon dissolves into an overdubbed soundtrack of the same song.<sup>9</sup> Making the link between popular song and sex (and, to an extent, between Eros and politics) explicit, Ophuls then asks the woman if there was 'flirting' that night, too. Momentarily stunned, the woman replies, "Excuse me?" and then giggles, "Well ..."

Not letting go of this nexus between the political, the erotic,



and popular song, Ophuls' next interviewee is a young East German man who recounts that his first post-Wall foray was moving in for three months with a West German woman before returning to the East and to his wife. "Ich habe den Eindruck," Ophuls muses, "dass Freiheit etwas mit Erotik zu tun hat. Haben Sie das auch bemerkt?" As the grinning and vigorously nodding man replies, "Teilweise," we hear Marlene Dietrich, from the soundtrack of *The Blue Angel* (1930), sing her signature song, "Falling in Love Again": "Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt/Denn das ist meine Welt und sonst gar nichts." In a line that not only echoes salient themes from the earlier *Hotel Terminus* but anticipates a leitmotif I see at work in *November Days*, Werner Schäfer, the wandering lover quoted above, unwittingly links erotic with political desires for freedom in his concluding remark: "Jeder Vogel kann hinfliegen, wo er will; bloss wir waren dort eingesperrt..."

Still another insertion of a theatrics of sound in *November Days* is the connection between popular song and political freedom in Ophuls' interview with his childhood friend, Barbara Brecht-Schall. Again Ophuls lightly pushes the erotic, reminding Brecht that "we used to spend time in our childhood together in Santa Monica because the beach was close and you were a very good-looking girl." A bit embarrassed, Brecht replies, "I was?" Before returning to his conversation with Brecht, Ophuls cuts to interviews with, first, a West German neo-Nazi (whose appearance is immediately occasioned by a shot of the graffiti "Sau Jud" on Bertolt Brecht's grave) and, second, a young actor playing the lead role of Sigismund in the musical, *Im weissen Rössl* (*The White Horse Inn*).<sup>10</sup>

This interlude, replete with popular song within the Barbara Brecht sequence, addresses in part the complex question of identity, namely how one not only defines oneself, here as a Jew and as a German, but how others add to, or distort, that identity. Ophuls reminds us that Bertolt Brecht, anti-Semitic graffiti notwithstanding, was not Jewish; yet in the crosscut from the poet's desecrated grave, the neo-Nazi, to whom the filmmaker openly declares himself as a Jew, states: "Es könnte hier kein einziger Jude leben, und wir könnten trotzdem unter jüdischem Einfluß stehen." The film then cuts to a performance of *Im weissen Rössl*, with the lead actor singing "Was kann der Sigismund dafür?" Ophuls informs the actor that

the musical, "written by nothing but Jews," was not played during the Third Reich, and then inquires why, since 1945, he thinks a Jewish actor cannot be cast for this traditionally 'Jewish' role. The implication of a German actor (successfully) playing a 'Jewish' role comments, of course, on the intractable categories of identity (and racist stereotypes) voiced by the neo-Nazi, and on the so-called "Jewish influence" he finds in a Germany largely devoid of Jews.

Seemingly unwilling, or unable, to pass on playing the role of "der schöne Sigismund" himself, Ophuls comments on the baldness of the German actor. Informed that this is only part of the actor's costume (in fact, as Sigismund sings, his bald pate is "one of my strongest weapons in the battle with women"), Ophuls retorts that "I'm a real Jew and am really bald" and begins to sing "Was kann der Sigismund dafür?" Theatrics of space (here literally on a theater stage) and theatrics of sound unite. Popular song (the domain of the feature film) and role of identity in Nazi ideology (the domain of the documentary) are intertwined in a characteristic Ophulsian moment.

Theatrics of sound in *November Days* does, however, assume a distinct and political direction and shape. What I earlier referred to as the film's leitmotif is more fully developed through the resumption of the Brecht interview. Barbara Brecht is one of several 'characters' in the film who generally look back with fondness to the establishment and accomplishments of the East German state, and with some trepidation, if not remorse, to its demise. Significantly the defenders of the GDR featured in the film are all of a privileged class and part of the intellectual elite: Brecht, Stephan Hermlin, Heiner Müller, and Markus Wolf. Their counterparts, on the other hand, are all portrayed as non-elites, 'common folk,' as it were, whose aspirations are none other than the freedoms associated with the West. Of all freedoms underscored in the course of Ophuls' interviews with the "common folk," the most idealized (and yet not quite attainable) is the freedom to travel, which was already anticipated in the early line by Werner Schäfer: "Jeder Vogel kann hinfliegen, wo er will; bloss wir waren dort eingesperrt..."

