

Claudia Heydolph; Der Blick auf das lebende Bild. F.W. Murnaus *Der letzte Mann* und die Herkunft der Bilderzählung

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From the cave paintings of Lascaux to the hieroglyphics of Egyptian pyramids, images have been around seemingly as long as the human needs for food and shelter. Nor has the fundamental relationship between spectator and object changed much throughout the intervening centuries. The observer who wished to perceive motion, to experience the fourth dimension of time, within the static

tableau before him/her, had to do so within the mind's eye or by physically moving. Film changed all of that, allowing the spectator to remain stationary while people, objects, and places fluttered by in trajectories and at velocities sustainable only in reel life. This change, in turn, brought about a reevaluation of the criteria used to judge pictorial art. Claudia Heydolph takes this "radikale [...] Zäsur in der Evolution der Bildgeschichte" (p.10) as a starting point. Reworking her dissertation on F.W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (1924), she offers a "kunsthistorische [...] Annäherung an das Medium der bewegten Bilder" (p.80).

Observing that "[d]er grundlegende Unterschied zu klassischen Bildwerken [...] 'nur' darin [besteht], dass es sich bei jedem kinematographischen Bild um ein temporäres Bild handelt" (p.81), Heydolph treats Murnau's film, celebrated at the time as cinematic perfection, as pure art historical document. The approach intrigues, for the director does dispense with all inter-titles, relying for the first time in film history upon images alone to tell a feature-length tale. Heydolph constructs her analysis slowly and methodically, surveying attempts by artists from Cézanne and Seurat to Marinetti to incorporate both time and space within their work. The motion picture thus becomes the logical development of photographic efforts to capture static reality and of, among others, Cubist and Futurist efforts to frame sequences of time. Murnau takes the process even further, the author argues, by releasing the recording apparatus, creating the "entfesselte Kamera", a "Meilenstein der Filmgeschichte" (p.102).

Heydolph includes a chapter on the "Biographie des Films," or the story behind the making of *Der letzte Mann*. She also addresses text-critical issues regarding reconstruction from various sources of the version under analysis. The author then divides her examination proper into three art-historical aspects, those of "Kadrierung," or the framing of shots, of "Bildraum," or the Cartesian three-dimensional space simulated by the flat image, and of "Licht," which serves the double function of creating individual tableaux through differences of shading and later of projecting these onto a screen. Heydolph includes 79 stills to support her analysis, all of them remarkably sharp for having been taken from a VHS copy. She approaches individual images in *Der letzte Mann* with the keen eye and exhaustive thoroughness found in Raymond Bellour's analyses of Hitchcock.

Although the author argues that the "medienspezifische Gliederung dieser Untersuchung [...] eine Möglichkeit dar[stellt], einen Film im anthropologischen Sinn als historisches Produkt der Interaktion von Bild – Medium – Betrachter und damit als symbolischen Ausdruck zeitgenössischer Visualität zu erfassen" (p.175), those interested in any of the wider cultural, sociological, and political discourses circulating through this classic of Weimar cinema will have to look elsewhere. Which does not detract from the work the author has done. Since Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), film scholars have scoured Weimar cinema for political, sociological, sometimes even pathological subtexts.

And they may be quite right to do so. But Claudia Heydolph reminds her readers that F.W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* is also a work of art, while efficiently demonstrating why. Her book will be of lasting interest not only to film and art historians, but also to film makers.

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