

EXCEPTIONAL CONVERSATIONS:
CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION OF NARRATIVE CINEMA

by

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Abstract

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Exceptional Conversations: Classical Music and the Historical Imagination of Narrative Cinema examines the ways in which film and music are bound together in their histories, forms, and meanings. More specifically it describes and interprets how music figures in some of the most singular directors' films and it traces the various appearances of equally singular composers' works in film. Thus, my dissertation includes chapters on Richard Wagner, Stanley Kubrick, Jean-Luc Godard, and Michael Haneke as well as sustained interpretations of music's role in films by Charlie Chaplin, Francis Ford Coppola and several documentaries by Werner Herzog, among others. My thesis is that the cinema is a contested realization of Wagner's idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Cinema is "the art work of the future," but not the one Wagner imagined. I thus argue for a definition of cinema form and history that reserves a more pivotal role for classical music in cinema than has been previously proposed.

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INTRODUCTION

On Exceptions, Extremes, Outliers, Misreadings, and Other Means of Understanding

History

Despite its seemingly peripheral location within both the cinema and cinema studies – beginning with Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987) and including Mervyn Cooke’s recent *A History of Film Music* (2008) with its formidable précis of nearly all the major academic texts and arguments since Gorbman’s book – the topic of film music has accrued a substantial body of critical literature over the last twenty-five years. But while the art of film music is no longer neglected in academic research, it is my contention that more work remains to be done not only on the historical implications of the relationship between the cinema itself and classical music, but more specifically on how classical music contributes to and reflects the historical imagination of the cinema. The practical value of this work resides in the way it will further connect the field of film music studies to both the larger field of cinema studies and to the intellectual life of cinema enthusiasts more generally. Indeed, it is my hypothesis that in order to more fully appreciate the cinema’s complex and often “discontinuous” sense of history, one’s account of the subject needs to pass through the historical implications of the fate of classical music in the cinema.

This dissertation accomplishes the task of attending to the historical implications of classical music’s presence in the cinema in a paradoxical way: by examining exceptions rather than rules, by looking at singular films and directors alongside equally inimitable musical works and composers rather than exploring or seeking to determine norms and averages. In this procedure, I follow what I believe to be the spirit of the films and the music I describe and interpret. In the introduction to his *Theory of Harmony* and its explanation as to why his was a

theory of musical composition and not a system, Arnold Schoenberg captured this unruliness of art generally and music particularly:

A real system should have, above all, principles that embrace all the facts... Only such principles, which are not qualified by exceptions, would have the right to be regarded as generally valid. Such principles would share with natural laws this characteristic of unconditional validity. The laws of art, however, consist mostly of exceptions!” (10)

A page after this insightful reversal of the cliché of the exceptions that prove the rule into the rules of exceptions themselves, Schoenberg almost imperceptibly introduces his concept of theory by rewriting and elaborating his notion of the laws of art as exceptions: “For... the laws of nature admit no exceptions, whereas theories of art consist mainly of exceptions” (11). In the domain of cinema studies, Slavoj Žižek presumes something similar in beginning his analysis of Hitchcock’s *The Wrong Man* by construing it as an exception. “The only way to reach the underlying law of a universe is through its exception” (“In His Bold Gaze” 211). Although Žižek’s “dialectical axiom” is tossed off with an ironic panache that indicates it should be taken with a grain of salt, it is nonetheless suggestive.

While its accent generally falls on historical meanings and implications, *Exceptional Conversations* explores these and other theses on the value of exceptions, extremes, and outliers at many levels pertaining to the relationship between cinema and classical music, beginning with the nature of music and classical music itself. At an ontological level, one might argue that music’s fundamental paradox – which appears in an extreme form in the figure of classical music – makes it exceptional as an artistic medium. As Diderot noted in his “Letter on the Deaf and Dumb” of 1751, and as musicologist Charles Rosen has reiterated time and again, on the one hand, classical music appears more “remote” from the society that produces it than any other art;

but, on the other hand, this indefiniteness of musical signs makes “their emotional impact on our senses...even greater” (Rosen, “Should We Adore Adorno?”). At a broad socio-historical level, *Exceptional Conversations* considers classical music to be similarly paradoxical – temporally discontinuous in that it appears both old and new – both too late and too soon and therefore often essentially out of phase with history. On the one hand, not only has classical music’s time to some degree passed – with its sound almost spontaneously perceived as historical, and its existence in the daily lives of amateur players in nearly permanent decline – but also, as Žižek and Mladen Dolar have argued, again both ironically and suggestively, in the case of opera, the genre itself was “a stillborn child of musical art...never...in accord with its time – from its beginnings perceived as something outdated” (*Opera’s Second Death* viii). On the other hand, however, classical music endures insofar as its modernist works remain controversial and contested (just as Beethoven and Mozart were in the nineteenth century). Furthermore, classical music also remains new insofar as it endures at the emotional core of the cinema and related modern media and yet – as this dissertation attempts to show – while at the same time playing a profound role in shaping the historical imagination of the cinema. In other words, even if the rumors of classical music’s death have been greatly exaggerated – or indeed constitute “its oldest continuing tradition,” with eulogies dating back to Monteverdi’s time – those who eternally spread such gossip would be hard pressed today to deny the importance of classical music’s role in the cinema both historically and enduringly (Rosen, “The Irrelevance of Serious Music” 295). And yet by exploiting classical music’s historicity, the cinema often seems to take it for granted that it is a remnant of a previous artistic era. Thus the cinema’s apparently contradictory effect on classical music, of both underlining the apparent antiquity of classical music and on the other

hand modernizing it in gestures of incorporation, is in a sense only a reflection – or, if you will, a projection – of the strange temporality of classical music’s continuously discontinuous history.

Thus classical music is ultimately and paradoxically somewhat spontaneously perceived as antiquated and yet, on the other hand, it remains almost too new, defiantly difficult and avant-garde. Moreover, it is in this latter regard that contemporary music remains most connected to the history of classical music more generally, where since the Middle Ages originality and difficulty have been the most consistent prerequisites for any chance of historical endurance (Rosen, “Irrelevance”). Indeed, noting the vibrant diversity of new classical music in contemporary times – “there is little hope of giving a tidy account of composition in the second fin de siècle” – Alex Ross ends *The Rest of Noise*, his acclaimed study of twentieth-century classical and other serious music, with a decidedly optimistic view of the future history of classical music, based in part on new developments in technology and their effects on mass culture. “As the behemoth of mass culture breaks up into a melee of subcultures and niche markets, as the Internet weakens the media’s stranglehold on cultural distribution, there is reason to think that classical music, and with it new music, can find fresh audiences” (515). One need only supplement this with the thought that for classical and new music to reach fresh audiences in a vibrant way they will need people to continue to be trained as musicians and devoted to playing classical music.

In the realm of original film music particularly, classical music’s conspicuous and ambivalent presence is similarly complex. On the one hand, its canon has been happily borrowed from and adapted by even the greatest composers for films; and yet, on the other hand, it has also posed a challenge both periodically and somewhat consistently to the viability of original scoring altogether. Many know the famous case of Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space*

Odyssey, where Alex North's score, sometimes called "the greatest score never heard," was rejected in favor of the classical music temp-tracks Kubrick had used during shooting while he waited for the score to be completed (M. Cooke 442-443, Patterson 446). It only added insult to North's injury that the film's preexisting classical music soundtrack became an unlikely cultural phenomenon and bestseller. But perhaps less well known is the precarious economic position of composers of original scores within the film industry at present, where they are an exception among creative professionals in the entertainment industry in that their union was disbanded in the early 1980s. For many composers in the industry their loss of bargaining power has been both financially and creatively damaging. Not only does it often prove more "cost effective," more desirable, or more lucrative to raid the classics and other forms of preexisting, especially popular, music than to pay for original music, but such competition from preexisting music keeps the price of original music and the compensation for most composers down, while often dictating what their music should sound like (Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*).¹

But the practice on the part of the influential auteurs examined in this dissertation of controlling music-editing decisions and often relying on preexisting music over and above

¹ The problems film composers face can roughly be divided into two interrelated parts. First, they face problems related to control over their work conditions, including minimum compensation packages and time-to-completion standards. Second, they face increasing competition from digital technology that has rendered their once specialized skills more accessible to amateurs. The latter problem of course further undermines composers' control over work conditions. In the first case, music producer/composer Alan Elliott, a leading union advocate, sums up the current wage decline, "Thirty years ago, the average television all-in fee was \$35,000 – for an hour of television. That would include the money that would go to the [recording] studio, the contractor [i.e. the composer], the musicians, the orchestrators, the copyists, the players. With inflation from 1979 to 2010, that would be \$104,000, but most network television shows now are around \$14,000 all-in, which means that the total number has fallen to about 13% of what it was" (*The Hollywood Reporter*, "Composers' *Norma Rae* Moment"). The other major problem film composers face is that technological advances in many areas, including music writing, recording, and existing music distribution have made composers' services either superfluous or have rendered their once exclusive skill set decidedly more accessible. Today music writing software is not only ubiquitous, it has also made composing a matter of manipulating the interface options of software programs rather than spending years training in the musical arts of counterpoint and orchestration. The results of such "advances" are aptly summed up by film composer and contributor to the trade publication *Film Music Magazine* Mark Northam, in the title of his recent article: "The New Film Music Paradigm: Free Composers, Free Orchestras, What's Next?" Northam goes on to explain: "The new paradigm for the film and television composing marketplace is based on **oversupply** – the exact *opposite* of scarcity. Instead of a small, highly talented group of composers, we have a massive oversupply of composers, many of whom are new in the marketplace and lack the years of experience characterized by the old paradigm composers."

original scoring as a final personal touch or aesthetic signature should not be blamed for the difficult economic and creative situation faced by film composers today. For the factors contributing to this economic state of affairs are bigger and more complex than the examples provided by a few directors, no matter how influential. Furthermore, rather than worrying primarily about the bottom line, the directors considered in this dissertation have pursued their creative visions often at great personal, professional and financial costs, all in an attempt to realize projects of enduring artistic value in what remains, and I say this without any intention of censoriousness, an entertainment industry. Thus, in their often uncompromising approaches, Kubrick, Godard, Haneke, along with Coppola in the case of *Apocalypse Now*, and Herzog, among many others, are worthy successors to the composers examined in this dissertation.

Indeed, the principal directors and composers that are the focus of entire chapters herein are essentially historical outliers: artists identified with a cultural milieu but also working independently of it. Wagner struggled with and rebelled against the formulas and conventions of Romantic opera, yet his work is also its summation. Kubrick worked within Hollywood, but with an almost unprecedented creative freedom he helped pioneer. Godard epitomized the French New Wave, but through continuously revolutionizing his approach to filmmaking had left it behind when its other exponents were finally hitting their strides. Haneke embodies the opposite phenomena: where Godard was a brilliant early figure in the New Wave, he is a late arrival in the New German Cinema, providing its extreme version, thanks to doses of Kubrick's coldness and Godard's censorious melancholy, mixed with a directorial sensibility honed in television.

The German Romantic critic and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel once wrote, "It is equally fatal to have a system and not to have a system. One must try to combine them" (quoted

in Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* ix). This antinomian idea aptly summarizes the hermeneutic approach taken in *Exceptional Conversations*. On the one hand, this dissertation's descriptions and interpretations start with openness to the complexities of individual films and musical works themselves. On the other hand, one cannot ignore the rich critical tradition of open-minded writing on film, music, and literature. Thus, *Exceptional Conversations* draws on three such traditions of inquiry and analysis – rhetorical criticism, historical materialism, and applied psychoanalysis. More than arbitrary choices, these theories are the intellectual “key signature” of my dissertation, with each theory corresponding to an integral part of the cinema-music text. Firstly, my dissertation takes moving images to be rhetorical in two important senses: first, they persuade audiences of and with their power; second, they are paradoxical figures of thought – at once highly literal and highly figurative. Similarly, my critiques of film criticism and scholarship are primarily grounded in rhetorical analysis. Secondly, the narrative structures of the individual films I consider warrant a materialist sense of history. Put another way, in repeated cases my dissertation finds that preexisting classical music stands in for a crucial “missing piece” of the film's narrative, such as an ideological or historical presupposition. This point dovetails with the final component of my methodology, psychoanalysis. For psychoanalysis, music is, in short, the cinema's most conspicuous symptom. It is often meant to cover over the more obtrusive technical aspects of film form, such as montage; and yet, in doing so it introduces further complications, especially in the case of preexisting classical music, which has a cultural history and meaning of its own.

Above all, *Exceptional Conversations* consists of original representations and interpretations of some of the cinema's most celebrated works and overlooked masterpieces. It accomplishes this by looking at them obliquely, from the point of view of their preexisting

classical music. My conclusion is that, on the one hand, classical music is part of the historical imagination of the cinema; and, on the other hand, the cinema's imaginatively estranging interpretation of preexisting classical music is not only part of the history of classical music, but also offers improbably astute and effectively "modernizing" critiques of particular pieces of music and their attendant ideologies. In sum then, my dissertation is, to use a metaphor, a narrow window onto a wide field of significance for cinema, classical music, and their ongoing historical conversation.

Previews of Coming Attractions

Chapter One, "What Happens to an Apocalypse Deferred: How the Cinema Adapts the Wagnerian Sense of History," centers on extending an insight from Deryck Cooke's authoritative but unfinished analysis of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, *I Saw the World End*. In a classic case of "blindness and insight" on Wagner's part, Cooke notes that regarding the main character of *The Ring*, Wotan, "Wagner the artist, with sure intuition, let drop the invalid part of the theory of Wagner the political thinker" (258). Specifically, Wagner let drop the oft-mentioned and nostalgic notion in his writings of a "golden-age" in primeval civilization. My finding is that *The Ring*'s cinematic afterlife has added another level of critique to Wagner's own unconscious self-criticism of his philosophy in his art. The cinematic appropriation of Wagner has eliminated another idea from Wagner's philosophy of history and this time it is an idea from the philosophy of his music dramas themselves: the idea that figures of authority and power will resign themselves to defeat and forsake their will to power. Thus Wagner's philosophy loses its innocence still further in the cinema's cooptation of his music. Rather than coming to an end, history is an ongoing process of involution and decay for the cinematic Wagner. At the same time, however, the cinema of directors as diverse as Griffith, Chaplin, Coppola and Herzog,

among others, bears witness to the enduring modernity of Wagner's art by enthusiastically associating it with future historical developments in ways that exhibit an anachronistic but nonetheless remarkable congruity between Wagner's philosophy of history as expressed in the *Ring* and contemporary times. Or as the director John Milius has put it, "Wagner just lends itself to helicopters" ("Interview with Coppola" 15:00).

The purpose of Chapter Two, "Historicizing the Condition of Music: The Logic of Exceptions in Several Films by Stanley Kubrick," is to show the depth and breadth of the relationship between Kubrick's films and music, not only the classical music his films are famous for, but also the more general condition of music as a sign that paradoxically has both too much emotional and not enough informational meaning. The complication that Kubrick introduces here is that such musical moments that surpass communicative narrative meaning are simultaneously points where his film's sense of history comes to the fore as well. My thesis is thus that, counterintuitive though it may sound, Kubrick's films are often at their most historical when they are at their most musical and the particular trope that this musical historicism is most often associated with is the historical development of the modern psychological subject. Thus music and the condition of music are central to scenes of indoctrination and to scenes of recognition and peripeteia in Kubrick that relate to historical shifts in the study of psychology and Kubrick's own sense of that history. This complex pattern holds true at a number of crucial junctures in Kubrick films identified throughout this chapter, including scenes of indoctrination in *Full Metal Jacket* and *A Clockwork Orange* and of traumatic encounters in *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. As Roland Barthes wrote, "The historical meaning of the lied must be sought in its music" ("The Grain of the Voice" 274). The same is true of Kubrick, and the historical task of

Kubrick's music is to represent repressed histories and to do so by both fixing and rupturing the meaning of his films.

Chapter Three, "The Sound of Music When History Is in a Hospital Gown: On the Significance of Music in the Films of Jean-Luc Godard," focuses on Godard's well-known tendency to include fragments of classical music in his films, especially from masterworks of instrumental chamber music. My contribution to the discussion of this pronounced tendency in Godard's use of classical music stems from the fact that not enough critical attention has been paid to the historical implications of this process of fragmenting classical music. Godard's fragments of classical music are more than emotive refinements of narrative developments; they are – as fragmentary ruins – signs of the current state of history, which for someone with Godard's leftist sympathies is generally a matter of immense dissatisfaction. In addition to associating classical music with leftist politics, Godard also associates it with reflections on the history of cinema. My conclusion is that from the standpoint of his use of historically-allegorical fragments of classical music, Godard's *idées fixes* of leftist politics and cinematic art have occurred both too soon and too late on the stage of history. Godard's cinema bears witness to this historical non-coincidence of its major ideas and their realization in its enduring sense of melancholy.

Chapter Four, "An Anachronistic Prequel to *Winterreise*: Michael Haneke's Critique of Film Music in *The Piano Teacher*," is the only chapter to deal primarily with one film. My starting point is a comment made by film critic Robin Wood about Haneke's film: "One can understand *La Pianiste* without access to *Winterreise*, but one cannot understand it completely" ("Do I Disgust You?" 59). My interpretation of the film both endorses and radicalizes this idea. In a sentence, I read *The Piano Teacher* as an anachronistic prequel to Schubert's song-cycle,

Winterreise. When Erika (Isabelle Huppert) hits bottom after her affair with her student Walter (Benoit Magimel), the film ends just as she departs on her winter's journey. At this moment she resembles the singer in Schubert's cycle and the speaker in Wilhelm Müller's monodrama: she has failed at love and abandoned the other defining characteristics of her life. The main historical implication of Haneke's anachronistic prequel is a desire to return to the prehistory of film music and to go in a different direction, to identify the cinema with chamber music and above all with Schubertian lied rather than opera; and yet Schubert's art-songs eventually contributed to major reforms in Romantic opera, while chamber music and opera are not as opposed as might be ordinarily assumed. In this way, Haneke offers a critique of film music by searching out one of its origins "organically," that is, in a film about the life of a singularly distressed classical musician.

"Failing Better" at Misreading Walter Benjamin

This dissertation has two more central ideas I would like to approach here, not by defining them in a textbook manner, but by giving illustrations of them in two very distant contexts. The first term is related to that of exceptions in the manner of a genus to a species: the notion of using extremes to explore and illustrate ideas. The second idea is also of great importance, not only for the organizing logic of this dissertation, but also for the common attribution of authority and agency to directors in the filmmaking process more generally: the concept of an auteur. In the first case I will refer to an esoteric work of philosophical literary criticism, Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Truerspiel*, and briefly relate a famous misapplication of the notion of extremes that Benjamin describes in his methodological introduction, followed by a justification for my own more knowing misapplication. In the case of auteurism, I will refer to comments that a frustrated and exasperated Francis Ford Coppola made

during the filming of his most complicated work, at least from a technical standpoint, *Apocalypse Now*. It was an unlikely but also very timely place for him to have offered a theory of the auteur, just as the introduction to Benjamin's work on baroque drama probably seems an odd place to address fundamental issues of epistemology but has nevertheless proved to be of enduring if controversial methodological value in a variety of disciplines.

It would be easy to say that the gap separating the theory of Benjamin from that of Coppola is the familiar one, deconstructed endlessly, of high culture and low. And indeed, these theories are not as different as they might initially appear. First, despite their difference of origin, drawn as they are from the intellectual life of the critic, on the one hand, and the working-life of an artist, on the other, both Benjamin and Coppola's theories illustrate Schlegel's paradox of always having a "system" and never having one. In both cases, the theory is, to put it perhaps too simply, an open one and one that consists of the exceptions, as was decisive for Schoenberg's theory as well. Secondly and furthermore, taken together they illustrate not only the type of eclectic and (why not?) opportunistic approach to criticism I have in mind in this dissertation, but also – albeit in a sense that differs from Benjamin's – a juxtaposition of outlying critical theories notable for their intellectual audacity. Benjamin once called his prologue to the *Origin* text, which was rejected as his habilitation thesis required for a teaching appointment in a German university, "an immeasurable *chutzpah*" for the way it boldly addresses fundamental problems of epistemology in an esoteric style in the introduction to a work, ostensibly, of period-based literary criticism (Rosen, "The Ruins of Walter Benjamin" 135). Coppola's moment of insight is spoken in a different and more clearly defiant tone as he attempts to overcome doubts about whether *Apocalypse Now*, a film it took immeasurable *chutzpah* to make, will fail both commercially and artistically. Finally, in both cases one encounters a theory that in a sense did

not seem to belong to the circumstance in which it was articulated, not unlike preexisting classical music's presence in the cinema.