The sequence that exemplifies the film's ideological orientation is Ophuls' resumed interview with his childhood friend. Brecht laments that the founding of the GDR was based too little on an



economic rather than a moral foundation. She quotes her father for support, "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral." Ophuls then asks, rather incredulously: "Was it [the GDR] built on morals? Which one?" Rather than cutting back to Brecht for the reply, the camera isolates a street sign on the corner of *Friedenstraße* and *Leninallee* while the soundtrack plays Bing Crosby's "I'm singing a song of freedom."<sup>11</sup> Ophuls answers his own question, "Which moral?", through the juxtaposition of subsequent shots and this soundtrack. While the song continues ("Where all people cry out to be free") the camera cuts to another street sign, *Leninplatz*, and to a Lenin monument. Precisely when the soundtrack of this song about freedom reaches the line "Freedom to sail the seven seas", the camera cuts from the Lenin statue to the "common folk," to a young man identified as Herr Oppolka, who says, in affirmation (and in English), "It's wonderful!" The Crosby number continues with the film's now signature concern: "If the birds up in the trees can be free, [crosscut to Oppolka: "Super!"] why can't we?"

Before again cutting back to the Brecht interview we have another example of a theatrics of sound: to Crosby's lyrical exhortation for freedom (in a tone and spirit, one might add, not far from the above-cited estimation of Chevalier: "ebullient, bouncy and mindlessly optimistic") we see two men repairing a *Trabant*. The motif of freedom of movement, even in an old rebuilt *Trabi*, is what leads back to the conversation with Brecht, now concerning the symbol of movement's main obstacle, the Berlin Wall.

"Freedom to sail the seven seas," repeats Brecht, echoing the Crosby song, "that's certainly a very important freedom and the Wall should have been pulled down twenty years ago, at least. I think it was okay to raise it, it was madness to leave it standing." "I imagine," Ophuls inquires, "you had occasions to listen to Erich Honecker and his wife explain why the Wall went up." Brecht replies that she had no connection to the regime. In a typical Ophuls crosscut, following one interview with its aural contradiction, we *hear* Heiner Müller challenging Brecht's statement (and declared innocence) and which is followed by a visual contradiction, where we *see* footage of Brecht sitting next to Honecker in the front row at the Berliner Ensemble.

The following sequence begins with Müller alluding to Brecht's privileged status, which included her ability to travel abroad and

which soon leads to his own admission that he too needed the regime. "I probably needed the pressures of the dictatorship; and democracy bores me."<sup>12</sup> The film cuts to Stephan Hermlin, who acknowledges that travel abroad was the privilege of the elite. Hermlin then proposes that if those who wanted to travel in the days of the GDR could "sing like Peter Schreier and Theo Adam" then they, too, would have been permitted to visit Bayreuth and Salzburg.

As counterparts to Hermlin and Brecht, a young couple who have been interviewed intermittently throughout the film (like a visual leitmotif) recall the difficulty of leaving the East. The wife, Karin Radunski, is reminded of the humiliation in the officials' questions and insinuations before allowing her husband to visit a relative in the West. Now, however, they have already vacationed in France and beam to Ophuls of their triumph. On screen snapshots of Rhône valley vineyards predominate, accompanied by the soundtrack of Tamino's sweet aria, "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön." The irony in this theatrics of sound, however, is not fully unraveled (at least not for this listener of *Die Zauberflöte*) until the film's very end when the credits reveal that the aria, in the soundtrack accompanying the Radunskis' vacation photos, is sung by Hermlin's privileged tenor, Peter Schreier.

