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Memory and Music: Striking the Right Note

What difference does a musical score make in presenting 'alternative' memories? Relatively little work has been done on the impact of musical scores on the reception and cultural perception of films reflecting social, political, and economic positions of marginalized groups. Yet the use of music to "break the frame" of the action was a staple of the Viennese *Volkstheater* that influenced both Bertolt Brecht and Austrian-born film director G. W. Pabst in their respective versions of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Films with ideologies alien or even threatening to mainstream audiences employ musical scores to render their messages more palatable and to allow for reflection. The scores help to fix the memory of a scene in terms of melody and rhythm, while even to some degree effacing in memory the actual visual and spoken text.

My approach is based on the insights of Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* and *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, distinguishing between music and place or purpose of performance. An opera or musical can be performed to result not only in different audience *receptions*, but also different audience *perceptions* and resultant memories about the messages of the work as a whole. Just as Hobsbawm sought "to understand and explain a world in the process of revolutionary transformation" by looking back from the 1980s to 1914 and earlier, we can better explain the ideologically charged 1930s, 1960s, and 1980s through the lens of films made in the twentieth century.

Hobsbawm's theories can be applied to such films as Peter Brook's cinematic adaptation of Peter Weiss's play *Marat/Sade* (1966). The musical score and foley (sticks beating against bars, inmates' cries) create a sound system that frequently overwhelms or countermands the work's spoken passages conveying Marxist ideology. Non-verbal acoustics modify audience perception of the information expressed by Marat and Roux. Their polemic assertions are reweighted and devalued within the larger context of the film--one might almost say "emasculated." While visual systems support this rewriting in performance, I argue that the audience memory of this version would be quite different without the musical score and supportive foley.

My talk closes with references to other works from and about similarly tense historical periods, such as the opening scenes of Johann Nestroy's *Der Talisman* (1840) and Pabst's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1931). In the dramaturgy shared by these plays and films, music resituates a marginalized, polemic message or situation as the score diverges in tone and delivery from a given audience's horizon of expectations or associations with the work's predominant ideas. The way musical scores render the problems and perceptions of marginalized groups accessible to mainstream audiences can shed light on seeming anomalies in cultural memory: positive immediate and long-term responses to works by a cultural community for whom the work's messages are antithetical or alien. Music

frequently functions to suspend immediate negativity, thereby allowing for more encompassing reexamination of a work's ideas at a later time, when the once marginalized text has become more acceptable to a wider audience. The ideas continue to have resonance even when they are no longer marginalized, after public discourse has provided listeners with more context for the issues.