Out of an interest in remaining brief and clear in discussing as forbidding a text as Benjamin's, one could do worse than limit the discussion to two of its more well-known sentences on the relationship of extreme examples to the philosophical-historical method he proposes for literary criticism in its attempts to configure and represent its ideas.

Philosophical history, the science of the origin, is the form which, in the remotest extremes and the apparent excesses of the process of development, reveals the configuration of the idea – the sum total of all possible meaningful juxtapositions of such opposites. The representation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored. (47)

The first of these sentences entered a wider sphere of circulation (indeed, first came to my own attention) when Theodor Adorno made it the starting point of his controversial treatise, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*. Adorno's idea for this book, to put it briefly, was to juxtapose what he saw as two extremes of modern music: on the one hand, Schoenberg and his disciples (Webern and Berg mainly), and on the other hand Stravinsky. According to Charles Rosen's incisive criticism, Adorno's application of Benjamin's method has been shown to have two fatal flaws. First, it is motivated by a bias, in Rosen's terms a "parochialism," in which Schoenberg represents the heroic continuation of the great tradition of the central European musical culture and Stravinsky represents an alien intruder from a marginal culture.

In *Philosophy of Modern Music*, the relation of Schoenberg and Stravinsky is mostly represented as a struggle between good and evil. Even Schoenberg's move from the

expressionist style of 1911 to 1920—in such works as *Erwartung* and *Pierrot Lunaire*—to the systematic twelve-tone system, which Adorno largely deplures, is viewed sympathetically as the tragic result of the clash between the developing musical style and the degeneration of capitalist culture. Stravinsky's work, on the other hand, is subjected to a polemical onslaught well illustrated by the section headings: Archaism, Modernism, Infantilism; Permanent Regression and Musical Form; The Psychotic Aspect; Alienation as Objectivity; Fetishism of the Means; Depersonalization; Catatonia... The pejorative vocabulary is systemic... The limit of this tendency is reached when Adorno ascribes Stravinsky's success in dealing with the crowd scenes in *Petrouchka* to the incapacity of the Slav to achieve subjectivity. (“Should We Adore Adorno?”)

Although Benjamin himself was no stranger to polemics, his were not motivated by this sort of parochialism and were most often aimed at other critics rather than the artists who provided the material for his critical activities. Furthermore, for Benjamin, whose first dissertation was on the concept of criticism, the act of criticism was not a matter of judgment primarily, but of understanding; and one can therefore assume that the juxtapositions of extremes he had in mind were meant to be more complex than good versus evil.²

² Responding to letters complaining that his accusation of “cultural racism” was too strong, Rosen further clarified his comments in what I see as a convincing reinforcement of his point.

Adorno's treatment of *Petrouchka* largely dismisses the second scene, which is the heart of the work, its most radical passage, and the original inspiration for the ballet. In this scene, the rage and the suffering of the puppet aspiring to life are portrayed with music that was perhaps the first complete revelation of Stravinsky's genius, and which was to influence almost every composer that followed in the twentieth century. For a writer as sensitive to musical values as Adorno, the willful disregard of this scene is a critical failure that can only be explained as an evasion, a refusal to come to terms with the subject. In place of a genuine discussion of the way Stravinsky represents subjectivity struggling to come to the surface of the imprisoned sensibility of the puppet, Adorno offers statements that betray only prejudice. “Wherever the subjective element is encountered,” he writes, “it is depraved; it is sickeningly oversentimentalized or trodden to death” (*Philosophy of Modern Music*, 144). How this can be applied to the second scene, I cannot imagine. This is not criticism but malice. (“Adoring Adorno”)

But the more significant although less sensational problem with Adorno's application of Benjamin's method of juxtaposing extremes is that he limits himself from the outset to only two such extremes from essentially only one category – the European avant-garde – of modern music. Adorno makes this mistake in part because he does not quote the crucial second sentence of Benjamin's formulation, "The representation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored." Ignoring this caveat, Adorno refused from the outset to explore a fuller range of possible extremes. Rosen succinctly lists some of the forms and composers of modern music not contained in Adorno's philosophy.

Adorno...eliminates from his review all forms of popular music, including jazz, and refuses to consider such contemporary figures as Rachmaninov and Sibelius. Hindemith is dismissed as a reactionary and Bartók given the most cursory treatment. In this way, he reduces the picture of the modern age to two isolated images, and does not even seriously consider the relations between the work of Schoenberg and that of Stravinsky. ("Should We Adore Adorno?")

What Benjamin himself did in his application of his philosophical-historical method was both more circumscribed than Adorno's attempt and more broad-minded in its exploration of extreme instances of cultural works and ideas that contributed, in his view, to the concept of *trauerspiel* ("mourning-play"). On the one hand, as the title suggests and in contrast to Adorno's, Benjamin started by limiting himself to a national-cultural tradition of drama in the period of the baroque. On the other hand, Benjamin explored a diverse array of phenomena from the period besides these neglected plays themselves, including for example the period's emblem books of which he was an avid collector. Moreover, as Charles Rosen accurately summarizes it in his own

exposition of *Origins* in a review of the first English translation, Benjamin's text also addressed subjects beyond its stated period and culture "extensively," including "Romantic symbolism, Greek tragedy, the Spanish baroque theater, Shakespeare (above all, the figure of Hamlet), the nature of allegory, and the emblematic concept of melancholy during the Counter Reformation" ("The Ruins of Walter Benjamin" 134).

My intention in *Exceptional Conversations*, however, is not simply to avoid Adorno's mistake in trying to follow Benjamin's model, though not his nearly impenetrable style, more closely. To paraphrase Samuel Beckett, I consider my application of Benjamin to be a "better failure" than Adorno's. Thus, on the one hand, my impetus to draw on a broad range of examples comes from Benjamin. In this regard, I consider everything from silent epics to contemporary "art-house" documentaries, from mainstream classical to post-classical Hollywood, from the French and German New Wave's to camp action films. But, on the other hand, in a sense my project is also based on a misreading not unlike Adorno's. For although I explore a wide range of cinematic examples, like Adorno my musical focus is limited to what one would typically refer to as European classical music, particularly nineteenth century music, with some attention to instances of the twentieth-century avant-garde. Or more precisely, my dissertation deals with films that deploy preexisting classical music both diegetically and non-diegetically. Thus my work on the idea of film music would not be considered complete by Benjamin's standard because "the whole range" of types of music – e.g. jazz and popular music, etc. – is not explored; and thus the idea of film music is not fully presented according to the parameters set by Benjamin for a philosophical history of the subject.

Perhaps my misreading is only an improvement in that it is a self-aware one. Indeed, in my interpretation, Benjamin's notion of juxtaposing extremes is often translated in a quantitative

sense as exceptions and/or rare instances. My broader justification for this misreading, however, resides in what I see as the exceptionalism of classical music itself within the full complex of genres of music used in the cinema – and thus the way in which classical music and cinema taken together form a singular and yet significant idea about music role in the cinema’s historical imagination. Classical music is different from other varieties of music in that both the historical and ontological tensions that define music more generally are taken to extremes in the case of classical music. Both of these tensions have to do with the gap between classical music as an idea and its realization. Historically, such a gap exists insofar as certain now canonical pieces were composed ahead of their time, before a proper performance venue was available for them (more on this in a moment). The related ontological tension between idea and realization in music and the performing arts more generally, that is more extreme in classical music performance particularly, is also historically grounded.

Since the eighteenth century, the almost absolute separation between composer and performer has exacerbated the inevitable tension between conception and realization that exists even on the level of improvisation. It has placed the work of music beyond realization but within the range of everyone’s imagining. While the text is, in its absolute sense, inaccessible, it is present as a yardstick, as an instrument for judgment against which the sample made from its mold will be found inevitably wanting. (Rosen, “The Aesthetics of Stage Fright” 10)

The cinema’s appropriation of classical music simultaneously exploits and compounds this tension between the ideal and actual that finds an extreme form in the problem of classical music performance. On the one hand, the cinema compounds this tension by associating recorded realizations of music with its own ideas and narrative and historical contexts. On the other, it is

able to accomplish this because of the underlying non-coincidence of idea and actuality in classical music performance that precedes it historically.

The cinema's appropriation of classical music thus both bears witness to this fundamental non-coincidence of idea and realization in classical music and intensifies it in a number of complex and often contradictory ways. In a paradigmatic manner, cinematic appropriations of classical music displace musical works to new contexts and thereby estrange them still further from their abstract idealization. One can imagine, for instance, that even with contemporary or modern classical music – the history of which coincides with that of the cinema – that the cinema's utilization of such music could associate it with historical settings at variance with its own social context and/or performance venue. Such is indeed the case in Kubrick's *2001*, where Ligeti's *Atmosphères* is rendered in the future-tense, as a soundtrack for the film's imagined revolution in human consciousness, while the "Kyrie" from his *Requiem* becomes a recurring leitmotif for the eternal a-historical monolith intervening in human history from outside. In another example of Ligeti and Kubrick, in *Eyes Wide Shut* the second movement from Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata*, meant as Cartesian search for musical first principles by Ligeti, stands for a remnant from the Second World in a film otherwise hailing, in terms both of its production and its historical imagination, from after the end of the Cold War, adapted from a novella from before it began. In both cases, Ligeti's music's fuller realization, at least in the sense of reaching an audience of millions, dealt a blow to its absolute idealization. This is apparent in the way these pieces of Ligeti's music now occupy a strange place in which it is practically impossible to hear them without thinking of Kubrick's films. In a speculative gesture, one might argue that in this sense Kubrick's use of these pieces has altered the very idea of them.

In order to better understand both why and how the cinema's historicization of music's ideal/actual tension is effectively a repetition of a problem in music history itself, one should take a brief detour into the history of technology by referring to Charles Rosen's application of the French historian Marc Bloch's famous essay, "The Advent and the Triumph of the Watermill in Medieval Europe," to the history of classical music. In his critique of musicologist Richard Taruskin's magnum opus, *The History of Western Music* (2006), Rosen mentions Bloch's essay as a model for understanding unusual pieces of music that are in some cases quite literally ahead of their time. In his essay, Bloch attempts to account for two strange facts about the history of the watermill. On the one hand, despite its immense benefits for productivity, the watermill was not fully integrated into Roman society until approximately five centuries after it was first invented in the first century B.C. On the other hand, the watermill persisted as a means of production long after it was no longer the most efficient option, well into the nineteenth century, when the steam engine had emerged as a clearly more efficient means of production. In Rosen's account, these "anomalies" were mostly due to the contingencies and exploitative conditions of existing labor relations in both eras.

During the Roman period, slave labor was plentifully available. As slavery declined, the expense of building water mills paid for itself, above all when the lord who owned the water rights could make his tenants pay for grinding their grain...When steam power provided an even more practical way of making flour, the water mills continued to be used because the local lord could force his tenants to continue bringing the grain to his mill. ("From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra")

The far-reaching conclusion that both Bloch and Rosen draw from this is succinctly presented by Rosen: "The processes of invention and exploitation are out of phase. Inventions arrive before

they are needed and continue to be employed when they are no longer useful. The history of society and the history of scientific invention do not fit neatly together” (Troubadours to Sinatra”). As Rosen demonstrates, this idea is of great relevance and suggestiveness for the social history of modern music, especially as regards what he calls “anomalous” pieces – pieces that in the language of this dissertation might also be considered exceptions of the sort that are of general rather than marginal value. Rosen’s estranging interpretation thus has the effect of returning one to the uncertainty that surrounded many masterworks of Western music in their original social context, to the way they seemed originally out of place. To quote just one of Rosen’s examples, “Bach’s great Mass in B minor was never performed during his lifetime: as a Catholic Mass, it could not be played in a Protestant church, and the use of an orchestra was forbidden in Catholic churches during Bach’s lifetime, although he hoped it might eventually be possible” (Troubadours to Sinatra”).

In the most obvious form of this non-coincidence as it is taken up by the cinema, classical music is an older form of art persisting at the emotional heart of modern and even contemporary cinema and the historical milieus and architectural spaces implied by stories set in modern and contemporary times. One example in particular of this cinematic phenomenon of pairing contemporary life with music from the past indeed provided the initial seed for this dissertation and figures prominently in the last chapter. The moment in question concerns the main character from Michael Haneke’s *The Piano Teacher*, Erika Kohut, as played by Isabelle Huppert. My strong reaction to this sequence was no doubt influenced by my familiarity with the piece of music used in the sequence in question, the “Andante con Moto” from Schubert’s Piano Trio in E flat. I have performed this piece as a student and heard it in concert on a number of occasions, most memorably during an ominous thunderstorm in the Rockies.

Erika has just finished a rehearsal of the piece in the sequence that provoked and still provokes me. After the film shows her chamber ensemble debating a matter of interpretation in the midst of their rehearsal, they restart the piece from the beginning of the movement. Suddenly, as the music continues as a sound bridge, the scene abruptly shifts to Erika exiting an elevator inside a modern, indoor shopping-mall in Berlin, a symbol of American consumer culture's global reach and influence if ever there was one. The shock of the ensuing sequence for me was due not simply to the way the music felt out of place, the way it seemingly belongs to a more refined environment than a mall full of bratty teenagers who nearly run over the stoic Erika as she makes her way through the crowd. The shock was that the music was out of time, ripped from its historical context yet not deprived of its artistic power or that power's historical valences. Indeed, as the scene proceeds and Erika enters a sex shop and then a private viewing booth, the way changes in shots coincide with changes in Schubert's music makes the entire situation that much more uncomfortable. Indeed, is it not remarkable that Schubert could be made not an ironic but an appropriate soundtrack for desperate woman's research of sexuality in a pornographic video store? As Erika finally enters the booth, begins to stare at the screen inside, and Schubert's Trio abruptly stops, it is as though the deafening silence on the soundtrack that replaces the Trio aurally represents the very gap between the historical moment of the Trio's composition in the early nineteenth century – to commemorate Beethoven's death of all things – and the contemporary moment of Haneke's realization of it at a sex shop in the mall.

Furthermore and as another preview of coming attractions, the effect of cinema's appropriation of classical music is not limited to appropriations of the past, as though the only possible effect is that of music having lingered too long of the stage of history, to be put to often unsettling uses such as the one just described. Indeed, in the films of Stanley Kubrick as was

already mentioned, classical music is often paired with historical and pre-historical settings from the other extreme of the historical continuum: not where the music occurs “too late,” but where it arrives “too soon.” For the sake of exploring the same example of classical music as was used by Haneke in *The Piano Teacher*, one could consider the use of Schubert’s Trio in E flat as it is heard in Kubrick’s neglected masterpiece, *Barry Lyndon*. In a film which otherwise features music from the baroque and rococo periods and thus more or less corresponding to the pre-1789 period of the film, the Schubert stands out as a piece of music from the future. Like Barry himself, who is attempting to gain admittance to the highest levels of aristocratic society despite his low birth and station, the Schubert appears too soon on the stage of history as Kubrick presents it. One thus has two temporally opposed examples of the use of the same piece that exploit the gap between its moment of invention and the relative independence the work maintains from the social context in which it was produced. The Trio “in-itself” represents the same historical moment in each of these films. Yet not only does a significant gap exist between its moment and the historical moments the films each associate the music with, but the films’ stories’ view the music from opposite historical directions. More than simply two examples of interpretation as misreading, the radical conclusion one might draw here is that there is not only something anachronistic about Schubert’s Trio in the way it seems to belong to “all time” (as the cliché goes), but also, according to the cinema, the way it belongs to particular and markedly different historical milieus in the cinema’s imagination, milieus that are out of phase with the Schubert’s moment of invention. To go a step further, perhaps indeed there is something anachronistic about history itself, a way in which, as Bloch has shown, its inventions and their utilization can be out of phase, a quality of history that art in the ongoing era of its technological reproducibility has arguably made more apparent and more recurrent than ever before.

Saying “Fuck It” to Being Pretentious as the Meaning of Auteurism

Sometimes on the surface and always between the lines of this dissertation lurks another idea: the concept of auteurism and its rebellious pedigree. Its initial gesture in Truffaut’s polemic, “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” was one of both exploding and creating a canon of French and, to some degree, American directors in the stifling creative environment of the French film establishment after World War II (Andrew, “Truffaut’s Vitriolic Manifesto”). This was followed by the term’s work as a conceptual tool to justify experiments in the personal styles of the French New Wave and the Left Bank Group, with Truffaut himself, among others, now putting his idea to good use. The French New Wave in turn sparked similar rebellions among the film-school-trained directors in the Hollywood Renaissance of the 1970s and the New German Cinema of the same time.

The 1970s are a decade widely considered the heyday for directorial control in Hollywood productions and, perhaps more than coincidentally, a “high water mark” in the industry in terms of artistic achievement, with directors such as Altman, Coppola, Malick, Scorsese, Polanski, Lucas, and Allen, to name a few, all enjoying a degree of creative freedom possible today in independent filmmaking, but increasingly unheard-of in productions from major studios, where the goal of creating “blockbuster” spectacles predominates as never before. Journalist and longtime Hollywood observer Peter Biskind nostalgically sums up this view of the Hollywood Renaissance: “The thirteen years between *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 and *Heaven’s Gate* in 1980 marked the last time it was really exciting to make movies in Hollywood, the last time people could be consistently proud of the pictures they made, the last time the community as a whole encouraged good work, the last time there was an audience that could sustain it” (quoted in King, *New Hollywood Cinema* 11). *Apocalypse Now* is a central example in this

dissertation in this regard, not only because of its astonishing appropriation of Wagner in its most important sequence, but because the film marks the end of the era when both creative freedom and studio backing were relatively common. Indeed, insofar as Coppola became increasingly financially responsible for its cost as the film's production went on, the film's production history could be said to dramatize in an abbreviated form the separation of the studios from such risky creative work.