The camera not infrequently catches glimpses, if not direct shots, of Ophuls himself. At times his image as interviewer appears in a mirror behind the interviewee (as in the sequence with Heiner Müller), at other times he shares the frame with his interlocutor. There is one moment at the end of the film, however, where Ophuls, unexpectedly, turns from interviewer to interviewee. Bärbel Bohley (identified as "The Mother of the Revolution") bemoans that as money and freedom, since the opening of the Wall, have become synonymous, the "little people" in the East will have less freedom as they have also less money. Suddenly she asks Ophuls: "How do you see the situation?" Taken aback, it appears, by being questioned, Ophuls replies:

You really want to know? The Germans have the same right of self-determination as others. And I can't get over the fact that the Wall is gone. That's



so positive; I can't understand the others' anxieties, including yours.<sup>13</sup>

However good, according to the *voices* of Brecht, Müller, and Hermlin, the "good old days" of the GDR were, the *choices* desired by the "common folk" seem to have the filmmaker's sympathy. The last words of *November Days* belong neither to the privileged cast(e) of characters nor to Ophuls himself. Rather the words belong to Karin Radunski, and by association to all the "little people" whose travails and desires were portrayed in the film. Echoing Ophuls' reply to Bohley, and indeed containing an element of the diversion and the pursuit of pleasure inherent in the entire genre of Hollywood tunes, she says, referring to the *Wende*, as the film closes:

The best part of it is the feeling of being free. You can speak your mind over a beer or while eating out with friends. You don't have to worry about the man behind you listening.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV

True to Ophuls' conception of movie-making, popular song, including the Hollywood variety, also has a part in the far darker film, *Hotel Terminus: the Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*. Ophuls explains his vision as such:

Reality is so fantastically complex. The more you can work with music, anecdotes, jokes, etc., the better off you are, because you're not going to get as much Truth, with a capital T, if you don't use all of that. (Ophuls, "A Sense of Loss" 20)

Unlike Ophuls' other films, *Hotel Terminus* uses (again as a leitmotif) yet another expression of popular song. To children's rhymes, workers' anthems, and Hollywood show tunes, as we have seen in *November Days*, Ophuls here introduces the folk song, and specifically the German *Lied*. According to Buruma, the "use of German folk songs, sung by the Wiener Sängerknaben, adds

a grotesque poignancy to the main charge against Barbie: the deportation of small Jewish children to Auschwitz" (229). Indeed, right at the beginning of the film, as we *see* black and white still photographs of the deported children from the French village of Izieu, we *hear* a children's choir sing "Sweet Homeland, Farewell," a melody based in part on a nineteenth-century Swabian folk song (Pinkert-Sältzer 308). The "grotesque poignancy" of this "audiovisual space" becomes nearly perverse when one looks, against the visual context, at the words of the song: "Und so sing ich denn mit frohem Mut, wie man singet wenn man wandern tut, lieb' Heimatland, adé!"

Ophuls' choice of folk songs in this film (all four sung by the Vienna Boys' Choir) undoubtedly addresses the sinister past of this German genre. In a recent study on the *Lied*, Edward F. Kravitt states:

To say that the lied played a significant role under the influence of nationalism understates the issue. More accurately, the lied became a principal vein to the hearts of a German people shaken in the late nineteenth century by social and economic upheaval. How better to discover a nation's roots than through the folkish songs of its people? (vii)

Kravitt describes the centrality of the folk song in the rise of nationalist ideologies from the mid nineteenth century, including for the influential fin de siècle youth group, the *Wandervogel*. Kravitt quotes one of its leaders, Hans Breuer, who declared, "In the *Volkslied*—the soul of the Germans—there lives the pulse of our entire German history" (108). Significantly, the folk song was seen also as a cultural countermeasure not only against "the fashionable popular song" (109), but against "ballroom dancing, the cinema, and many other recreations of the modern age" (Stachura 22). In short, against the precursors of Ophuls' other cherished musical genre, popular show songs, and indeed against his very artistic medium.

Segments of "Nun adé du mein lieb' Heimatland," are inserted at least six more times in the course of this film. Its second appearance constructs a different theatrics of sound as this time it



acts as the soundtrack to Barbie's own topographical and intellectual origins. Skillfully intertwining text, audio, and video (and thus further corroborating that this work can indeed be considered a multilayered essay film), Ophuls' *mise-en-scène* here consists of a montage of elements all belonging to Barbie's youth.

Beginning with a neon sign above the present-day Hotel Terminus, and accompanied aurally by the opening melody of "Nun adé," the scene cuts to shots of a school courtyard. To this "audiovisual space" (folk song and schoolyard) we hear, as voice-over, Ophuls reading an essay written by the schoolboy Barbie.

"Request for delivery of a high school diploma to Klaus Barbie, Staatliches Friedrich-Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier. I request permission to take my final examinations this coming Easter 1934. [...] Please take note also of my religious convictions."

Elsewhere in the film, Ophuls eagerly seeks to establish a particular locus when exploring the "life and times" of Barbie. We thus repeatedly see shots of geographic signs and sites either generally familiar to the viewer or that are explained by the context. Belonging to the latter are the long and medium shots, as the camera cuts from the schoolyard in Trier, of fields, lakes, and a village. This, we immediately discover from the essay being recited by Ophuls, is the topos of Barbie's youth:

"Like my mother, I am a true child of the Eifel, the stern landscape whose volcanic origin can be seen reflected in the serious character of all those who have grown up in it. My father was a teacher; my mother was a teacher, there can be little doubt about my own plans for higher education."

The text of the soundtrack now assumes another dimension from its use earlier against the stills of the children of Izieu. Here, echoing its origin also as a Westphalian soldier's song, the lyrics address Barbie's own eventual departure from "the stern landscape" of

the Eifel and likewise from his "own plans for higher education": Begleitest mich, du lieber Fluß,.../Bist traurig, daß ich wandern muß,/ Lieb Heimatland, adé!

The use of this folk song surely points to the irony generated by the harmless nostalgia in its lyrics against his actual departure, as a newly promoted SD officer. Its yearning lyrics reflect, however, only the first leg of what will be a long exile, including Barbie's nearly thirty-year stay in South America. "His is the Diaspora of the torturers," Ophuls said of his film subject, "mine is the other one" (Buruma 229).

Yet however, and irreversibly, condemned these folk songs are,<sup>15</sup> a closer look at their lyrics also reveals themes and aspirations that Ophuls seems to advocate in *November Days*. The desire and need "to sail the seven seas" is reflected, if not embodied, in the folk song, particularly in the subgenre *Wanderlieder*. There is, of course, bitter irony when we hear in *Hotel Terminus* the folk song, "Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär/ und auch zwei Flüglein hätt,/ flög' ich zu dir./ Weil's aber nicht kann sein/ bleib ich all hier."

Flight is anything but possible ("Weil's aber nicht kann sein") in the audiovisual space in which this song is heard: in the opening credits, where a prison wall in Lyons is framed, and later and even more acutely as the soundtrack to a clip of Resnais' *Night and Fog*. Yet one cannot help isolating the element of wandering, and its embodiment in this genre of popular song, and linking it to Ophuls' emphasis on human mobility and the yearning to "sail the seven seas," a freedom that belonged only to the privileged few in *November Days*. It is exactly "Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär/ und auch zwei Flüglein hätt,/ flög' ich zu dir," that the wandering lover at the opening of *November Days* unwittingly and implicitly sang with his remark that "Jeder Vogel kann hinfliegen, wo er will; bloss wir waren dort eingesperrt..."

A final theatrics of sound that Ophuls inserts in *Hotel Terminus* features the *Wanderlied*, "Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust." Part of the 1818 cycle "Die schöne Müllerin" by lyricist Wilhelm Müller, the text was put to music by, among others, Franz Schubert. It was popularized, however, through the melody set in 1844 by the Thuringian choir director, Carl Friedrich Zöllner (Pinkert-Sälzer 297). More than the other three folk songs used in the film by



Ophuls, this one accentuates the urgency, indeed the elemental need, to wander, comparing this drive to the movement of water and stones in a stream. "Vom Wasser haben wir's gelernt,/ vom Wasser haben wir's gelernt, /vom Wasser: / Das hat nicht Ruh' bei Tag und Nacht, /ist stets auf Wanderschaft bedacht,/ das Wasser."

Surely these words reflect the desires of the "common folk" as well as the basic freedoms that Ophuls emphasized, and championed, in *November Days*. But in *this* context we are still far from the events of 1989 and the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc. The setting for this particular "audiovisual space" is simply a black background on which the closing credits of *Hotel Terminus* are shown. As though a four-hour film on the brutality of Nazism and specifically of Barbie (and those who protected and defend him) were not enough, the very last scene, just prior to the credits with the accompanying folk song, reveals yet another act of treachery, a neighbor's betrayal of a family in hiding. Yet within this dark scene there emerges a sliver of hope through one individual's act of conscience (and contrasted by another's act of cowardice).