Thus for an illustration of the concept of the auteur, it seems appropriate to turn not to the usual canonical critical texts in a search for a definition of this illusive term, such as Truffaut's foundational polemic against the so-called *cinéma de qualité*, or Andrew Sarris' historically important and more polite distillation of Truffaut's ideas for the America public, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962." Rather, my idea is to seek out an unusual (yes, exceptional) example in the theorization of auteurism, not in the sense that it comes from a director (this is quite common), but in the sense that it comes from a director under duress, in the heat of the battle to keep his vision and his project alive. It is under such conditions, along with being massively over-budget and facing persistent rumors of disaster in the industry press, that Francis Ford Coppola summoned the following vision of the filmmaker that I hold to be of general value for the notion of the auteur, insofar as it is relevant to the directors considered in this dissertation. These directors – Kubrick, Godard, Haneke, Coppola, and Herzog principally – could all be said to have at least flirted with the catastrophic possibility of having made pretentious films; and it is the risk of making a pretentious film that Coppola is keenly aware of when he theorizes the nature of filmmaking in a interview with his wife Eleanor Coppola that appears near the end of *Hearts of Darkness*, the 1991 documentary about the making of *Apocalypse Now*. In an illuminating preface to his monologue, Eleanor's voiceover describes the process of making

Apocalypse Now as one in which Francis was pushing everything to extremes. What follows is the improvised, feverish diatribe of a shirtless Coppola on his own plight, but translated into the plight of the filmmaker as such. If Coppola's theory is a failed one or one that stops making sense, this is for me all the more reason to attend to it. Like Freud's everyday parapraxes, perhaps Coppola's moment of frustration and madness is a window into his unconscious and that of auteurism more generally:

Nothing is so terrible as a pretentious movie. I mean a movie that aspires for something really terrific and doesn't pull it off is shit; it's scum. And everyone will walk on it as such. And that's why poor filmmakers in a way...their greatest horror is to be pretentious. So here you are on the one hand trying to aspire to really do something; and on the other hand you're not allowed to be pretentious. And finally you say fuck it. I don't care if I'm pretentious or I'm not pretentious...or if I've done it or I haven't done it. All I know is that I am going to see this movie and that for me it has to have some answers. And by answers I don't mean just a punch-line; I mean answers on about 47 different levels. It's very hard to talk about these things without being very corny. You use a word like self-purgation or epiphany and they think you're either a religious weirdo or an asshole college professor, but those are the words for the process, this transmutation, this renaissance, this rebirth, which is the basis of all life. The one rule of all men from the time they were first walking around and looking up and scratching around for an animal to kill...the first concept that I feel got into their head was the idea of life and death; that the sun went down and the sun went up. When they learned how to make a crop and then in the winter all the crops died, the first man must have thought, "Oh my god, this is the end of the world." And then all of a sudden there was spring and

everything came alive and it was better. And I mean after all, look at Vietnam. Look at my movie; you'll see what I'm talking about. (1:27-1:29)

This speech could be said to fall into three parts: (1) a bit of dialectical analysis of the way in which a director overcomes his fear of being pretentious during the creative process and its corollary search for meaning; (2) a self-deprecating and satirical moment that seems to mark the threshold of the pretentious, with Coppola naming some of its stereotypical residents; and (3) – as though to indicate his crossing over into pretentiousness – a flight into a both mythological and quasi-anthropological anecdote that ends in a final escape from the abyss of nonsense when, in a non sequitur, Coppola insists that one simply view his film to comprehend the 47 levels of meaning that cannot be listed without corniness or pretentiousness. Regarding *Apocalypse Now*, the mythological component of Coppola's speech is deeply symptomatic. For indeed, the film does essentially mythologize the history of the Vietnam War by substituting the mythological killing of the primal father in the figure of Kurtz for the actual confrontation over resources and political ideology that motivated the conflict. In this regard, Coppola's project makes a mistake common to much of modern literature's treatment of imperialism, as Fredric Jameson has shown, in which the struggle to subdue the oppressed is relegated to the background, and the narrative's center of attention becomes the fight between imperial powers for control of resources or, as is the case in *Apocalypse*, the internal struggle for the soul of the empire (Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism").

Furthermore, beyond both the absurdity of several of the 47 levels of this speech and the satirical brilliance and self-deprecating wit with which Coppola in part delivers it, it is worth dwelling on and appropriating a few of its details that are of interest for the concept of the auteur as it pertains to the directors at issue in this dissertation. To put it succinctly, all the auteurs or

filmmakers discussed at any length in this dissertation are ones who have at one time or another in all likelihood said “fuck it” in the sense described by Coppola. They have risked being pretentious so that the films they make might mean something, above all, to themselves, as a kind of first audience member for their own work. Of all the ways they have signaled this fundamental moment where one begins to risk being pretentious, the inclusion of preexisting classical music either diegetically or non-diegetically in a film is undoubtedly a strong one.³ And yet precisely at such moments the classical music expropriated comes improbably close to being “reborn” in a manner not altogether dissimilar from what Coppola has in mind in his anthropological bluff. Except that classical music has never died. Instead, it has developed both independently and in concert with historical processes both contiguous with its development and predating and following it – all of which are entailed to varying degrees by the cinema’s appropriations of it.

Thus what we are dealing with in the figure of classical music in the cinema is not so much a kind of Frankenstein made up of the undead flesh of previous art works and forms, but rather, to use a figure from the cinema, something more like Gloria Swanson’s immortal performance as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*. Desmond is a star from the silent era whose time has passed – a fact everyone seems to know except for her, thanks to the protective care of her faithful servant (and former husband) Max (played by the silent film star and director

³ In film theorist Dudley Andrew’s interpretation of Truffaut’s initial essay on auteurism, the hallmark of auteurism is a short artistic step away from classical music: the literary. Thus, for Andrew, the ultimate proof of Truffaut’s indictment of the French film establishment’s lukewarm adaptations of Gide et al came in the paradoxical form of an even bolder attempt to adapt literature for the cinema; or rather, to make the cinema literary.

The strongest vindication of the historical aptness of Truffaut’s 1954 essay comes from the concurrent appearance of a parallel group whose conception and practice of cinematic écriture would indeed link up with the most advanced tendencies in French culture, right through the 1960s and 1970s. The Rive Gauche (Left Bank) group, made up of Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and, most important, Alain Resnais, was supported by *Cahier du Cinema*, although its members never wrote for that journal or engaged in its polemics...Resnais put into play a radical reexamination of the function of character, one that drew on the aesthetic of the *nouveaux romanciers*...Duras...Robbe-Grillet...Sarraute...In this way Resnais...helped overturn the conventional “psychological” realism of the *cinéma de qualité*. (“Truffaut’s Vitriolic Manifesto” 998).

Erich von Stroheim). But when it becomes increasingly clear that her planned comeback is impossible, Desmond reacts by literally shooting the messenger, her lover Joe Gillis (William Holden), who delivers this news to her in no uncertain terms as he attempts to leave her and her sheltered time-capsule of a home. In one of the greatest flourishes ever to end a Hollywood film, this murderous act has the beyond-tragic effect of bringing media attention to a now psychotically delusional Desmond, who thus finally reappears on the biggest stage of them all – the headlines of the tabloids and television – and descends the staircase in her mansion under the delusion that the cameras are filming her latest movie rather than her fall from grace. Like Desmond at this precise moment on the staircase, is there not something defiant about classical music's persistence in the cinema? (Indeed, the ubiquitous use of classical music's greatest hits during the silent era is playfully referenced in *Sunset Boulevard* itself.) My dissertation thus explores the presence of classical music on all 47 levels of its historical significance as entailed by its presence in the history of cinema under one final hypothesis – that like Norma Desmond, preexisting classical music in narrative cinema is ready for its close-up again.

CHAPTER ONE

What Happens to an Apocalypse Deferred: Or, How the Cinema Adapts the Wagnerian Sense of History

On the Cinema's Disastrously Correct Appropriation of Wagner

In his perceptive article, “Secret Passage; Decoding Ten Bars in Wagner’s ‘Ring,’” commemorating the premiere of the Metropolitan Opera’s new, high-tech production of *The Valkyrie* in the spring of 2011, noted classical music critic Alex Ross touches on many of the issues discussed in this chapter and dissertation more generally. One gesture in particular towards the beginning of the article presents a satirical and entertaining caricature of what one might call the “Wagnerian cultural studies” approach that has become popular in recent decades thanks in part to the rise of film music studies as a vibrant interdisciplinary academic topic. “The usual way to write about Wagner is to proceed from the world-historical level, musing on some combination of Aeschylus, the Icelandic sagas, Shakespeare, ‘Faust,’ Beethoven’s Ninth, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, George Bernard Shaw, Theodor Herzl, Adolf Hitler, ‘Apocalypse Now,’ and Bugs Bunny” (“Secret Passage”). For Ross, while this world-historical approach is “an absorbing game...at the end of the day it leaves little space for the music, which is the ultimate source of the spell that Wagner continues to cast upon the world.”

In contrast to this approach, Ross begins, instead, by noting a suggestive irony: Wagner’s “colossal” *Ring* cycle is actually “made up of hundreds of intimate moments.” Ross then proceeds to describe one such instrumental musical “microlude” from Act II of *The Valkyrie*. The “microlude” that fascinates Ross occurs at a key moment in the saga of *The Ring*: just before Wotan’s famous monologue in Act II, in which he pours out his heart to his daughter Brünnhilde. Ross refers to this speech succinctly as “the most spectacular psychological tailspin in the history

of opera,” and goes on to summarize it as “a twenty minute monologue that begins with cries of ‘Endless rage! / Eternal grief! / I am the saddest of all living things’ and culminates with a quiet rasp of ‘*Das Ende!*’” Ross’s “microlude” immediately precedes this stunning confession by the chief of the gods in which he signals his intention to resign himself to defeat. It also follows a tense argument between Wotan and his wife Fricka in which she forces Wotan to agree to sacrifice his half-human son Siegmund, whom Wotan had sired with the intention of having him regain the all-powerful ring. (Wotan cannot do this himself because it would violate the contract or agreement he has negotiated with the ring’s current possessor, the giant Fafner, who along with his brother built Wotan’s home, Valhalla, in exchange for the ring.) Fricka has pointed out that Siegmund, whose life hangs in the balance in Acts I and II, is both not free from Wotan’s laws and a living proof of Wotan’s own violation of one of these laws, their marriage vow. At the end of the argument she compels Wotan to swear he will allow Siegmund to perish.

Ross’s analyses of the musical details and narrative context of Wagner’s “microlude” have many happy and clarifying effects for a fundamental understanding of *The Ring*. Chief among his insights into the significance of this musical moment is the idea that it “marks the moment at which women begin to take charge of the ‘Ring.’” In particular, in addition to emphasizing how Brünnhilde’s decisive role begins here, Ross convincingly rehabilitates the often maligned character of Fricka. And yet this insightful feminist reading is simultaneously the point from which Ross’s own reading of *The Ring* begins to march inexorably towards the “world-historical level” of analysis. Thus, by the end of his article he is citing not Nietzsche and Shaw, but two of their present-day equivalents – Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek – in a manner resembling “the usual way” of musing upon Wagner he begins his article by satirizing. Indeed, in a decisive interpretive gesture, Ross attempts to disassociate Wagner from his Nazi

appropriation by emphasizing Wotan's willingness to resign his will to power. Wotan's "soliloquy undercuts everything that is popularly associated with the term 'Wagnerian.' It is a deconstruction of power, a dismantling of grandeur." Then, in "the usual way," this interpretation is followed by the record of Ross's discussion of Hitler's impact on Wagner's legacy with the German maestro Christoph von Dohnányi, a man with a unique perspective of the question given that his father and uncle were executed for participating in the German resistance during World War II.

One could invoke a number of larger ideas here to explain why Ross's close reading of Wagner's "microlude" still winds up musing on a "world-historical level." For philosopher of music Lydia Goehr, the topics of politics and history are inherent to a discussion of Wagner's work because "with an impact unparalleled [Wagner] demonstrated in theory and in practice the wide-ranging significance of thinking about philosophy and politics in terms of music, and music in terms of philosophy and politics" (*The Quest for Voice* 1-2). For Goehr, this shuttling between the music and the world-historical in Wagner criticism is practically inevitable because Wagner himself engaged in the process more than anyone before or since. Going a step further, at an even broader level one could invoke Charles Rosen's comments on the peculiar nature of a properly executed hermeneutics of music. For Rosen, a proper hermeneutics of music involves a basic paradox:

Even the most technical description of music will bring us eventually to history. No doubt the relationship between analysis and historical interpretation is reciprocal, a movement back and forth generally called hermeneutic. But the movement is difficult to establish: the relation is most often based on metaphor – a Beethoven symphony is like the French Revolution, for example – and the human mind is so constituted that it will

insist on finding a resemblance between any two objects or forms presented for its inspection; and the more unlike the two objects, the more enjoyable is the challenge to discover the secret likeness. The essential condition of music is its proximity to nonsense, its refusal from the outset of a fixed meaning. That is why starting with historical interpretation in order to explain the formal aspects of music is certain disaster: it is too easy to convince ourselves that anything we say is true, and too hard to convince anyone else. (*Frontiers of Meaning* 125)

In this light, the greatness of Ross's reading of Wagner resides in how it starts and stops with the music of *The Ring* and thus addresses the historical and political questions only secondarily.

But more complexly and more relevantly for beginning to think about the cinema's cooptation of Wagner and by extension of classical music more generally, one should reflect on Rosen's warning that "starting with historical interpretation in order to explain the formal aspects of music is certain disaster." It is my thesis that when it comes to the cinema's appropriation of Wagner this is historically speaking what has happened. The cinema has given a historical interpretation to Wagner's music that in terms of explaining the formal aspects of music has in a sense been a disaster. Audiences do not understand the formal details of music any better for having heard a snatch of Wagner (or Bach or Beethoven) in a film, while, on the other hand, the film itself gains the affective power and the broad historical connotations of the music co-opted. Yet, and this is the crucial turn of my argument and my thesis, this certain disaster of the cinema's appropriation of Wagner, at least in cases chosen for their exceptional or extreme value, nonetheless exhibits a remarkable affinity for the political philosophy entailed in Wagner's musical dramas and for the way this philosophy differs from Wagner's own stated philosophy. Thus, the paradox of the cinema's appropriation of Wagner's music is that by

associating it with historical events in the manner of the metaphors that Rosen rightly finds so dangerously subjective, it has nevertheless arrived at an interpretation that is in keeping with Wagner's own rewriting of his philosophy in his art. Thus, the cinema's cooptation of Wagner's music is, to paraphrase literary theorist Paul de Man, what one might call a "disfigured interpretation," an interpretive gesture whose very violence seems to reflect the contingency and unpredictability of history itself. "Reading as disfiguration, to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archeology" ("Shelley Disfigured" 69). After formulating this paradoxical thesis, in which the ahistorical reading ("to the very extent that it resists historicism") is the most reliable reading historically, de Man quickly warns any would be critics against elevating this insight into a method of interpretation more generally. But the cinema's disfiguring appropriation of Wagner has not heard or heeded de Man's warning. It violently rips fragments of Wagner out of their original context and in so doing creates an improbably reliable historical interpretation.

Another and less paradoxical way of characterizing the cinema's historically-metaphorical appropriation of Wagner would be to say that the cinema's relationship to the music of Wagner that it appropriates is analogous to the relationship of criticism to a work of art as defined by Friedrich Schlegel. "Great works of art criticize themselves. The work of criticism is therefore superfluous unless it is itself a work of art as independent of the work it criticizes as the work is independent of the material that went into it" (quoted in Rosen, "The Ruins of Walter Benjamin" 135). The cinematic appropriation of Wagner exercises precisely the sort of critical and artistic independence from Wagner that Schlegel demands from the practice of criticism. Again, as with de Man's idea, the paradox is that the very independence of the

critical cinematic appropriation signals its much stronger underlying fidelity to the same world-historical level that interested Wagner.

What then, one might ask, is the cinema's criticism of Wagner? Let us return to Alex Ross's emphasis of the "progressive" nature of Wotan's resignation of his will to power for a moment. For Ross, invoking Alain Badiou's recently published lectures on Wagner, this moment is key to countering the familiar charge against Wagner of proto-fascism. "In Wotan's monologue, Badiou sees a pivotal moment in which 'power and impotence are in equipoise'; that paralysis creates the possibility of a different world" ("Secret Passage"). But from the point of view of the cinema's appropriation of Wagner and the fundamentally historical implications of its attendant interpretation, this possibility of a different world created by Wotan's resignation of his will to power is the ultimate historical fallacy of Wagner's philosophy as expressed in *The Ring*. The cinema's appropriation of Wagner's music thus admonishes him for his belief that those in power would or could come to a moment of realization not unlike Wotan's. But in so doing, it will be shown, the cinema continues a process that Wagner himself began in *The Ring* when he effectively criticized his own stated political philosophy by abandoning one of its central themes: that there was a "golden age" in human history when society was organized through love and spontaneous freedom resulted. In *The Ring*, as musicologist Deryck Cooke has shown, Wagner abandoned this naïve notion of a "golden age": "Wagner the artist, with sure intuition, let drop that invalid part of the theory of Wagner the political thinker" (*I Saw the World End* 258). The cinema further lets drop Wagner's idea that history could be set aright by a wholesale resignation of power on the part of those who wield it. Thus the cinema's Wagner has grown more cynical as his music bears continued witness to the ongoing disaster called history.

A Parapraxis in Recent Film Music Criticism; Or, “Wagner Lends Itself to Helicopters”

“Ride of the Valkyries” in *Apocalypse Now* – the overwhelming force of a helicopter assault on defenseless villagers and a few intrepid Vietcong with an operatic accompaniment played on loudspeakers in the helicopters to terrify the Vietnamese and inspire the US soldiers: it is perhaps the most famous use of Wagner’s music in the modern cinema and certainly one of the most familiar examples of preexisting classical music in cinema for post-World War II American audiences. Indeed, thanks in no small part to *Apocalypse*, the music from the Prelude to Act III of *The Valkyrie* has more generally become what cognitive scientist Richard Dawkins would call a meme, the cultural analogue of a gene, instantly recognized by millions if not billions of people.

In order to see such a familiar cultural phenomenon – and the nearly as familiar topic of the influence of Wagner on the cinema and film music – in a fresh light, one could do worse than begin in a psychoanalytic vein with a discussion of an error that has taken root in the practice of film criticism and history concerning this famous scene. For given “Ride of the Valkyries” long history in film and television prior to *Apocalypse Now* it was practically inevitable that an error of interpretation would have taken hold in our memory of this disturbing episode, like the Freudian notion of a “screen memory” that hides or obscures a traumatic truth. The error in question concerns Francis Ford Coppola’s intention in using Wagner in this scene. In Mervyn Cooke’s 2007 *A History of Film Music* and Matthew Wilson Smith’s article “American Valkyries: Richard Wagner, D.W. Griffith, and the Birth of Classical Cinema,” which appeared in *Modernism/modernity* in April 2008 and follows from his 2007 book, *The Total Work of Art: from Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, both authors mistakenly infer that *Apocalypse Now* uses “Ride of the Valkyries” to allude to and criticize D.W. Griffith’s epic silent film about Reconstruction,

The Birth of a Nation, and its similarly disturbing scene where members of the Ku Klux Klan ride to the rescue to the sound of “Ride of the Valkyries.”⁴

Smith concludes that this supposed allusion is satirical in nature based on a number of coincidences between the corresponding points in the two films beyond their shared use of Wagner’s music: “Throughout the...sequence, Coppola plants clues – the horse-head ‘cavalry’ emblem on the nose of the copters; the similar names of the charging officers (Colonel Cameron, Colonel Kilgore); the racist invective of Colonel Kilgore (‘Yeah, I use Wagner – scares the hell out of the slopes!’) – to make his satire of *Birth* explicit” (221). Cooke’s *A History of Film Music* does not go so far as to claim that Coppola is satirizing *Birth*, but he does assume that the sequence is best understood by those who recognize its allusion to the landmark work of silent cinema. Only then can one perceive Coppola’s sequence’s implicit criticism of not only the Ku Klux Klan but also Nazism:

A striking application of Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries,” with a clear reference to its ultra-right-wing associations in Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, came in the seminal Vietnam war movie *Apocalypse Now*...Blared diegetically from a tape recorder in a Bell

⁴ This pattern does not of course hold universally, but one does see something of a family resemblance to it in other recent critical interpretations of this scene. One could mention, as a related but more general argument, Marc Weiner’s recent essay, “Hollywood’s German Fantasy,” which takes this scene’s use of Wagner as representative of a larger pattern of allusions by Hollywood to Nazism. “Wagner can be understood as...one component of a plethora of consistent references to a repertoire of associations attending the presentation of Hitler and National Socialism” (205-206). For Weiner, Wagner’s association with Nazism is so deeply ingrained by now that it is practically invisible; the “connection may have become so ubiquitous that it is no longer even apparent” (206). Thus directors are alluding to Nazism whether they know it or not and audiences are subjected to it whether they know it or not as well. But of course, Wagner himself never alluded to Nazism. Thankfully, noted musicologist and literary critic Richard Kramer’s reading of the helicopter assault moves in the right direction. While his tone leans towards censorious, Kramer nevertheless scores a significant point for noting that the use of “Ride” in *Apocalypse Now* is at the very least more of a reference to Wagner than Griffith, Hitler, etc.

The effect is not simply – not primarily – conceptual. The armored choppers seem to look and move differently than they would otherwise, to be both more terrifying and more grotesque. The music will convey this effect whether it and its lore are recognized or not; but these things are also part of the story...The full force of the allusion remains esoteric for those who don’t know the *Ring* cycle or the implications of associating Wagner with a racially charged triumphalism. (quoted in Weiner 205).