In this final scene the filmmaker himself appears on screen, accompanying a survivor of Auschwitz to her one-time home in France. There the woman, Simone Kadouche-Lagrange, meets a former neighbor, who, she says, looked the other way when the Gestapo had come to arrest the Kadouche family. As filmmaker and his interviewee ascend the same steps of the apartment building down which the woman was forced forty years earlier, Kadouche-Lagrange recalls a neighbor who did not look the other way. "I feel a fondness for her, not for the others." This neighbor, she tells Ophuls, tried unsuccessfully to intervene and grab the young Simone into her apartment. As the film fades out into the black background and closing credits, and into the jarring soundtrack of the Vienna Boys' Choir singing "Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust," we hear the final homage to the individual, and implicitly the potential in his or her choices, through a calm but firm voiceover: "This motion picture is dedicated to the late Madame Bontout—a good neighbor."

In what acts as an audio epilogue to Ophuls' film, it is not until this final scene—the closing credits with its accompanying tune—that we learn that this calm but firm voice belongs to Jeanne

Moreau, the *grande dame* of French cinema and the star of Marcel Ophuls' own first feature film of a generation earlier. In one last magisterial use of a theatrics of sound, Ophuls shows us that folk song, even one with a nefarious past, is at once also a manifestation of popular song and individual expression. Folk song (via "Das Wandern"), feature film (via the voice of Moreau), and documentary do not cancel one another out. All are elements of, Ophuls seems at pains to emphasize in his essay films, a popular mode of expression in which resides some redemptive potential.

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

University of Michigan

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *November Days*, dir. Marcel Ophuls, Co-prod. BBC/FR3/Marcel Ophuls, 1990 and *Hotel Terminus*, dir. Marcel Ophuls, Memory Pictures Co., 1988. *Hotel Terminus* won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Much of my thinking about the aspect of sound in *November Days* is indebted to Nora M. Alter's work on Ophuls. Especially useful are Alter's concepts of "audiovisual space" and "audio graffiti" ("Ophuls" 38).

<sup>3</sup> Christa Wolf was asked but declined to be interviewed for the film (Ophuls, "Troubles" 9).

<sup>4</sup> In her recent article, Susan Rubin Suleiman offers an incisive and pioneering reading of this film, linking her analysis to the larger issue of cultural memory. It is with some modesty that I propose the present paper as an initial response to her comment that "Ophuls's use of music in his films, [...] and in *Hotel Terminus* in particular, would deserve a separate study" (Suleiman 522).

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hoffmann in his introduction, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Film by Marcel Ophuls*. *Filmscript*, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike for *The Sorrow and the Pity*, I have not been able to examine film scripts for either *November Days* or *Hotel Terminus*. My quotations (other than most of the song lyrics, which are readily available) are thus based on multiple viewings of the films. I have also benefited from seeing *Hotel Terminus* on laserdisc format (*The Cinema Disc Collection*, dist. by Image



Entertainment, 1989, 5-sided disc. #ID6763VV, approximate running time: 272 minutes). Both films are available on VHS. One hopes, now that *The Sorrow and the Pity* has been released on DVD, that the others, especially *Hotel Terminus*, will soon follow.

<sup>7</sup> Alter considers this sequence as a self-reflexive (and self-corrective) comment and on misreading one's evidence. "Ophuls himself has misread documentary film footage in his own film, and that he allows us to see and hear this fact" ("Ophuls" 40-41).

<sup>8</sup> In conjunction with *November Days*, Alter also mentions (in a footnote) Ophuls' use of "The International" in *The Sorrow and The Pity*. There is no reference, however, in her article to its use in *Hotel Terminus* ("Ophuls" 43).

<sup>9</sup> The film credits cite this song from the 1957 film *Funny Face*, directed by Stanley Donen and starring Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn. The original score was composed by George and Ira Gershwin in 1927 and was added to the movie soundtrack.

<sup>10</sup> *Im weissen Rössel*. Operetta by Ralph Benatzky. Premiered on 8. November 1930 in Berlin.

<sup>11</sup> The song, written by Irving Berlin, is from the 1942 film, *Holiday Inn*, directed by Mark Sandrich and also stars Fred Astaire. Ophuls' attention to Astaire deserves a separate study. A third film featuring Astaire (*Swing Time*, 1936) is also "visually quoted" in both *Hotel Terminus* and *November Days*.

<sup>12</sup> In German in the film.

<sup>13</sup> In German in the film.

<sup>14</sup> In German in the film.

<sup>15</sup> "Die Lieder sind nicht mehr singbar, weil ihre Wirkungsgeschichte bewußt geworden ist. Wir sind ihnen gegenüber in einer historistischen Situation" (Kurzke 230).

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