Huey helicopter leading the US airborne attack on a Vietnamese village (the commander [Robert Duvall as Kilgore] shouts “Put on the psy-ops. Make it loud... Shall we dance?”), the Wagnerian gesture carried uncomfortable overtones of both the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi atrocities: the first shots fired coincide with a glowing major chord in the music. (427)

Cooke’s analysis may lack Smith’s satirical claim, but it out-does Smith in the sense that it reads the scene as referring not only to the Ku Klux Klan but to the Nazis and the Holocaust as well.

But when one investigates recent statements by the film’s creators, one finds that neither director Francis Ford Coppola nor screenplay author John Milius have referred to *Birth of a Nation* as a kind of negative inspiration for the idea of including Wagner in this scene. Indeed, for the sake of clarifying the issue, one should first of all correct the assumption explicit in Smith’s reading and implicit in Cooke that the Wagnerian helicopter idea was Coppola’s. In fact, it was John Milius’ and occurs in his screenplay. In a recent conversation between the two, recorded for the release of the *Apocalypse Now: Full Disclosure*, the DVD set of both versions of the film and the documentary about the making of the film, Coppola repeatedly emphasizes it was Milius’ idea to use Wagner during the helicopter assault.

Coppola: Early on you had the extraordinary invention of the idea of helicopter attack playing the psy-ops music, the Wagner which is of course your creation. Everyone always says to me, “Oh, that was great what you did.” And I say, “I didn’t do it. That was in the script.”

Milius: Well when you listen to his music and I loved Wagner, it just lends itself to helicopters for some reason [laughing].

Coppola: How did you come up with that? Because that was an early idea wasn’t it?

Milius: Yeah, when I wrote the script the two things that I thought about all the time were Wagner and The Doors because I wrote the script entirely to Wagner and The Doors.

(Apocalypse Now: Full Disclosure Bonus Disc 15:00)

Milius' comments indicate that far from being meant as an ironic rebuke of *Birth*'s glorification of the Ku Klux Klan, the idea of "helicopter Wagner" was born out of a genuine enthusiasm for his music and presumably for the martial character of "Ride of the Valkyries" in particular. This renders the allusion to *Birth* a matter of coincidence rather than intention on Milius' part. Not only is there no mention of *Birth* in Milius' explanation, but Milius is definitely not a stereotypical Hollywood liberal, let alone the kind of filmmaker who might be tempted to enact such ironies over the heads of audiences. On the contrary, Milius (who reportedly inspired John Goodman's memorable character of Walter Sobchak in *The Big Lebowski*) is one of the most significant culturally conservative figures in the US film industry. With writing credits for Dirty Harry's most famous lines and direction work on, among others, the kitsch 1980s anti-communist propaganda film, *Red Dawn*, it should come as no surprise that he sits on the board of The National Rifle Association. Given this context, the likelihood that Milius would have set out to criticize race relations in a film from 65 years earlier by using Wagner during a helicopter assault is an unwarranted conjecture rather than a fact.

As he continues his explanation of where the idea for the Wagner came from, Milius' sincere and decidedly uncritical enthusiasm for US military history and culture comes to the surface:

Coppola: This led to this extraordinary helicopter Wagner...when you wrote that you must have felt like, "God, what have I done? How do you do [i.e. film] this?"

Milius: Oh yeah, that whole scene...I thought the Wagner worked. I knew that would probably work. And I knew that they did have psy-ops where they did, you know, put out speakers and play things...

Coppola: But they didn't play Wagner.

Milius: They didn't play Wagner; they played rock n' roll and stuff like that. But I really thought the Wagner would work. I thought that it would be, you know, something that fit with helicopters and a helicopter assault. And it worked so well that you can't do a helicopter assault anywhere in the world today without using Wagner.

Coppola: [laughing] That's true.

Milius: During Desert Storm, when the 101st landed behind the Iraqi lines, they had the helicopters flying over with the Wagner before the other helicopters came, so that everyone could hear the Wagner and run away from "Ride of the Valkyries." And the same thing in 2003 when they invaded, every time the Apaches would go ahead they would put on the Wagner. (17:00)

Among other things, Milius comments contain a nice illustration of the way art not only imitates life but can also directly influence it, something perhaps particularly true in the case of cinematic art.⁵ Milius' use of Wagner had no precedent in psy-ops, and yet on account of its appearance in the film it became the precedent for future psy-ops. Indeed, these future instances seem to especially please Milius, who was deemed ineligible for service during the Vietnam War due to asthma (*Full Disclosure* 5:00). Unable to fight himself, Milius clearly takes pride in having had

⁵ Milius, however, slightly exaggerates his invention's presence in actual combat missions. Reports out of Baghdad in June of 2003 describe soldiers watching the Wagner helicopter scene from *Apocalypse* – in a manner similar to that depicted in the film *Jarhead* – before going on raids. As reported in the *New York Daily News*: "Psyched up by the blaring Wagnerian 'Ride of the Valkyries' of *Apocalypse Now* fame, hundreds of American soldiers raided the homes of suspected Iraqi guerrillas yesterday in the western city of Ramadi. Troops with the 124th Infantry Regiment crashed their vehicles through metal gates in the city 60 miles west of Baghdad and rounded up Iraqi men at gunpoint, scribbling codes on their skin with marker pens as women howled in anguish" ("Valkyries' Swoop in Iraq" 23 June 2003).

his “invention” become part of the culture of battle for the US military. By contrast, the instance of Wagner’s role in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is singled out by Smith for admonishment, whereas for Milius it is a badge of honor (Smith 221). Meanwhile, the use of music in psy-ops, especially as part of the so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques of the “War on Terror,” is an ongoing phenomenon in other areas of military life as well, although in such cases heavy metal and children’s songs are preferred to nineteenth century classical music (*BBC*, “Sesame Street Breaks Iraqi POWs” *Washington Post*, “FBI Agents Allege Abuse at Guantanamo Bay”).

In the broader literary historical perspective, the connection between Wagnerian aesthetics and modern warfare has a history prior to Milius’ inspiration as a young screenwriter. As Matthew Wilson Smith points out, Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* contains a similar insight to Milius’ anachronistic point that “Wagner just lends itself to helicopters for some reason.”

Early in Proust’s *Le temps retrouvé*, we are given a conversation with Robert, Marquis de Saint-Loup, in which he describes a German zeppelin raid he had witnessed on a Paris rooftop the previous evening. He speaks of the ensuing battle “as he would formerly have spoken of some spectacle of great aesthetic beauty.” The air raid sirens are “Wagnerian,” the whole performance a gorgeous “show” of “constellations,” a magnificent “‘apocalypse’ in the sky.” “He seemed to take pleasure in this comparison of aviators to Valkyries,” observes the narrator, “and explained it, moreover, with purely musical reasoning. ‘By Jove, the music of the sirens certainly was like “Ride of the Valkyries.’” (239)

Smith’s point in presenting this moment from Proust is to contrast its “knowing wink” with the melodramatic sincerity of D.W. Griffith’s version of “Ride,” while also drawing attention to the

fact that both examples date from 1915. But despite the historical congruence of their inception, the difference between the sensibilities of Proust and Griffith is also and primarily, I would argue, a matter of their historical imagination. Despite *Birth*'s oft-mentioned technical and formal innovations, Griffith's Wagner, on the one hand, paired as it is with riders on horseback, is a thoroughly nineteenth-century affair, dated by its very congruity with the historical period of the film's events no less than by the fact that Wagner also imagined horses for his Valkyries. Proust's Wagner, on the other hand, is so "enjoyable," as Smith puts it, partly because Saint-Loup revels in the anachronism of his insight. But the irony of the anachronism of Proust's and/or Milius' Wagner is not therefore primarily critical of Griffith. Instead, it amplifies the historicity of Wagner's achievement. Before he had written most of his greatest operas, when he was theorizing such concepts as Music Drama and Gesamtkunstwerk in exile from Dresden after 1848, Wagner often referred to his coming projects – especially *The Ring* tetralogy, but also *Tristan and Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal* – as "art-works of the future." What is clear from Milius's and Proust's interpretations of his music is that this was both more accurate than Wagner could have ever known and in some sense a misnomer. In their reading, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" is, more precisely, the soundtrack for the warfare of the future written in the obscure prophetic language of musical sound. The insight of Proust in the early twentieth century was thus in a sense made available to a more general public by Milius' example. Indeed, it was the cinematic example that had the historical effect of influencing actual military operations culture. Meanwhile, the association of helicopters with the presence of Wagner on film soundtracks and diegetically within films is one of the more persistent patterns in Wagner's cinematic profile.

Although the story is perhaps apocryphal, one could also mention that at least one authority on German classical music, the great Austrian conductor Herbert von Karajan, appreciated the historical insight of Wagner's anachronistic role in *Apocalypse*. Coppola claims to have received a letter from him specifically praising the Wagner helicopter assault.

Coppola: I got a letter from the great director [sic] von Karajan, who I think did the version we used, but he was so blown away by the Wagner attack that he wanted to meet me and discuss other ways that you could use music with film.

Milius: Really?

Coppola: I wish I still had that letter, but he was very impressed with it. (19:00)

It seems the satirical reference to *Birth* was lost on von Karajan as well. He too shared Milius and Coppola's sincere enthusiasm for the anachronistic pairing of Wagner and contemporary air power's "Death from Above." Milius' sincere intentional meaning regarding Wagner in *Apocalypse Now* is thus "too sophisticated for the sophisticated." Both Cooke and Smith commit the error of "over-interpretation," mistaking their own political sympathies and their consequent associations for those of the author. The true irony of the situation is finally that the very soldiers in Iraq today, whom Smith suggests do not get the joke about *Apocalypse*'s Wagner and its reference to *Birth*, arguably have a more accurate understanding of the film than the academic film theorist in search of such ironic allusions.⁶ This makes the film's political message more ambiguous but also more complex and robust. The film criticizes the war effort by representing it as absurd and adrift, but – in true Hollywood fashion – it also celebrates and glorifies war as an

⁶ To put it in the language of the internet, Smith and Cooke's interpretative assumption does not heed the main corollary of "Poe's Law." Named for ChristianForums.com message board participant, Nathan Poe, Poe's law states: "Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humour, it is impossible to create a parody of fundamentalism that someone won't mistake for the real thing" (*Telegraph*, "Internet Laws"). The corollary of this law is analogous to the mistake of Smith and Cooke: "A corollary of Poe's law is the reverse phenomenon: legitimate fundamentalist beliefs being mistaken for a parody of that belief" (*Wikipedia*, "Poe's Law").

adventure, and at a deeper level a spiritual journey to the dark side of the soul. Associating the Far East with such a journey is of course hardly a politically sensitive decision.

The ambivalence of the film's politics can be summed up in its very resemblance to the war effort itself as an illustration of the colonial and neocolonial projects. As Coppola famously put it at a press conference at the Cannes Film Festival, "My film is not about Vietnam. My film is Vietnam." These famous lines should be taken as more than a cheap publicity slogan and with considerable ambiguity. Like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, on which the film is based, the politics of the film are also problematic from the point of view of the cultural studies academic establishment. If this were untrue, the film would have faded from cultural memory by now.

The Concept of Exaptation as a Tool for Understanding One of Wagner's Main Cinematic Vicissitudes

So if the use of "Ride of the Valkyries" in *Apocalypse Now* is not a satirical or otherwise critical allusion to *The Birth of a Nation*, how does it nevertheless relate to *Birth* at a level deeper than the category of intentionality can take us? To return to the conceptual field of social or evolutionary psychology, in a sense what "Ride" amounts to in *Apocalypse Now* is a true adaptation of Griffith's deployment of it, a moment in the historical evolution of this meme. More precisely *Apocalypse*'s "Ride" amounts to what Stephen Jay Gould would have called an "exaptation" of Griffith's use of "Ride," with the latter being representative, more generally, of the use of music to stir the emotions of the cinema-going public. In *Apocalypse*, this initial function of the music is "exapted" for the more utilitarian though no less emotionally manipulative purpose of simultaneously frightening the enemy and inspiring the soldier. Gould helped introduced the notion of exaptation to the non-scientific community – and waged a long

campaign in its favor in the so-called “Darwin Wars” of the 1980s – as a corrective to what he thought was an over-reliance on an under-theorized conception of adaptation by natural selection in contemporary Darwinian thought. For Gould, adaptation via natural selection is a powerful engine of evolutionary change but it is not evolution’s only mechanism. Exaptation comes in two forms,

- (1) A character, previously shaped by natural selection for a particular function (an adaptation), is co-opted for a new use—cooptation. (2) A character whose origin cannot be ascribed to the direct action of natural selection (a nonadaptation), is coopted for a current use. (Gould & Vrba, “Exaptation – A Missing Term in the Science of Form” 5)

The second sense above points to the significant role for what Gould elsewhere calls *sequelae*, secondary consequences, or “side effects” in common parlance, of a primary adaptive change that eventually acquire a purpose but do not have one originally. The first sense, however, that of cooptation – in which a trait with one function takes on a new purpose like birds evolving feathers for warmth that then help with flight – is more relevant to a discussion of the relationship and the differences between Griffith’s and Milius/Coppola’s versions of “Ride of the Valkyries.”

First, consider the original adaptation and Wagner’s role. The case of *The Birth of a Nation* can indeed be taken as emblematic of a significant and, as Matthew Wilson Smith and others have argued, conscious “adaptation” in the history of cinematic art: the transition from what film historian Tom Gunning has called the “cinema of attractions” (prior to 1907) to the “cinema of narrative integration” (after 1913).

In many ways closer to the performance practices of circuses, exhibitions, lectures, and vaudeville than the subsequent cinema, the “cinema of attractions” emphasized

heterogeneous performance, audience agency, and explicit demands for spectatorial attention...The emergent “cinema of narrative integration,” by contrast, placed greater emphasis on suspense, depth of character, moral judgment, and unit of performance, and it sought to create an audience that would be [in Gunning’s words] “absorbed in a coherent fictional world, attentive to character cues and immersed in following a story.” (Smith 226-227)

It should be easy enough to surmise the role assigned to the music and the larger aesthetic ambitions of the real and imagined figure of Wagner in such a transition. Wagner’s music or music of similar scope and seriousness was to aid in the shift towards a more elevated (and more lucrative) form of filmmaking by lending coherence to narrative lines through the use of recurring musical ideas or leitmotifs. Although to a significant extent he repeats the scholarship of the opening chapter of Carol Flinn’s *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* without acknowledging Flinn’s work, Smith’s contribution to Gunning’s line of thought is that he is able to show how journalists during this period, especially the critics Louis Reeves Harrison and Clarence E. Sinn, a practicing film accompanist, through their regular articles in *Motion Picture World*, consistently invoked Wagner as a model for the evolution of a new artistically more unified cinema.

Indeed, the cinema of narrative integration needed “unity” above all and musical accompaniment could be a key factor in such a transformation.

Sinn and Harrison remind us that an important aspect of the transformation from a cinema of attractions to a cinema of narration was a fundamental change in the musical accompaniment of film. The cinema of attractions called for...accompaniment that was

frequently improvised, often to films that were being viewed for the first time by the accompanists themselves. (Smith 227)

In this early account, the “attractions” style – which had its roots in working-class musical halls and vaudeville – is criticized for the disconnected and frequently arbitrary relationship between music and moving images. By contrast, the integrative approach to musical accompaniment invoked Wagner so often in part because of the particular suitability, it was deemed, of his leitmotif technique for narrative integrity and development. This technique would take music’s role past that of a calling card for each character, and would be accompanied by a whole series of changes in the way both practitioners and audiences viewed the cinema. Thus, while they advocated a new role for music and musicians, where musicians at least received the “opportunity to study the pictures beforehand,” cinema reformers writing for *Motion Picture World* also “championed... screenwriting [and original] film-music composition...and advocated mass aesthetic and moral improvement through film” (228).

In this context, *The Birth of Nation* is not only an instance of this new approach to music in the cinema of narrative integration, but also exemplary of its larger ideological and financial ambitions as well. Ideologically, it was intended to promote political unity among white audiences at the expense of African-Americans, and to present its specious version of history in a powerful medium for a mass audience (“writing history with lightning” as Woodrow Wilson is supposed to have said upon seeing the film in a private screening with Griffith at the White House). It was also meant to establish the American film industry alongside Europe’s various national cinemas as capable of creating films with high production value on serious subjects (through the use, for example, of live orchestra accompaniments, expensive theatrical venues, ticket prices comparable to Broadway shows, and other marketing tactics used previously by

major European film distributors on American audiences) (Lenning, “Myth and Fact: The Reception of ‘The Birth of a Nation’” 121-122).

The scene in which “Ride of the Valkyries” accompanies the Klan on its ride to the rescue is representative of all these intentions, including the most outrageous aspects of racial hatred and political mythology that were the results of the film’s “noble” intentions. Again, according to Smith, by implication it was the use of “Ride” that sealed the deal – that drove home the power of this rescue sequence to the audience’s emotions. At the film’s first run in New York, for example, Stephen Bush, reporting for *Motion Picture World*, described the “Ride of the Klan” sequence and its effect on the audience effusively: “When these ‘crusaders of the South’ are seen mounted on superb horses, dashing furiously through field and forest and river to rescue innocent maidens from brutal assault or to punish ‘wicked Africans,’ the audience never fails to respond, but applauds while the spectacle lasts” (237). Although in this and other anecdotal testimony the mention of Wagner does not occur, one can safely assume with Smith that the effect of his music was not lost on such frenzied audiences.

Within this context, to put it succinctly, *Apocalypse Now* “exapts” this original adaptive function of Wagner’s music in the establishment of the cinema’s narrative integrity. When “Ride of the Valkyries” enters the frame of the film its original purpose in the movie theater – to unify a film aesthetically and inspire emotions in the audience – has a new more practical purpose in the field of combat: to scare and confuse villagers and prepare and inspire soldiers for combat. In parallel with this evolution in the purpose of this Wagnerian quotation in the cinema, *Apocalypse* also parallels *Birth*, not satirically, but at a historical level of redefining or “adapting” a certain dubious form of nationalism. In both films a nation is implicitly a community unified by its opposition to a falsely characterized common enemy, and each film is a

kind of sign of the historical times in its version of this nationalism.⁷ *Birth* imagines an ethnically fixed “Aryan” America fighting an enemy within. *Apocalypse* presumes a multicultural American army fighting a similar enemy abroad. The adaptation of this nationalism in the Cold War era signals a broadening of the sense of the threat that was used to maintain American patriotism and also a broadening of the category “American” to include the previous internal threat from Griffith’s film, *African-Americans*.⁸ Moreover, this parallel speaks to the “solidarity” between a film like *Birth* and the Vietnam War film genre as a whole. In this sense, the Vietnamese and in particular the Vietcong are a kind of re-imagined and historically more modern version of the caricatured freed slaves terrorizing white communities in *Birth*. In the case of *Birth*, the film exploited the old fear that slaves would seek revenge for the injustice of their bondage upon gaining their freedom, casting an imaginary realization of this fear in a misleadingly historical mold. In the case of Vietnam, “the yellow peril” was an extrinsic version of the same threat to the “American way of life.” Indeed, insofar as they rarely ever present the conflict from the other side’s point of view, *Apocalypse Now* and practically all Vietnam War films rely on a racially-charged stereotypical representation of the average Vietnamese peasant or fighter, just as *Birth* caricatured African-Americans.⁹

⁷ I rely here on Karl Deutsch’s retort to Ernst Renan’s famous definition of a nation. For Renan, “A nation is a great solidarity created by the sentiment of the sacrifices which have been made and those which one is disposed to make in the future.” In a definition that holds up better historically, Karl Deutsch replied, “A nation is a group of people united by a mistaken view about their past and a hatred of their neighbors” (quoted in MacMillan, *Dangerous Games* 81-82).

⁸ But as Martin Luther King pointed out in his condemnation of the Vietnam War, the tragic irony of this was that Blacks fought to guarantee “freedoms” half a world away that they themselves did not enjoy at home: “We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago” (King, “Beyond Vietnam”).

⁹ One important exception to the nationalist navel-gazing aspect of Vietnam War films is Peter Davis’ documentary *Hearts and Minds*, which does include the voices and views of a wide cross-section of Vietnamese society.

The arrogant implication of the use of “Ride” in both cases is that it equates the Clansmen in *Birth* and the Air Cavalier in *Apocalypse* with the gods rather than their human counterparts on the battlefield. The Valkyries, according to both traditional interpretation and Wagner’s *Ring*, did not so much participate in battle as they administered it from a safe distance, not unlike the safe distance enjoyed by a spectator viewing a film.¹⁰ In *The Ring* in particular, they are responsible for bringing the bravest of the fallen to Valhalla to await the battle at the end of the world, at which time Wotan would need their help in defeating his rival Alberich. In this way, Griffith equated the Clansmen with a race of gods not so much engaged in a battle with equals as sweeping into disperse them without the possibility of being harmed themselves. The same thing can be said of the Valkyries of *Apocalypse Now*, only the extent of their invincibility is located in one character in particular, Robert Duvall as Colonel Kilgore, and is explicitly mentioned in the voiceover narration of Captain Willard (Martin Sheen). “He had a weird light around him. You knew he would come out of this without a scratch.” More memorably, Duvall’s Kilgore displays his invincibility by appearing indifferent, even oblivious, to the artillery shells exploding around him and in his willingness to enter upon a major combat operation for nothing more than the quality of the surfing at “Charlie’s Point.” Indeed, John Milius has long referred to Kilgore as a mythical figure analogous to the Cyclops from *The Odyssey* and has likened his broader intentions in crafting his screenplay to synthesizing elements from famous episodes in *The Odyssey* with *Heart of Darkness*, with the Sirens represented as Playboy Bunnies and Willard of course as a modern-day antiheroic Odysseus suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (see interviews in *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse*).

¹⁰ The old-Norse *valkyrja* means “chooser of the slain” (D. Cooke, *I Saw the World End* 317).

Apocalypse Now as a Brief Introduction to the Subversive Core of Wagner's Ring

However, this parallel equation of Teutonic gods with the modern American military, on the one hand, and nineteenth century paramilitary white supremacists, on the other, also brings one to what is perhaps the most significant point of contrast between *Birth* and *Apocalypse*. Where *Birth* openly celebrates its Valkyries, *Apocalypse* both celebrates them and renders them absurd, in what was on Coppola's part a conscious nod to surrealist aesthetics. Thus although there is no satire of D.W. Griffith, there is certainly dark humor if not satire in the character of Colonel Kilgore, who is willing to attack a Vietcong stronghold because of the optimal surfing conditions and who loves the smell of napalm in the morning, a parody perhaps of some of the more colorful commanders during the war, or at least Milius' idea of them. In this way, as Michael Wood remarked in the most astute contemporary review of the film, with Kilgore and his men "Coppola...pictured...the casual everyday lunacy of the war in Vietnam" ("Bangs and Whimpers"). Wood drew a contrast between Kilgore and Kurtz in this light and concluded, astutely, that the ending of the film doesn't work in part because the film's "heart of darkness" occurs already in the encounter with Kilgore. "Coppola...cannot discover the promised 'heart of darkness' in the murk of his conclusion, because he stumbled across it much earlier...on a bright, noisy beach strewn with soldiers and helicopters, with sheets of flame lighting up the background, as a plausible imitation of napalm devoured the jungle. He went on looking – writing, directing, editing – for the horror he had already found" ("Bangs and Whimpers").

The film's witness to the lunacy of Kilgore is the stupefied Willard, who is explicitly skeptical about Kilgore's methods. And the contrast between the two of them is worth dwelling on as an overdue supplement to Wood's admirable comparison of Kilgore to Marlon Brando's Kurtz. To disavow or forget the idea that he is far from home, like the commanding officers that

present Willard with his assignment earlier in the film, Kilgore is trying to recreate his California lifestyle in Vietnam – complete with campfires, barbeques on the beach, sing-a-longs, and of course surfing. In stark contrast to Kilgore and his grotesque mixture of gun-ho machismo and laid-back cool, Willard is an observant wallflower. But more importantly, he has been home already and voluntarily returned. Or more precisely, he has returned to Vietnam because he found it impossible to go home again. His marriage disintegrated; he could not forget what he had seen and done. He was, as Milius has observed, “a poster child for posttraumatic stress disorder” (*Full Disclosure* 12:00). The film vividly captures Willard’s mental state in its opening scene, with Willard’s flashbacks of combat superimposed over his hotel room’s ceiling fan and scored to The Doors’ “The End.” And it is Willard’s eyes through which one sees Kilgore and his men marauding the jungle on a seemingly aimless series of missions. But this is not to say that Willard is more or less “sane” than they are, only that he seems to be more honest with himself about what he is doing in Vietnam and what has become of him as a result of participating in the war. Going into the “Heart of Darkness” on a veritable suicide mission, Willard has accepted not going back and he thinks that Kilgore and his men still think it is possible to return home. Whether they will return relatively unscathed physically and psychology is an unanswered question of the film and another sign of its deep ambivalence concerning the war.

The gap separating Willard from Kilgore is at its clearest after Kilgore makes his famous “I love the smell of napalm in the morning” speech that ends with the matter-of-fact non sequitur, “someday this war is going to end.” As he rises and walks off out of the frame, the camera lingers and a dumbfounded Willard becomes its new object of interest. Thus, where Kilgore’s reflections on his own actions end, Willard’s continue and he is rightly unable to make

sense of Kilgore's deeds. It is as though Kilgore is not really fighting a war, but only using the military weaponry in pursuit of his private ends, carrying out orders as necessary but not acting in a manner befitting an officer or that can be publicly acknowledged by his superiors. Or at least this is an amplified version of Willard's view of him. And indeed it is Willard's view that effectively undermines the presentation of Kilgore's Wagner-accompanied helicopter assault on "Charlie's Point" as a gun-ho piece of military propaganda. This may seem to contradict the earlier point that the use of Wagner here is not satirical of *Birth*. However, what is being argued now is that the critical perspective upon the Wagnerian helicopter assault is intrinsic to the film, not located in its reference to another film.

But Willard's critical perspective is juxtaposed and to a great degree overtaken by the gun ho aspect of the scene, as is clear when one watches a film like Sam Mendes' *Jarhead*, where Marines are shown watching this scene and singing along to "Ride." As soon as the scene ends, their screening is interrupted by a call to deploy to Iraq for "Operation Desert Storm." They simply do not see the rest of the movie, which includes the greater part of the film's antiwar episodes. In his audio commentary for *Apocalypse Now: Full Disclosure*, Coppola himself expressed reluctance in allowing permission for this scene to be used in *Jarhead* and ultimately did so as a personal favor to the film's director Sam Mendes and its sound editor Walter Murch, who also worked on *Apocalypse*. "The moral dilemma" of *Apocalypse Now* generally, as Coppola calls it, exemplified by both the absurdity which Willard recognizes in Kilgore's "Ride of the Valkyries" and Kilgore's own performance of evil as California cool, thus resides in the way the film has its cake and eats it too. It both undermines the jingoist militarism with Willard's skepticism and overwhelmingly affirms it in Kilgore and company's show-stealing performance. As *Jarhead* and the American military's adoption of "Ride" as a kind of unofficial

soundtrack for helicopter assaults both show, the Kilgore perspective has effectively carried the day. As Kilgore might have put it, for the US military Wagner sounds like victory.

More complexly, this difference between Willard and Kilgore, in a larger view, opens onto the way in which *Apocalypse*'s complex use of "Ride" is, somewhat improbably, much closer to the original Wagnerian context than *The Birth of a Nation*'s version, in that Willard's predicament, in a general sense, resembles Brünnhilde's at the point in the story of *The Valkyrie* when the original version of "Ride of the Valkyries" takes place. While *Apocalypse*'s state of affairs is not analogous to the same point in *The Valkyrie*, Willard's moral quandary in the helicopter assault bears enough of a family resemblance to the predicament of Brünnhilde at the moment in the opera where "Ride" is heard in its full symphonic texture that juxtaposing the two allows for a useful estrangement of both the original opera's narrative development and the music from "Ride" as it appears there – an estranging juxtaposition in which the subversive side of *The Ring* becomes apparent.

As every student, fan, or acolyte of *The Ring* knows, the appearance of "Ride" in its full symphonic form known to millions occurs at the opening of Act III of *The Valkyrie*. This moment in the opera and the tetralogy marks a crucial turning point in *The Ring*. Act II ends after one of the Valkyries, Brünnhilde, has defied her father, Wotan, and come to the aid of Wotan's half-human son, the Volsung Siegmund, in a fatal duel with his brother-in-law Hunding, the villainous husband of Siegmund's sister Sieglinde. Wotan first orders Brünnhilde to protect Siegmund and guarantee his victory over Hunding. But, as was mentioned earlier, an argument with his wife Fricka then occurs in which she reminds him that Siegmund is an illegitimate child and that Wotan's first duty is to her, and she wants Hunding to win. After this spat, Brünnhilde is recalled by her father and given her new orders to take Siegmund to Valhalla after his death.

Not only does Brünnhilde become aware of the conflicted nature of her father's situation here, but she also learns that he seeks a truly free hero – one not bound to him and his laws and contracts – to regain the ring and the Rhinegold.

Yet despite her knowledge of the moral ambiguity of the situation, as a loyal daughter Brünnhilde is at first ready to carry out her father orders. It is only when she encounters Siegmund and Sieglinde and their passionate love for one another that she changes her mind and begins to act disobediently and freely. Thus when she tells Siegmund he must die and he decides that out of love he will kill himself and Sieglinde, his twin sister and lover, a deeply moved Brünnhilde decides to disobey her father's explicit orders in order to grant what she later explains to him to be his true wish: that a hero arrive who can rescue the ring and save the world. Brünnhilde is of course also aware that Sieglinde is pregnant with a son, the very hero that Wotan ultimately needs to secure the ring of the Nibelungen to prevent his archenemy Alberich from taking control of the world and instituting an autocratic regime without reason or love. Thus, when Hunding, Siegmund's enemy and Sieglinde's lawful husband, arrives to fight Siegmund, true to her word, Brünnhilde aides Siegmund, and it is only Wotan's personal intervention that destroys Siegmund's sword and kills him. As Act II ends, Brünnhilde informs Sieglinde of the child she is carrying, and they flee from Wotan's rage.

This brief and incomplete summary of Acts I and II allows one to properly understand the irony of "Ride of the Valkyries" in its original narrative context. As Act III opens and "Ride of the Valkyries" is finally heard in all its power, it is for both the first time in the opera and last time in the lives of the Valkyries as they have hitherto known them. Indeed, despite the sublimity of the instrumental music and the ensemble's singing, the other Valkyries appear to be engaged in nothing more than their usual ritual, regrouping after carrying out their duty of

bringing the bravest of the fallen to Valhalla. There is an unself-conscious naïve pride in their celebration of their work in song. After all, it is the work of their beloved father Wotan that they carry out. However, Brünnhilde's arrival and indeed her wholly new status amongst her sisters undermines the other Valkyries' musical glorification of their duty. She now knows that her father's orders are not always just, and that in her case to do justice to his true and best interests she has had to disobey him. She has gained knowledge, lost her innocence, and risked everything out of her own love for her father, in solidarity with the love of Siegfried's parents, and for a plan that may (and ultimately does) not work. The other Valkyries react ambivalently when she relates her actions to them. They are both shocked by her and afraid for her. They even try to protect her when Wotan arrives, but quickly disperse when faced with his wrath for the first time. One learns later in the tetralogy, in *The Twilight of the Gods*, that this moment marked the end not only of Brünnhilde's life as a Valkyrie but also the end of the other Valkyries' lives as they had hitherto known them. After Brünnhilde's act of disobedience they never again assemble to the glorious music of "Ride."

To put it somewhat speculatively, the morally ambivalent use of "Ride" in *Apocalypse Now* is in a sense an attempt at a historically more contemporary remake of this crucial moment in *The Ring*. The historical difference that *Apocalypse* marks is not simply the modern technology of warfare, as one could easily imagine a postmodern (film) production of *The Ring* in the manner of Stockhausen opera, with Valkyries riding in helicopters, Wotan as the commander of NATO forces, and Alberich hiding in his Bond-villain lair. Rather, the historical difference between *Apocalypse*'s "Ride" and Wagner's original would seem to be best characterized by the old pessimistic quip: "It's the same, but worse." *Apocalypse*'s "Ride" is a version of *The Ring*'s, but without the idea of love as a force undermining the will to power

embodied in the music of the Valkyries. In its place, Willard, who cannot love, can only stare in bewilderment at the modern Valkyries of Colonel Kilgore and his men. Indeed, this shows how Willard is not as extreme or as radical a figure as Brünnhilde. Through her love for her father and her regard for Siegmund and Sieglinde's love for each other, she realizes that being disobedient to Wotan's explicit orders and sacrificing of her immortality is the only way to fulfill her true duty. Willard is, on the contrary, still carrying out the explicit orders of the film's equivalent of Wotan, the commanders of the US military mission in Vietnam. He is not motivated by love in this regard, but by duty in the sense of something that one can hide behind, i.e. duty as an excuse for criminal or immoral behavior. Brünnhilde by contrast is not merely following orders, but carrying out what she believes her true duty to be in contradiction to her orders, a duty she has discovered in redemptive love. One could thus imagine a more Wagnerian version of *Apocalypse* in which out of deep sympathy with the Vietnamese people's suffering – or, à la Brecht and more radically, in solidarity with an undercover Vietcong operative brother and sister couple who love and honor their communist ideals in one another – Willard disobeys his orders and joins forces with the Vietcong to bring the war to a swifter conclusion by engaging in counter-intelligence on behalf of the North Vietnamese army. Indeed, the extent to which this counterfactual version of the film is impossible marks the historical difference between Wagner and Coppola in a negative way.

More to the point, Coppola has implicitly acknowledged the lack of love in *Apocalypse Now* and its relation to the film's openness to its eventual pro-war cooptation. During a discussion of the military's cooptation of the Wagner helicopter assault on the film's audio commentary track, he speculates that the only way to make a true antiwar film that cannot be co-

opted is to make one far from the field of combat about the decisions that lead to war, and the love that is destroyed as a result.

Recently I gave permission for the film *Jarhead* to use the sequence of “Ride of the Valkyries” from *Apocalypse Now* after a request from Walter Murch and the film’s director Sam Mendes...They would show the helicopter sequence of *Apocalypse Now* to get the young soldiers all stoked up to send them off to war and they asked the permission to show the sequence. And I said, “God,” I said, “*Apocalypse Now* was meant to be more than that and I would feel badly if it came off as kind of a film that’s used as ‘pornography for grunts,’ as the phrase in this book [*Jarhead*] is.” The director assured me that that’s not how it would come off and said he would show it to me and if I thought it was portraying *Apocalypse* on just this one note as just to stoke your worst instincts towards violence that he would do something about it. But, you know, I wonder if I’m really going to have the opportunity to...or should I even bother to try to moderate that. It’s clear that if you want to make a real anti-war film you have to be far far from the battlefield because if you show battle you are in a sense exciting people even though it’s horrible. People are drawn to watching violence in movies because it’s a vantage point where they can watch the violence for all the thrills of it and not be in danger and not be hurt and I guess that’s why it’s appealing. If you want to make a film that’s anti-war, it has to be about love and it can’t be near a battlefield. It has to be far from the battlefield where the real decisions are made as to whether there’s war or not. (1:12-1:15)

Here Coppola specifically implies that in addition to its celebrated Wagner-accompanied helicopter assault, the film’s lack of love generally, and perhaps Wagnerian redemptive love more particularly, was a factor in its eventual cooptation. The lesson is that, ironically, if

Coppola had allowed for the cliché of “the power of love” as Wagner had, he would arguably have made a more subversive film and one less open to the interpretation of pro-war audiences. This insight into the subversive side of love in *The Ring* dovetails with a broader point about the political philosophy of Wagner’s tetralogy and his operas more generally: their philosophy is more sophisticated than is often credited. Indeed, the next part of this chapter endeavors to demonstrate that the politically allegorical interpretation that dwells on the details of Wagner’s *Ring* reveals significant differences between the philosophies of “Wagner the Artist” and “Wagner the Philosopher.” This conclusion has implications for film music scholarship’s understanding of this fundamental composer and artist for the art of film scoring and the cinema more generally because film music scholarship and criticism has tended to refer to “Wagner the Philosopher” as authoritative instead of “Wagner the Artist” and the philosophy entailed in his music dramas. Finally, I will return to cinematic examples that intuitively grasp, further amplify, and constructively criticize the philosophy of Wagner’s art, particularly the anti-nostalgic sense of history entailed by *The Ring*, in order to amplify the following point. As *Apocalypse Now* could have learned from *The Ring* on the topic of love, so *The Ring* has essentially learned in its cooptation by *Apocalypse* and related films a basic historical truth about the century and a half since *The Ring* premiered: mankind will not resign its will to power as easily as Wagner imagined in the figure of Wotan. Thus the apocalypse predicted in Wagner’s *Ring* has been deferred as the historical storm called progress continues to blow global civilization away from paradise, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin.

Towards an Amplification of Bernard Shaw’s Reading of The Ring

Before either Milius or Proust were so inspired as to identify Wagner with the – from Wagner’s historical perspective – “futuristic” sights and especially the sounds associated with

modern warfare, in *The Perfect Wagnerite* in 1898, Bernard Shaw had written a sustained modernizing interpretation of *The Ring* that takes as its axiom the idea that Wagner's tetralogy is most intelligible when it is read as a dramatization of the antagonisms of modern political and economic life under the cloak of Teutonic mythic imagery. With his characteristic panache, Shaw lays out this fundamental insight in his "preliminary encouragements" to the reader:

First, *The Ring*, with all its gods and giants and dwarfs, its water-maidens and Valkyries, its wishing-cap, magic ring, enchanted sword, and miraculous treasure, is a drama of today, and not of a remote and fabulous antiquity. It could not have been written before the second half of the nineteenth century, because it deals with events which were only then consummating themselves. Unless the spectator recognizes in it an image of the life he is himself fighting his way through, it must needs appear to him a monstrous development of the Christmas pantomimes, spun out here and there into intolerable lengths of dull conversation by the principal baritone. ("The Perfect Wagnerite" 192)

For those familiar with Nietzsche's polemics against Wagner, this passage is striking for its unlikely correspondence with a point made by Nietzsche but from the opposite perspective of condemnation rather than appreciation. Of all his accusations against Wagner, the most sarcastically poignant was the idea that underneath the mythic substance of his work, Wagner was essentially writing contemporary dramas about the bourgeoisie.

But the content/substance of the Wagnerian texts! their mythic content! their eternal content!" – Question: how can we test this content, this eternal content? – The chemist replies: translate Wagner into reality, into the modern – let us be even crueler – into the bourgeois! What becomes of Wagner then? – Among ourselves, I have tried it. Nothing is more entertaining, nothing to be recommended more highly for walks, than retelling

Wagner in more youthful proportions: for example, Parsifal as a candidate for a theological degree, with secondary school education (the latter being indispensable for pure foolishness). What surprises one encounters in the process! Would you believe it? All of Wagner's heroines, without exception, as soon as they are stripped of their heroic skin, become indistinguishable from Madame Bovary! And conversely one understands that Flaubert could have translated his heroine into Scandinavian or Carthaginian terms and then offered her, mythologized, to Wagner as a libretto. (*The Case of Wagner* 175-176)

Shaw's reading views this same insight from a different angle, that of British "commonsense socialism." Whereas for Nietzsche, such a point is an unmasking of Wagner's operas' ostentation, for Shaw, the modernity and indeed the bourgeois character of *The Ring* is the tetralogy's great miracle, that underneath the mythology lies modern history's complex iteration of the grand class struggle. One hastens to add how the modern history of stage productions of *The Ring* has borne out Shaw's perspective much more than Nietzsche's. Today Patrice Chéreau's centenary production at Bayreuth, which sets *The Ring* in the industrial age of Shaw's era, is considered the standard bearer for contemporary performance, while the Metropolitan Opera's contemporaneous and more traditional staging was called "neo-Romantic" but seems more like pastiche or even kitsch after the cultural saturation of Teutonic imagery in contemporary media.

For Shaw, and indeed for Wagner to a great extent, *The Ring* allegorically recasts the class struggle in mythological terms. The Gods – Wotan, Fricka, Freia, etc. – are figures for traditional aristocratic and theocratic authority, and they are at war with the emergent class of industrial capitalism in the figure of Alberich above all, but also in Mime and later Hagen. The

hero Siegfried is a by-product of their struggle. In Shaw's reading he is "a born anarchist" destined to save the world (and based on Wagner's revolutionary comrade Mikhail Bakunin), but managing only to precipitate its collapse, a deeply ambiguous outcome. From Shaw's socialist perspective, the ending of *The Ring*, in which a socialist order is not brought into being, and the world ends instead, was unintelligible. Thus this section in Shaw's text is significantly subtitled "The Collapse of the Allegory." But of course, Wagner's ending is only a break with an optimistic socialist interpretation, in which history is on the side of the progressive cause. Shaw thus could not entertain the actual conflicting but ultimately synthesizable ideas that *The Ring* does in fact represent concerning the outcome of its class struggle element: on the one hand, the idea that such a struggle could end not in the birth of socialist society but – as Marx and Engels themselves put it – "in the common ruin of the contending classes"; and, on the other hand, the idea that the contending classes of aristocrats, theocrats, and capitalists could destroy themselves, and the proletariat would be left alone at the end of *The Twilight of the Gods*, having inherited what remains of the Earth after the death of the aristocrats and their plutocratic rivals (Žižek, "There Is No Sexual Relationship" 215-216).

The Class Struggle Allegory That Eluded Shaw's Class Struggle Allegory

Although it was left unfinished at the time of his death, musicologist Deryck Cooke's monograph on *The Ring, I Saw the World End*, includes the most substantial critique of Shaw's study of Wagner: at once sympathetic and perspicacious in taking Shaw to task. My reading of Shaw will in effect aim to finish the job of Cooke's unfinished text, which breaks off just after the end of its analysis of *The Valkyrie*. Before delivering his verdict, Cooke starts his analysis of Shaw by showing that in his letters in the early 1850s to his jailed revolutionary co-conspirator August Röckel, Wagner had indeed averred that the first intention of his *Ring* was to dramatize a

revolutionary criticism of the capitalist political economy of his day. In particular, Cooke points to Wagner's description of Wotan as "the sum of the intelligence of the present," Siegfried as "the man of the future whom we [meaning himself and Röckel above all] wish for...who must create himself by means of our annihilation," and most remarkably to the similarity between both Shaw's and Wagner's politicized descriptions of Nibelheim – where Alberich instructs Mime to create the all-powerful ring – as the modern industrial workshop (15). Shaw describes Nibelheim with acerbic humor: "This gloomy place need not be a mine: it might just as well be a match-factory, with yellow phosphorus, phossy jaw, a large dividend, and plenty of clergymen shareholders...or any other of the places where human life and welfare are daily sacrificed" (quoted in D. Cooke 15). Wagner makes the same point about the conditions of modern factories but without the satirical sting of Shaw: "Our modern factories offer us the miserable spectacle of the deepest degradation of man: perpetual soul- and body-destroying toil, without joy or love, often almost without aim" (quoted in D. Cooke 16). One can only admire Shaw's genius for elaborating such details all the more when one realizes that he based his reading not on a study of secondary documents such as letters, but on his intuition of the importance of Wagner's revolutionary activities during 1848 for his future artistic endeavors.¹¹

¹¹ Or as Shaw put it with infinitely greater aplomb:

In 1843 [Wagner] obtained the position of conductor of the Opera at Dresden...This was a first-rate permanent appointment in the service of the Saxon State, carrying an assured professional position and livelihood with it. In 1848, the year of the revolutions, the discontented middle class, unable to rouse the Church-and-State governments of the day from their bondage to custom, caste and law by appeals to morality or constitutional agitation for Liberal reforms, made common cause with the starving-wage working class, and resorted to armed rebellion, which reached Dresden in 1849. Had Wagner been the mere musical epicure and political mugwump that the term 'artist' seems to suggest to so many critics and amateurs – that is, a creature in their own lazy likeness – he need have taken no more part in the political struggles of his day than...Sterndale Bennett in the Chartist and Free Trade movements. What he did do was first to make a desperate appeal to the King to cast off his bonds and answer the need of the time by taking true kingship on himself and leading his people to the redress of their intolerable wrongs...and then, when the crash came, to take his side with the right and the poor against the rich and the wrong. When the insurrection was defeated...Wagner was of course utterly ruined, pecuniarily and socially...and his exile lasted twelve years. (Shaw, "The Perfect Wagnerite" 213-214)

In Cooke's reading, Shaw's interpretation begins to lose ground in its very honesty towards the inconsistency of its own socialist interpretation regarding many complexities of *The Ring* beyond the social-political reading. For Shaw, a perfectly consistent allegory would only have been "written by someone without dramatic faculty, in which case it is unreadable" (214). However, for Cooke, Shaw's reading ignores or trivializes too many important scenes and larger themes in the operas to be considered final. So although the political intention amplified by Shaw is admitted by Cooke to be the primary intention of Wagner, it was not his only intention according to Cooke. The others have to do with psychology and ultimately with metaphysics. They are, respectively, "redemptive love" and "renunciation of the will," with each embodied most forcefully by one character in particular: Brünnhilde in the former case and Wotan in the latter.

My addition to Cooke's criticism of Shaw can be formulated as a departure from Cooke's final verdict about Shaw's interpretation: "The result is that his [Shaw's] interpretation stands as an exaggeration of the social and political aspect of the work" (23). But from the perspective of Romantic opera as a historically situated genre, Shaw's political and social reading is in a sense not exaggerated enough. The irony of Shaw's interpretation is thus that he locates the "collapse of the allegory" in the very opera, *The Twilight of the Gods*, where contemporary audiences would have been most likely to have recognized it. Shaw expresses light-hearted contempt for *Twilight* from the very beginning of *The Perfect Wagnerite*, referring to it as an ordinary opera in comparison with the other members of the cycle, which are genuine "Music Dramas" allegorically embodying modern historical life. However, the Grand Romantic operas, with which Shaw here implicitly equates *Twilight* and as typified by the work of Meyerbeer and Bellini, two major influences on Wagner, were of course widely acknowledged to be, in

musicologist Charles Rosen's memorable phrase, "naïve and pleasing depictions of the class struggle" (*Romantic Generation* 601). Rosen points out how this pronounced theme of class struggle in Romantic opera signals an important shift in the history of opera that anticipates important political developments in modern Europe.

The change of serious opera from an aristocratic art that dealt largely with court intrigue and dynastic marriage, sometimes disguised as classical mythology, into a popular form that expressed the political ideals of republicanism and patriotism was a long development that started slowly in the last decades of the eighteenth century, before the French Revolution. (*RG* 600)

Rosen then goes on to summarize the underlying class struggle narrative of many representative operas in the Romantic tradition, and the variations of this narrative in important composers. The key to understanding the class dynamic in most of these stories is to remember that "in opera...religion is largely another name for politics" (*RG* 599).

The hero and heroine – rarely seen as tied to their class but characterized only as individuals or else as rising above narrow class interest – are caught between the immoral corruption of the aristocracy and the doctrinaire rigidity or the secret greed of the leaders of the proletariat. In *Le Prophète* by Meyerbeer, the local seigneur rapes a peasant girl, while the hero, who becomes the religious leader of a popular revolt, is coerced by his wicked Anabaptist henchman into denying his own mother publicly at his coronation; in the end, his love for his mother wins out and he redeems himself by blowing up the palace with himself and everyone else in it...

This naïve and pleasing depiction of the class struggle is sometimes varied, above all in an Italy still suffering from foreign occupation, by turning the vicious aristocrats

into a foreign army of occupation. The native revolutionary party, in this case, becomes more idealized, while generally remaining no less doctrinaire or bent on merciless revenge... the hero or heroine is still trapped between the two forces. *Norma*... is a fine example of the scheme, in its intimate combination of religion and politics: the captain of the occupying Roman army is corrupt and immoral (he is about to go off with another priestess after fathering Norma's two children), and Norma's father, the native high priest Oroveso, reluctantly applies Druid law in its full harshness by condemning his daughter to death... (RG 601)

Verdi's version of the scheme is the closest to Wagner's combining of aristocratic and theocratic power in the figure of Wotan:

For personal reasons, Verdi preferred a variation in which the corrupt aristocracy is replaced or complemented by an evil priesthood. *Aida* combines all these elements: the evil priests, the army of oppressors; the slaves with their unscrupulous leader whose intransigence seals the fate of his daughter; and the hero and heroine who stand outside their class, to betray it and themselves. (RG 601)

I have quoted Rosen's summaries of representative operas of the nineteenth century tradition at length in order to give not only a sense of the permutations of the basic class struggle dynamic of the genre and its relationship to larger historical changes, but also so that one may appreciate the degree to which Shaw, already given to an analysis of *The Ring* from the perspective of socio-economic and political class, missed the obvious connection between Wagner's *Ring* and the long tradition of depicting the exact kind of modern class struggle that Shaw perceived as uniquely attributable to the first three operas of *The Ring*.

Indeed, when one realizes how easily *The Twilight of the Gods* scans as another permutation and instance of the “naïve and pleasing depiction of the class struggle” outlined by Rosen, Shaw’s oversight becomes almost inexplicable. All the principle warring factions are there, and Wagner’s version of the scheme generally takes them to an extreme point. Thus throughout *The Ring*, the corrupt aristocrats and priests of the normal average depiction are transformed into dissolute and corrupt gods, especially in the figure of Wotan. *Twilight* presents the bosses of the proletariat, corrupted by dogma and/or greed in the general scheme, in the figure of Hagen, the son of Alberich, whose greedy desire for world domination apparently runs in his family as well as class. Indeed, in their time both Hagen and Alberich have been the manipulative leaders or masters of the proletariat. And of course, the hero and the heroine of *Twilight* are caught in between these plotting and scheming classes. Brünnhilde now married to Siegfried, whose mother she long ago delivered to safety, has of course risen above her narrow class interest by defying her father in the second opera of the cycle, and she has paid dearly for it with a long imprisonment, the loss of her immortality, and her forced marriage to whoever braves the fires surrounding her isolated mountain cell. Finally, Siegfried himself is of course the other kind of hero, not rising above his class but simply indifferent to it in his “free willing of necessity” as Shaw puts it. Above all, the unique twist that Wagner gives to the scheme resides in the very title of the final opera. The corrupt Gods have essentially fled the scene of their crimes by the beginning of the *Twilight*. Wotan, now resigned to his eventual defeat, waits in Valhalla for the world to end and has even provided fuel in the form of the wood from the dead “World Ash Tree” to insure that Valhalla will be destroyed. Thus when the world perishes at the end of the tetralogy, it is a conventional ending of the class struggle in the Romantic opera genre, already indicated in Rosen’s summary of *Le Prophète*, magnified to apocalyptic proportions.

That this was not only not the socialist outcome that Shaw desired in real-world political affairs, but also not even conceivable according to his sense of history is made abundantly clear by the article of faith he ended up substituting for Wagner's redemptive love: his teleological faith in the progress of life.

The only faith which any reasonable disciple can gain from *The Ring* is not in love, but in life itself as a tireless power which is continually driving onward and upward – not, please observe, being beckoned or drawn by *Das ewig Weibliche* or any other external sentimentality, but growing from within, by its own inexplicable energy, into ever higher and higher forms of organization, the strengths and the needs of which are continually superseding the institutions which were made to fit our former requirements. (“The Perfect Wagnerite” 249)

As this passage unfolds, the meaning of Shaw's notion of life becomes clear. It is not a matter of life in the abstract biological or mystical sense, but essentially political life under modern economic conditions. It is of course interesting to note that Shaw's sense of faith in the progress of life is noticeably absent not only from *The Ring's* outcome, but from the genre of the Romantic opera more generally, in which the struggle for freedom and justice, or as it is usually translated in the bourgeois idiom, the struggle to successfully form a happily married couple, is likely if not guaranteed to end in far-reaching catastrophe. Ultimately, the point that Romantic opera thus makes about love is that it is a destabilizing force for the unjust societies depicted in these operas. Lovers cross class, ethnic, and other social boundaries to find each other, and they do so at society's and their own peril.

Locating Wagner's Philosophy in His Operas

But there is a significant difference between the conflagration that ends *The Ring* and the catastrophes at the end of Romantic operas more generally. It is not just that the magnitude of the catastrophe is apocalyptic, rather than being a matter of state politics or interpersonal love-relations. Nor is the problem that, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, “Wagner [inflated] the defeat of the revolution [of 1848] and his betrayal of the revolutionary ideals into the end of the world itself” (*Why Is Wagner Worth Saving?*” xiii). The problem with the conflagration at the end of *The Ring* is that according to one level of the plot it should not have taken place because it contradicts the basic motivation for seeking to recover the ring in the first place. As Cooke has shown, it was already August Röckel, Wagner’s jailed revolutionary comrade, in his comments to Wagner upon finishing reading the first draft of the libretto, who identified what Cooke judges to be “the puzzle of *The Ring*.” “Why,” asked Röckel in 1853, “since the Rhinegold is restored to the Rhine, do the gods still perish” (D. Cooke 2)? At first it seems that Röckel was right to be confused on this point. It is mentioned at numerous points in the tetralogy that this was the ultimate solution to the dilemma of the dangerously powerful ring falling into the wrong hands. This point is even reiterated at the end of Act I of *The Twilight of the Gods*. While waiting for Siegfried to return to her mountaintop prison, Brünnhilde is paid a visit by her sister, Waltraute, who pleads that the ring – which Siegfried has given Brünnhilde as a token of their love – be returned to the Rhine along with the gold. Otherwise Wotan’s rule of law will never be secure. Brünnhilde refuses at this moment but ultimately relents and returns the ring and the gold to the Rhine, and yet the gods perish anyway. As Röckel asked, “Why?”

The answer, as Cooke notes, has to do with a crucial event retold in the prologue of *Twilight*. In this scene, three Norns, the equivalents of the Fates in Norse mythology, recount the moment when history began.

The first event, which happened long before the curtain rises on Scene 1 of *The Rhinegold*, was Wotan's drink from the Well of Wisdom, which enabled him to cut from the Tree of Life the spear with which he controls and rules the world. Before this event, there were no events, but only the unconscious world of nature, in which Erda slumbered, the Norns guarded the Well and the Tree, and the Rhinemaidens guarded the Gold; after that event, conscious life began. This is where the First Norn – the Norn with knowledge of the past – begins her history of the world at the opening of *The Twilight of the Gods*.

(D. Cooke 248)

Aside from containing one of *The Ring*'s more powerful symbols for modern, ecologically conscious audiences – the withered remains of the Tree of Life representing civilization's effects on nature - this crucial story is significant on a number of levels. First, it reveals that Wotan not Alberich is responsible for engineering the beginning of history – for, in short, hurtling his world towards catastrophe. Žižek draws a stark conclusion from this circumstance of Wotan's "original sin": "Wotan's choice was ethically worse than Alberich's: Alberich longed for love and only turned towards power after being brutally mocked and turned down by the Rhinemaidens, while Wotan turned towards power after fully enjoying the fruits of love and getting tired of them" ("Why Is Wagner Worth Saving?" xvii).

But the even more salient conclusion to be drawn from the fact of Wotan's "original sin" concerns the gap separating Wagner's philosophical outlook as stated in his writings and his philosophical outlook as it appears in his operas. Deryck Cooke draws attention to this gap and

sides decisively with “Wagner the Artist” against “Wagner the Philosopher.” Both Wagners postulate a philosophy: the latter explicitly, the former implicitly and in its most complete form in *The Ring*. Furthermore and above all, as Cooke shows, where Wagner the philosopher erred, Wagner the musical dramatist did not. The error in question concerns the naïve position, at least from today’s perspective, that Wagner adopted in his philosophical writings: that primitive societies were utopian and represent for us a lost “golden age.” For Cooke, the need, as stated in Wagner’s writings, for love and fellowship as a motivation (but not the only one) for the collectivizations that led to early societies is not a problem, “but [Wagner’s] postulation that [the need for love] also soon found satisfaction in free and happy societies is a piece of pure conjecture, which even in his own time was beginning to be thought unlikely, and today is regarded as beneath consideration” (257). Cooke goes on to depict the broader ideological context for this conjecture and its correction.

This whole aspect of Wagner’s thinking is a blatant example of “golden-age” romancing: it is based on an unthinking assumption of the naïve eighteenth-century conception of the “noble savage,” implying the original virtue of “natural man,” who had been corrupted by the evils of civilization. In Wagner’s post-Feuerbachian (and even perhaps Marxian) thinking, there was an unconscious, outdated residue of the simplistic idea of Rousseau: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” What primitive society was like, and how it first grouped itself into societies, and what those societies were like – these are questions which still await a full answer, and it may never be forthcoming; but the research of modern archaeology and anthropology, as well as the investigation of psychoanalysis into the primitive strata of the human mind, suggest that if the full answer is ever found it will be less simple and less beautiful than Wagner imagined. (257)

Cooke's description of Rousseau here is at best a caricature, and his dismissal thus proceeds too easily in this regard, but his mention of Freudian thought and its pessimism on the fundamental character of human nature is well-placed. Indeed as Cooke makes his way towards what Wagner the artist thought as opposed to the "golden-age romancing" of his philosophical counterpart, Cooke's invocation of Freud's social thought becomes even more incisive.

After his correction of Wagner's speculations on the importance of love and fellowship, Cooke goes on to argue that their ongoing role in society is without a doubt crucial and that one need only drop the "golden age" view of human history to validate Wagner's view. "However, if we dispense with this element [i.e. the image of 'noble savages' living in peace and harmony], the theory does not collapse but, on the contrary, stands up more firmly. The natural instinctive need for mutual love and fellowship, which Wagner postulated, must have been there in humanity from the beginning" (257). But, invoking Freud, Cooke quickly notes, this instinct is and was up against its opposite – "the aggressive instinct." "There would seem to be, as Freud maintained in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a perpetual battle between humanity's life- and love-instincts, on the one hand, and its instinct of aggression and self-destruction on the other" (257).

The point of mentioning Freud's dichotomous view of man's instincts and especially his emphasis on man's instinct for aggression – which is, in Freud's view, on the whole depreciated and "swept under the rug" in many people's spontaneous philosophies – becomes clear when Cooke returns to his discussion of *The Ring*. In *The Ring*, it is precisely the struggle between aggression – symbolized by the lust for power driving both Alberich and Wotan (although the latter is undoubtedly more conflicted) – and love – as represented by the various couples formed in defiance of the law throughout the tetralogy – that motivates the drama. Thus, returning to the

figure of Wotan and his founding crime of creating his spear from the Tree of Wisdom, Cooke points out that “Wagner the Artist” was a much wiser philosopher than “Wagner the Philosopher.”

Returning to Wotan...we find that Wagner the artist, with sure intuition, let drop that invalid part of the theory of Wagner the political thinker, and kept the remainder... [with the origin of Wotan’s spear] representing an allegory of man’s conscious will gaining control over fellow-man by building up an authoritarian state through a rigid system of laws. In the tetralogy, the question of how this actually happened in pre-history, and of what primitive humanity and its first societies were like, are ignored as the irrelevancies they are. Wagner simply confronts us with Wotan and his rune-laden (law-laden) spear, as a pure symbol of the existing immemorial authoritarian state-ruler. (258)

Having made this decisive point for the first time, Cooke is not one to shy away from the implications of the fact that there is no golden age in the one Wagner opera that was meant to represent the entire history of human life.¹²

Indeed, after this point is first made, Cooke goes on to reiterate and consolidate it in a number of thematic domains within *The Ring*: above all as regards the two subjects that seem opposed in the tetralogy – love and law. In each case, the accent on the non-existence of the “golden age” in the cosmology or ontology of the tetralogy acts as a corrective to a widely held misconception about these domains. In the domain of love, Slavoj Žižek, who is otherwise quite discerning of the significance of love for an interpretation of Wagner’s operas, succinctly

¹² But this should not lead one to rush, as so many critics do, to the opposite conclusion: that the dark view of life as an aggressive struggle is in effect a proto-Nazi statement by Wagner, as if Wotan were the ultimate proto-Fascist (D. Cooke 263-267).

articulates the mistaken view that the love Siegmund and Sieglinde have for one another, for example, harkens back to the “golden age.”

Wagner’s rejection of (the society of) exchange, which is the basis of his anti-Semitism, amounts to an attempt to regain a prelapsarian balance. Nowhere is this more obvious than in his sexual politics, which assert the incestuous link against the exogamic exchange of women: Sieglinde and Siegmund, the “good” incestuous couple, against Sieglinde and Hunding, the “bad” couple based on exchange; Brünnhilde and Siegfried against two further couples based on exchange (Brünnhilde and Gunther, Guttrune and Siegfried). (“There is No Sexual Relationship” 217)

Compare this to Cooke’s more detail-oriented analysis based on his insight into the non-existence of the “golden age” of primal man in the tetralogy. After citing Wagner on the primacy of love among mankind’s needs, Cooke returns to his familiar caveat and supplements it with the idea that, pace Žižek, love does not harken back to a prelapsarian past in *The Ring*.

Once again, what Wagner expressed theoretically, in his writings, he symbolized in *The Ring*; and as before, he dropped the “golden age” element of his theorizing – the idea of a return to a lost state of nature – as irrelevant. For in Act I of *The Valkyrie*, the coming together of Siegmund and Sieglinde symbolizes the emergence (not the re-emergence, since there is no golden-age humanity in *The Ring*) of the “need for love” which is “the life-need of all man’s life-needs.” And this love is not merely sexual – though it is rooted in sex: it is also compassionate love, and family love. It appears in direct contrast to the world of *The Rhinegold* – Wotan’s world of power without love...*The Valkyrie* (and *Siegfried* too, for that matter) is an idealistic prognostication of a possible future in which

man's aggressive power-lust will gradually give way to mutual love and fellowship.

(274)

If this reading seems to put us back into conflict – and at a decided disadvantage – with Shaw's mockery of the idea that love will save the day, one need only keep in mind that love is not the final answer in *The Ring* for aggressivity and the compromises of the law (D. Cooke 275).

Indeed, to cite Žižek in an affirmative mode: one of the key points in his interpretation of *The Ring* is that the exercise of power ends in its opposite. Describing Alberich in a sympathetic light, Žižek writes: "The choice of power doesn't involve only the loss of love (and vice versa), it also leads to the truncation or outright loss of power itself. The outcome of Alberich's choice of power is that he ends up as a powerless dwarf" ("There Is No Sexual Relationship" 209).

Nevertheless, given the aggressivity of mankind, as represented by Alberich and his relations and also Wotan but in a more conflicted way, the existence of laws becomes absolutely necessary as a check on human aggressivity. On this point, Cooke again emphasizes the superiority of the thinking that went into *The Ring* as opposed to the philosophy of Wagner.

Here Wagner again shows himself far wiser as an artist than as a political philosopher.

For in his writings he inveighs against the law as a curb on man's natural instincts, until one comes to believe that he has no idea of the necessity of laws to restrain humanity's aggressive instinct; but in *The Rhinegold* he makes Wotan's conception of law the only decent thing about him...[Wotan is] greedy for power, hypocritical, dreadfully cunning, brutally aggressive, and practically devoid of love. But...he has a noble ideal. Although there's nobody to force him, he rules, not entirely according to his own whims and desires, but to a large extent according to laws. (267)

As Cooke elaborates it earlier, this ideal of the law is precisely why the middlebrow analogy of Wotan with Hitler is false not only in spirit, but to the letter. Describing the predicament Wotan finds himself in *The Rhinegold*, when the Giants demand Freia as payment for building Valhalla, Cooke notes that for all his dishonesty in dealing with them, Wotan does not resort to force:

The whole basis of Nazism – the replacement of law by swindling and brute force – is explicitly repudiated in *The Rhinegold*, at the crucial point in Scene 2 where Donner, the “strong man,” lifts his hammer with the intention of bringing it down on the giants’ skulls. Wotan has only to let it fall, and all his problems will be solved: he will be able to keep Freia, and have Valhalla for nothing. But instead, he interposes the spear with its laws between Donner and the Giants, to enforce the contract; and in doing so he roars out “Stop, you madman! Nothing by force!” – which is the direct antithesis of the Nazi method. And this...was one of Wagner’s deliberate contradictions of his source-materials: in the original myth in the Prose Edda, the contract is ignored, the hammer falls and murder is done. So Wagner reveals himself as an explicit anti-Nazi before his time. (265-266)

The paradoxical conclusion to be drawn from the fact that Wagner’s philosophy in *The Ring* contradicts his philosophy as set out in his “philosophical” writings has already been made by Slavoj Žižek, a master of such reversals of conventional wisdom. For Žižek, “Wagner is great not in spite of his protofascist, aesthetic-political vision, but for the way his very realization of that vision undermines it” (quoted in Goehr 43). In Žižek’s reading the ultimate proof of this theory as illustrated by *The Ring* is the way the supposedly more “conservative” final ending of *The Ring* is actually more progressive than the original ending in which Siegfried ascends to Valhalla in triumph at the end of *The Ring*.

Concerning the political, the debate usually centers on the change in the ending of *The Twilight of the Gods*: from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, from the revolutionary assertion of new humanity delivered from the oppressive rule of gods and finally free to enjoy love, to the reactionary resignation of the very will to life...however, on a closer look, it soon becomes clear that the true state of things rather resembles the good, old Soviet joke about Rabinovitch: Did he really win a car in the lottery? In principle, yes, only it wasn't a car but a bicycle; besides, he didn't win it, it was stolen from him...So the standard explanation for the changed ending of *The Twilight of the Gods* is also in principle true, only that the ending we actually have is close to the original one (people, common mortals, do survive and just stare as mute witnesses at the cosmic catastrophe of the gods); furthermore, the early revolutionary Wagner is definitely more proto-fascist than the late one – his “revolutionary” looks rather like the restitution of the organized unity of the people who, led by the prince, have swept away the rule of money embodied in Jews. (215-216)

Although, he makes the point with ironic use of a Soviet-era joke, Žižek's idea is nevertheless confirmed in the common modern staging practice of leaving the chorus on stage in silence after the end of the music in *Twilight*. Indeed, returning to Shaw's supposed “collapse of the class struggle allegory,” we find in this interpretation that, on the contrary, Wagner's final ending was a utopian one in which the elites destroy themselves and the meek inherit what is left of the earth, an ambiguous ending but hardly a clearly reactionary one.

Juxtaposing Two Extremes in Interpreting the Cinema's Appropriation of Wagner

The major irony of the foregoing can be summed up as follows: the close textual analysis of *The Ring* that limits itself mostly to the ideas intrinsic to the drama itself (let alone the music)

and combines these with a sense for the tradition of Romantic opera to which Wagner was responding actually arrives at not only a more accurate but also a more progressive politically extrinsic reading of *The Ring*. On the other hand, the tendentious and anachronistic “proto-Fascist” reading, or one that relies too greatly on what Wagner said in his writings, tends to see what it wants to see more than what is really there. The latter reading begins extrinsically and stays there, while the close readings of Cooke and Žižek, although very different, are able to locate with greater accuracy the extrinsic political significance of the intrinsic narrative elements of *The Ring*. But one can at least sympathize with the popular proto-Fascist reading, insofar as Wagner himself in his writings paved the way for this interpretation, throwing interpreters off the trail of the reversals of intuition entailed in detail-oriented readings of his tetralogy.

Musicology, with its emphasis on textual analysis, offers a great precedent here, but German Romanticism itself is the standard bearer for this methodological principle of locating the principles of art in artistic phenomena themselves. Indeed, Deryck Cooke’s insights into the philosophy of *The Ring* as expressed in the narrative of the tetralogy, not even yet in its music (as he did not live to complete the more comprehensive musical analysis he desired), can essentially be said to follow from a famous idea from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. “The blue of the heavens reveals to us the chromatic laws of optics. Only do not look behind the phenomena, they themselves are the doctrine” (quoted in Rosen, *Frontiers of Meaning* 125).

At the conclusion of *Frontiers of Meaning*, Charles Rosen refers to these lines to solidify his sweeping conclusion about the way Schubert’s music reflected his generation’s experience of history in a way that differed profoundly already from Beethoven’s generation. Although I have already cited it, Rosen’s wonderfully counterintuitive claim in summing up the significance of formal descriptions of details for historical matters is worth repeating here: “Even the most

technical description of music will bring us eventually to history” (*Frontiers* 125). For Rosen, due to the slippery, highly subjective, extra-linguistic nature of musical meaning, one cannot start with history and proceed to formalism in the discussion of music because “it is too easy to convince ourselves that anything we say is true, and too hard to convince anyone else. Only when the movement back forth between historical and formal interpretation starts and ends with the music itself do we have any possibility of saying something sensible... To paraphrase Goethe’s grandiose warning to the scientist: do not look behind the notes, they themselves are the doctrine” (126).

Although the case of reading absolute music formally to arrive at history may seem to be at the opposite end of the hermeneutic continuum from the interpretive concerns in the usual discussion of film music – where the interpretive task is generally seen as reading the music in the context of a film’s story and the related historical concerns forced upon music by the moving images – upon closer inspection, the difference is not so absolute or even very great. True, the cinema generally starts and stops with its own concerns and not those of the notes on the musical page and the sounds they translate into, but it nevertheless asks one to listen to those notes in synchronization with histories and narratives – not looking past the notes to history, but listening to the notes simultaneously with history; while at the same time and at another level the cinema borrows the feeling of history from the music it appropriates. The cinema thus finds a compromise between an ideology- or history-first interpretation and a detailed textual interpretation of music, doing both simultaneously, with ambiguous yet rhetorically powerful results.

Thus to go a step further, it is the cinema’s juxtaposition of the formal and the historical reading, the intrinsic and the extrinsic interpretation, in its appropriation of Wagner that has

allowed it to add another worldly caveat to Wagner's explicit philosophy in addition to *The Ring's* own anti-nostalgic correction. The cinema's appropriation of Wagner has furthermore erased an idea from the philosophy of "Wagner the Artist" – the idea that history is coming to an end – replacing Wagner's premise of Wotan's "resignation of his will" with four related outcomes based on the intractability of mankind's aggressive will to power: (1) the often dangerous and unpredictable contingencies of nature confronted by adventure seekers; (2) the ongoing power struggles of historical classes, albeit allegorically configured and/or prefigured; (3) combinations of these natural and political antagonisms; and (4) in a paradigmatically postmodern vein, the substitution of the natural antagonisms for political ones. In concluding this chapter, I will seek support for this theory, or note its absence, in a few films by Werner Herzog before returning to *Apocalypse Now* and what I consider its ironic sequel, if not its counterfactual rewriting, the underappreciated 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger-vehicle, *The Running Man*. Although hardly a comprehensive list, these two examples at least give us a "juxtaposition of cinematic extremes," to paraphrase Walter Benjamin: foreign art-house documentaries filmed on the fly and with shoestring budgets, and Hollywood-blockbuster camp, based on a best-selling author's mass-market paperback. And yet both are united by more than their preferences for Wagner's music and a conspicuous German accent. They are reflections and expressions of a philosophy of history that one might do worse than call post-Wagnerian. History is not coming to an end in the post-Wagnerian cinema's appropriation of his music. Indeed, despite these films' often explicitly apocalyptic pretensions, in the final analysis history is not winding down in such films but, rather, getting noticeably worse.

Provoking the Elements: Wagner, Nature and Voiceover in Herzog's Failed-Apocalypse

Documentaries

After such an excursus, it is worth summing up the main points made so far and adding to them a few uncontroversial details before returning to cinematic examples of Wagner's music and the discussion of the cinema's criticism of Wagner. As has been shown, the "golden-age" nostalgia in which Wagner indulged as an amateur philosopher does not occur in his most important philosophical work as an artist. The philosophical world view that emerges in *The Ring* is instead a very modern, even contemporary one: with its attention to modern concerns of complex class antagonisms and ecological crisis, and its outcome in which contending classes are ruined with, in Žižek's reading, ordinary people of no particular distinction in the tetralogy left to pick up the pieces. Indeed, in this respect Wagner's inflation of the failure of the revolution into the end of the world prefigures the horizon of the postmodern imagination as diagnosed by Frederic Jameson and summed up memorably by Žižek:

Nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer, whereas popular imagination is persecuted by the visions of the forthcoming "breakdown of nature," of the stoppage of all life on Earth – it seems easier to imagine the "end of the world" than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the "real" that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe. (*The Žižek Reader* 55)

In this description it is important to note how history in the form of capitalist development is presumed to continue although the natural world itself is essentially destroyed. Furthermore, we have seen that an important series of critical voices (e.g., Nietzsche, Cooke, Shaw, Badiou, Goehr, Žižek...) over the past century have recognized the modernity of Wagner's world view to

varying degrees, to say nothing of the operatic directors that have re-imagined Wagner repeatedly. Meanwhile, of course Wagner's musical and dramatic breakthroughs have had a profound influence on both his contemporaries and subsequent generations of both avant-garde and mainstream artists and entertainers – e.g. modernists of the expressionist school, cinema reformers of the silent era, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Debussy, Strauss, Nietzsche, Mann, filmmakers of the New German Cinema... One indication of the power of Wagner's influence is of course not his acceptance but the decidedly ambivalent attitude with which many of these artists regarded his work – e.g., Mallarmé, Mann, and more recently Syberberg.

Finally, returning to the subject of cinematic appropriations of Wagner, one finds among them a remarkable intuition regarding the modernity of Wagner's music and the philosophy entailed in his music dramas, especially *The Ring*. Of course, one could think immediately here of Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, his first film to fully introduce speech and sound after the end of the silent era, and its perspicacious use of the Prelude from *Lohengrin* at opposite dramatic moments. First, the Prelude is heard as an ironic accompaniment, while the Dictator Hynkel daydreams about world domination by bouncing a balloon shaped like the earth on his rear-end. Then, at the end of the film, it accompanies the sincere call for love and fellowship by Hynkel's doppelgänger, the powerless Jewish barber. In this juxtaposition, Chaplin invokes the themes of the love of power and the power of love that motivate much of drama of *The Ring*. More interestingly, his identification of opposites with the same musical material finds a precedent in the "resignation of love" motif first sung by Alberich in *The Rhinegold* and then later sung to the words "holiest love's deepest need" by Siegmund when he pulls the sword from the tree and affirms his love for his sister Sieglinde in Act II of *The Valkyrie* (Cooke 2-10, Žižek 208-210).

But perhaps above all, one should consider here the charismatic work of the director Werner Herzog, an intuitive artist in the Wagnerian tradition if ever there was one and a noted director of several productions of Wagner's operas. Herzog has of course made numerous features films that are notable for their scores and for the way they integrate music into their stories, especially *Fitzcarraldo*. But it is in his documentaries that Herzog has shown an abiding predilection for scoring to classical music and Wagner in particular. In addition to a documentary on the annual summer festival founded by Wagner in Bayreuth, *The World Transformed into Music*, many of Herzog's documentaries, on subjects as diverse as natural catastrophes and political and historical personages of note, include brief excerpts from Wagner's "greatest hits," especially the "Liebestod" from *Tristan and Isolde* and Siegfried's "Funeral March" from *The Twilight of the Gods* (Hillman, "Wagner as Leitmotif" 260-264). It may seem strange to combine what commonsense holds to be *the* genre of realistic filmmaking – documentary film – with the level of artifice that Wagner's music conventionally stands for, but such a contradiction elevated to the status of a paradox is precisely what Herzog aims at in his refusal to acknowledge the distinction between fiction films and documentaries in his theoretical statements on the cinema, if not always in practice (Ames 49).

Indeed, Herzog has been quite explicit about the way artifice combined with documentarian realism equals "ecstatic truth" in his so-called "Minnesota Declaration," read as a statement before an interview with Roger Ebert at the US premiere of one of his more well-known documentaries to make use of Wagner, *Lessons of Darkness* (1992). "There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization" ("Minnesota Declaration"). My supplement to this idea would be that the name for these deeper

strata of truth that cinema reaches through fabrication is, paradoxically, history – history most obviously in the messianic sense of the fascination with catastrophes and disaster, but not exclusively in this sense. Thus in Herzog’s documentaries, Wagner is altered and extended by his inclusion in histories of catastrophes and thus by extension in what Herzog believes is our collective failure to come to terms with the biggest catastrophe of them all, the ecological crisis presented by global warming.¹³ Emphasizing the historical valence of Herzog’s Wagner is, moreover, not unlike Cooke’s reading of Wagner himself, where the philosophy of Wagner as the artist differs from the philosophy of his tracts and treatises. Something similar can be said for Herzog, where an apocalyptic sense of history is not mentioned in his declared aesthetics of ecstatic truth, but is nevertheless a crucial theme of his filmmaking.

Thus, let us deal with the one of the films that resorts to Wagner for stylization in the place where its ending was to have been: *La Soufrière* (1977). This film finds Herzog “chasing nature” to the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe to film an imminent volcanic eruption that never actually occurs. Significantly, when Herzog’s reveals in the last minutes of the film that the volcano never in fact exploded, it is scored to Siegfried’s “Funeral March” from *The Twilight of the Gods*. As though to compensate for the lack of the explosion, the film becomes aesthetically maximal: with Wagner accompanying helicopter shots of the still smoldering volcano as Herzog notes in a voiceover the mystery of why the volcano never exploded and remarks that he was, in a gesture acknowledging class antagonisms, more deeply impressed by the poverty of the few

¹³ As Herzog put it with his customary panache in 2007’s *Encounters at the End of the World*, in a voiceover of aerial shots of the wreckage of a helicopter in Antarctica: “Our presence on this planet does not seem to be sustainable. Our technical civilization makes us particular vulnerable. There is talk all over the scientific community about climate change. Many of them agree the end of human life on this Earth is assured. Human life is part of an endless chain of catastrophes, the extinction of the dinosaurs being just one of these events. We seem to be next” (1:12-1:22).

locals they met who had ignored the evacuation order than he was by the volcano's mysterious behavior:

The volcano did not explode. Days came and went. The signs of a catastrophe began to diminish. After some weeks the population began drifting back to their homes and villages and towns. It will always remain a mystery why there was no eruption. Never before in the history of volcanology were signals of such magnitude measured and yet nothing happened. (26:00)

Here there is a pause in Herzog's voiceover as the March reaches its first climatic brass fanfare. Then while the music decrescendos between fanfares, the voiceover continues.

The volcano will probably soon be forgotten. In my memory it is not the volcano that remains but the neglect and oblivion in which those black people live. There was something pathetic for us in the shooting of this picture and therefore it ended a little embarrassingly. Now it has become a report on an inevitable catastrophe that did not take place. (27:00 min)

This sequence is representative of Herzog's sonic approach to documentary filmmaking in that it features both a prominent, some would say grandiose, musical track, and Herzog's own signature voiceover as the complements or adjuncts of panning helicopter shots, one of Herzog's preferred modes of capturing his all-important landscape shots, which his voiceover habitually describes as metaphors for the human soul (Ames, "Herzog, Landscape, and Documentary"). Indeed, despite the connotations of seriousness in Herzog's German accent and, as Roger Hillman has noted, the introspective attitude that establishes a loose connection to the German Romantic tradition, one cannot help but note how the whiny and nasal quality of Herzog's voice both distinguishes it and also always leaves his sublime ruminations dangerously close to the precipice of the ridiculous

(“Wagner as Leitmotif”). At a historical rather than an aesthetic level, however, Herzog’s honesty about the mystery of the catastrophe never arriving makes for an ironic if not erroneous cooptation of Siegfried’s “Funeral March.” In *The Twilight of the Gods* the music glorifies one of the great events of *The Ring*: the death of its purported hero. For Herzog, it is associated with an event of sublime magnitude that despite expectations nevertheless is indefinitely and inexplicably postponed. The historical lesson, emphasized by Herzog’s reference to the history of volcanology, is that the contingencies and complexities of nature are less predictable and more chaotic than even scientists sometimes allow for.

It is instructive to juxtapose the paradigmatically historical phenomenon of the catastrophe that although expected does not take place in *La Soufrière* with the opposite case in Herzog’s documentary *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), where a significant environmental catastrophe does in fact occur (as a side consequence of the First Iraq War) and yet obviously does not precipitate the Wagnerian and postmodern fantasy of “the end of the world.” The catastrophe in *Lessons* is the ecological disaster created by the oil wells set fire to by Iraqi troops as they fled Kuwait and carried out a “scorched earth” policy following their defeat in the First Gulf War. Of course such a simple description of this film is belied by the controversy that surrounds it, with critics accusing Herzog of creating a spectacle that fails politically and didactically. But unlike *La Soufrière* where the failure of the film is extrinsic, here the failure is intrinsic to the film in that Herzog’s stylization of the disaster is belied by the more prosaic historical reality of the event. Reading from *Revelations* as a voiceover to accompaniments from *The Ring* and *Parsifal* Herzog associates the oil fires with “the end of the world.” But while stunning visually, the oil well fires are hardly a literal apocalypse. And yet the very failure of

this apocalyptic event historically is noted by the film's concluding emphasis on the difficult and yet ultimately comically quotidian task of the largely American cleanup crew.

Still, the apocalyptic imagery, as it were, "steals the show," and the flipside of the inflation of a local disaster into an apocalypse is not the film's failed politics, but its void where a politics might have been. As Herzog scholar Timothy Corrigan has pointed out, the "film seems to avoid or detour around the undeniable politics" of the First Gulf War (quoted in Torbett, "The Quick and the Flat"). As a result, when the film premiered in Berlin, it and Herzog were roundly booed and accused of decontextualizing the war and its consequences while creating a spectacle instead of the educational experience or the clear moral message the audience implicitly demanded. Indeed, there is something to these charges, in so far as the basic facts of the situation of the war, from the countries involved to the locations of the different sequences, go conspicuously unmentioned.

In their place one is forced to deal with the willfully romantic, cynics would say indulgent, irony of Herzog's voiceover, which begins in the character of an almost extraterrestrial observer. "A planet in our solar system. White mountain ranges, clouds, a land shrouded in mist. The first creature we encountered tried to communicate something to us" (2:00). The images that accompany these poetic lines form a montage that is equally lyrical if more contemporary historically: beginning with an opening shot of dilapidated electricity plants, cutting to a primordial landscape with smoke rising from smoldering oil, and arriving at a long shot of a worker shouting something in the direction of the camera while an oil derrick spews flames many 100 hundreds of feet in the air behind him. But the genius of the scene is in the sound, or rather in the way the music from the Prelude to *The Rhinegold* replaces the sound and takes the whole enterprise from grandiose irony to bathos. The lesson of this is that when

Herzog attempts to literally represent the ironic modernity of Wagner's music, the effect is not sublime but grotesque: at once terrifying and ridiculous.

Indeed, the entire opening credits and first montage is scored to the opening measures of *The Rhinegold*, where a droning E flat, which is developed with orchestral effects but does not leave the overtone series of this fundamental pitch for over a hundred bars, was meant to invoke a primordial, ancient world at the beginning of *The Ring*. In *Lessons of Darkness*, the music has a similar effect: it is meant to put the events at a distance, to see them from a "ecstatic perspective" in Herzog's terms, but what one might also more accurately call a primordial perspective: as though, somewhat impossibly, they had happened long ago. Such a perspective is of course not factual in emphasis, but it is historical in what I would call the Wagnerian sense of history: it transposes history into mythology, but with persistent historical remainders. Specifically, one historical remnant left over from Herzog's mythologizing is that of historical difference. The mark of this historical difference, of the post-modernity of Herzog's use of Wagner compared to Chaplin's or Wagner's own, is the absence of the element of class struggle and its emancipatory potential. For Herzog, between the lines, it is as though instead he simply welcomes these ecological crises as a major opportunity, as a grand subject matter for filmmaking.

But this is not to say that one would want Herzog to make didactic left-leaning documentaries. There are plenty of filmmakers who do this, but there is only one Werner Herzog. Indeed, among the more commendable features of Herzog's worldview is an insight his films share with Wagner's *Ring*: as Herzog has said explicitly in a number of films, including *Burden of Dreams*, *Grizzly Man*, and *Encounters at the End of the World*, he rejects the idealization of the natural world as a utopia or a lost paradise to return to. The point is rather that

in a precise way, at the level of his albeit allegorical presentation of the class struggle, Wagner's art is more modern than its postmodern cinematic relatives, in this case Herzog. Herzog imagines disaster already in a way that has forgotten that the driving force of history is class struggle, replacing it with mythic confrontations between man and natural forces. But this finally is a historically overdetermined tendency, at least according to a foundational definition of the historical condition of postmodernism, outlined by Fredric Jameson in his eponymous book on the subject. Jameson nominated the idea of postmodernism precisely to name the process of reconnecting contemporary society's ahistorical appearance to historical processes. "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (*Postmodernism* ix).

Symptomatic of the postmodern forgetting of history in *Lessons* is the exceptional status of its use of voiceover within the Herzog canon. As has been mentioned, Herzog does not use his voiceovers in *Lessons* to present contextual information that might ground the viewer of the film's otherworldly images and its traumatic anecdotes from victims of war crimes in the historical particulars. In the former case, we are never even told where the fires are, except in such poetic title cards as "Satan's National Park." In the latter case, while one does learn what happened to certain victims, basic contextual information, such as their nationality, is omitted. This marks a departure from the normal balance of such contextualizing voiceover comments with the more poetic ruminations. In *Lessons*, the poetic mode of voiceover predominates and thus represents both an exception and an extreme in Herzog's documentaries' use of voiceover.

Methodologically, the interest in such an exception is that it provides insight into the dynamics of the interrelation of a few of the more conspicuous features of Herzog's documentaries: i.e., landscape (or other conspicuous natural) imagery, voiceover, and classical

music (especially Wagner). In his exposition of Walter Benjamin's notion of extremes, Charles Rosen provides a cogent formulation of the way an exceptional or extreme use of one feature within a personal or period style provides insight into the dynamics of the constellation of features that comprise the whole.

A period style...or even a personal style...is not a collection of procedures and tendencies, but the interrelationship of these procedures. Each time we try to discover these interrelationships, we are postulating a configuration which is the object of our research...It is also evident that the interrelationships among stylistic procedures are best discovered when one of the procedures is used in particularly outrageous fashion, provoking reactions in the others. That is why the extreme case gives more information than the average. ("The Ruins of Walter Benjamin" 168)

In the case of the personal style of Herzog, the extreme of the almost exclusively poetic use of voiceover in *Lessons of Darkness*, along with the prominent and often bombastic film-scoring, is essentially provoked by the incredible landscape imagery Herzog found in Kuwait. The tentative conclusion to be drawn is that changes in the substance of the voiceovers and the prominence of the film scoring in Herzog correlate to corresponding and proportional shifts in the surrealism of the landscape imagery he is documenting.

One can easily find confirmation of this pattern, which one could do worse than call a surreal romantic grotesque, albeit in less extended instances, throughout Herzog's oeuvre. One prominent recent example occurs during a fly over of the glacier in Alaska that borders on the area "patrolled" by Timothy Treadwell in *Grizzly Man* (2005). We have all three features: helicopter shot of sublime landscape, prominent musical score (albeit not featuring preexisting classical music) and highly figurative voiceover by Herzog, in which he claims that the

landscape represents the turmoil of the inner emotional life and soul of Treadwell. A similar moment occurs in the opening scene of Herzog's more recent documentary, *Encounters at the End of the World*. In this case however, the exceptional natural imagery provokes a confessional in the voiceover while still being paired with an especially prominent element of musical scoring, elegiac material for male a cappella bass choir. The images in question are of the sea ice in Antarctica, but shot from underneath, from the perspective of divers below the ice. Another nice example of an extreme feature provoking a reaction in these signature formal elements in Herzog is provided by the 1976 documentary *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*, which also offers a contrary example in which the diegesis of the film becoming so prominent sonically that the reaction in the non-diegetic elements of score and voiceover is that they disappear. The film follows the Live Auctioneering World Championship and consists mostly of extended scenes of auctioneers explaining their techniques and demonstrating their art, which Herzog has elsewhere referred to as "the last poetry possible, the poetry of capitalism" (*Stroszek* DVD commentary 12:00).

Based on these examples, one is tempted to say that the imagery is invariably the horse pulling the cart of the voiceover and film scoring, which are fundamentally reactive, but the true state of affairs, at least as retold by Herzog, whose sincerity in such matters is presumed to be reliable, is more complex. In the case of the ending of *Encounters at the End of the World*, in an interview in 2009 Herzog claimed that the ending of this apocalyptically named film was set musically before any of its other features had been determined:

And the music at the end, which is a church choir from Orthodox liturgy in Russia – there is a basso profundo, a very, very low bass voice which is one octave lower than the regular bass voice. And the voice names the saints, saint after saint after saint, the glory

of the saints. And I just felt, yes, that's exactly what should be the end of the film. I always had the music for the end of the film before I even started shooting. (“BFI Southbank Interview”)

Interestingly, in this version of the ecstatic truth from and about the end of the world, Herzog presents the mirror inversion, the flipside of the coin, of the problem that plagued Wagner in bringing *The Ring* to an end. Wagner wrote the poetic text first and in reverse order, beginning with what would become *The Twilight of the Gods*, but was originally titled “Siegfried’s Death,” and finishing the job with the prologue, *The Rhinegold*. He then composed the music from beginning to end. The traditional quip about the music at the end of the tetralogy is thus that it betrays the confusion about what the ending should mean as it shifts rapidly and seemingly haphazardly through various motifs from throughout the cycle. Wagner knew his ending but not his music. Herzog knew his exit music but not his visual ending. Yet both of them could be said to have cataclysmic historical imaginations and propensities for ecstatic truth. For Herzog, however, his art does not document the end of the world in as direct a way as Wagner’s. Instead, it has attempted to represent so many minor and major examples of the catastrophes that plague mankind historically. Thus despite his own apocalyptic pretensions, Herzog’s films effectively critique and rewrite Wagner’s own, admonishing him for thinking the resignation of the will to power would lead to the end of the world. For Herzog, on the contrary, this will to power’s very intractability plus the contingencies of an all-powerful natural world run amok are the agents of the apocalypse and the source of his confidence in its inevitability.

While Postmodernism Forgets Present History, Wagner Remembers the Future

The personal style of Herzog of course occurs within the larger period style of what I have been loosely referring to as the postmodern cinema in this comparative analysis of its

pattern of appropriating Wagner's music. Indeed, *Apocalypse Now* also belongs to this period, just as Coppola and Herzog are contemporaneous representatives of two national traditions of auteurism. The features that the documentaries of Herzog and *Apocalypse Now* have in common are quite striking. Chief among them are a fascination with the end of the world, the limits of human experience, and, by implication, art's role in representing both. Furthermore, at the level of production history, both *Apocalypse* and many of Herzog's features and documentaries are well known for the ways in which they collapsed the boundary between life and art, with Herzog inserting himself into the situation in his documentaries in particular. My hypothesis is that this allows for a tentative definition of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the auteurist cinema – films where the difference between the reality on set and the spectacle being produced becomes significantly indistinct. Coppola notes this blurring in his repeated comments that the journey of Willard up the river was simultaneously the journey of his production crew and cast into the same unknown creative abyss. Thus, just as Willard did not know what he would encounter upstream, so too did Coppola not know what the ending of his film would be during the majority of the shoot (see *Hearts of Darkness*). For Herzog, in *Fitzcarraldo* for instance, the side consequences of filming nearly impossible technical scenes in the Amazon is similarly the stuff of legend and became material for the documentary *Burden of Dreams* that is nearly as famous as the feature film it follows. And of course among the more conspicuous details in these films is the anachronistic figure of the “Wagner helicopter” as an emblem for the futurism of Wagner's music's historical imagination, posited by Milius and Coppola diegetically and by Herzog in his pre- and post-production choices for scoring helicopter shots to Wagnerian soundtracks.

Even more symptomatic of postmodernism proper, however, is the fact that while both filmmakers' cooptation of Wagner offers an associative critique of Wagner's political

philosophy on the subject of political power, both do so in effect by avoiding representations of the underlying struggle between and within economic classes that is central to Wagner's *Ring*.

The paradox is thus that while both instances, as representative of the auteurist cinema in its mainstream "Oscar-winning" feature film and art-house iterations, implicitly chastise Wagner for his naïveté about the possibility of human beings resigning their will to power over nature and each other, they do so in a way that itself sidesteps the latent and paradigmatically modern historical thesis of Wagner's *Ring*: that the history of the world is the history of class struggle.

Wagner, however, went a step further than the classical Marxian definition of class struggle as "oppressor versus oppressed" in his representation of it. He represented the struggle with a degree of complexity which has proved both remarkably prescient and also representative of the political events he observed during his own lifetime in the wake of the upheavals of 1848. Bernard Shaw's reading of *The Ring* points in this direction in his attempts to explain why Wagner turned more politically conservative with age. For Shaw, this evolution of Wagner's politics was a personal embodiment of a general trend towards conservatism in politics after 1848.

Siegfried did not arrive and Bismarck did. Röckel faded into a prisoner whose imprisonment made no difference. Bakunin broke up, not Valhalla, but The International, which petered out in an undignified quarrel between him and Karl Marx. The Siegfrieds of 1848 were hopeless political failures, whereas the Wotans and Alberichs and Lokis were conspicuous political successes... There was no revolutionary leader who was not an obvious Impossibleist in practical politics. (266)

What one should bear in mind here is not so much the obvious point Shaw is making: that the conservative political factions out-maneuvered their revolutionary opponents in a series of

compromises and bolder political moves. More subtly, Shaw's brief and allegorically couched version of events highlights how intra-class infighting contributed to the downfall of the political left after 1848. This point is crucial for understanding what Wagner got both right and wrong historically in his allegory. Interestingly, in transposing the historical intra-class divisions of the class struggle into culture, Wagner effectively inverted historical reality in this regard.

Thus, Wagner located the struggle that along with Wotan's primordial crime contributes to "the end of the world," or the end of one of history's class struggles, in the intra-class strife amongst the ruling factions of aristocrats and capitalists. Wotan's class resigns itself to a doom it recognizes as predestined by the founding crime of history, and Alberich's class seals its fate with its overreaching hubris. To put it speculatively, thus it was that Wagner, in a fundamental misreading of history, but also a foundational one for his *Ring*'s story, violently translated the politically disastrous infighting on the "Left side" of the political continuum as the political infighting of the other side of the spectrum. In an admirable gesture of counterfactual interpretation, Shaw himself tried to re-imagine *The Ring* with a greater degree of historical accuracy regarding the decades following 1848, insofar as – precisely – the ruling factions of Wotan and Alberich would have sought common ground for maintaining power rather than persisting in their disagreements until they shared a common ruin.

To put it in terms of Wagner's allegory, Alberich had got the ring back again, and was marrying into the best Valhalla families with it. He had thought better of his old threat to dethrone Wotan and Loki. He had found that Nibelheim was a very gloomy place, and that if he wanted to live handsomely and safely, he must not only allow Wotan and Loki to organize society for him, but pay them very handsomely for doing it. (267)

And yet, pace Shaw, far from being completely inaccurate, Wagner's idea that the ruling factions would relentlessly try to destroy one another was, so to speak, "ahead of its time." Indeed, it took only a few more decades for the instruments of destruction of modern war – which ruling factions began to use to destroy both unprecedented numbers of soldiers and civilians and themselves – to become available. This sheds a fresh and confirming light on Proust's comment that air-raid sirens sounded Wagnerian. The material dangers the sirens warned of were also allegorically prefigured in the narrative of *The Ring*. Thus, just as the cinematic technology did not yet exist to mass produce and reproduce dramatic art with an ambition to represent and change the world during Wagner's time, so too would the ruling factions of European society have to wait until the twentieth century for the technologies that would tempt them to destroy each other completely. If each generation dreams the next, then Wagner's dream was, at one level at least, a nightmare.

Terminating Wagner; or, the Running Man as a Camp Remake of Apocalypse Now

To go a step further and begin to conclude: both the misinterpretation of history in and the prophetic accuracy of Wagner's work, and the existence of misinterpretations of Wagner's work and of its significance for the cinema I have highlighted in this chapter, far from signaling mere aberrations – such as a problem with a certain critical methodology or the bias of a private reservation – bear witness to the fact that the (economic) class struggle itself cannot be directly represented in a cultural text. To put it perhaps too bluntly, this difficulty is due to the fundamental gap separating politics from economics, with no "metalanguage" that can objectively mediate them, that would render them both transparent and readily comprehensible without bias. Slavoj Žižek has approached this subject repeatedly in his theoretical and political writings. Most recently, in 2008's *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Žižek describes the existence of

this gap between the political and the economic by referring to the Lacanian concept of a “distant cause” as a way of understanding the economy’s effect on political phenomena as they find inherently distorted expressions in cultural texts.¹⁴ The economic nature of the class struggle, so Žižek’s argument begins, is a cause in the sense in which Lacan opposed a cause to the normal phenomena of causality.

For Lacan, they [i.e. the cause and causality] are in no way the same, since a “cause,” in the strict sense of the term, is precisely something which intervenes at the points where the network of causality (the chain of cause-and-effects) falters, when there is a cut, a gap, in the causal chain. In this sense, a cause is for Lacan, by definition, a distant cause...it acts in the interstices of the direct causal network. (*Lost Causes* 288-289)

The class struggle as the economic absent cause is precisely such a cause in Žižek’s Marxian application of Lacan. “This is how one should understand the infamous Marxist formula of the ‘determination in the last instance’: the overdetermining instance of ‘economy’ is also a distant cause, never, a direct one, that is, it intervenes in the gaps of direct social causality” (*LC* 289).

There are two consequences of this reconceptualization of the economic as an absent cause rather than a direct cause in the social totality. One consequence has to do with the way in which one properly interprets and thereafter participates in political struggles. The other concerns the essentially negative or “absent” character of the class struggle as the element in a cultural work or text that is present but only by way of distortion. In the first instance, Žižek

¹⁴ This thesis of Žižek’s on the complexities of the culture representation of the class struggle could be said to follow directly from a caveat introduced by Marx and Engel’s in their foundational description of the class struggle in *The Communist Manifesto*, namely the qualification that the struggle is often a hidden fight. “In a word, oppressor and oppressed carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Marx, *Selected Writings* 222). If one were to brutally condense this sentence along the lines of a Freudian “dreamwork” one might also have a working definition of the class struggle’s representational tendency in the culture of the postmodern period: “oppressor and oppressed engaged in a hidden fight ending in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

draws a somewhat counterintuitive “post-Marxist” conclusion that emphasizes the importance of “the cultural front.” In light of the uniquely absent nature of the class struggle as a cause:

The “determining role of the economy” does not mean that, in this case, what all the fuss “really was about” was the economic struggle, so that we should imagine the economy as a hidden meta-Essence which then “expresses” itself with a two-level-distance in a cultural struggle (it determines politics, which in turn determines culture...). On the contrary, the economy inscribes itself in the course of the very translation/transposition of the political struggle into the popular-cultural struggle, into how this transposition is never direct, but always displaced, asymmetrical. (*LC* 290)

On the complex question of cultural representation that occurs in the final sentence here, where the economic appears in a distorted form as a side consequence of the translation of the political into a cultural modality, Žižek’s emphasis falls decidedly on the complexity and unpredictability of the resulting expression of the class struggle: “The ‘class’ connotation as it is encoded in cultural ‘ways of life’ can often turn around the explicit political connotation” (290).¹⁵ Žižek illustrates this ironic mode of appearance of the class struggle in the translation of politics into cultural life by referring to the Nixon/Kennedy television debate in the 1960 presidential election where the left-leaning Kennedy came across as the more establishment figure while the conservative candidate showed his humble roots insofar as most commentators deemed him unready for the limelight after his performance in the crucial debate. But one could also think today of how one of the main stereotypes for the radical Left, or what remains of it, in the

¹⁵ In his first book in English, 1989’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek shifted the accent in a different direction apropos of the vexed phenomenology of the class struggle in cultural representations as expressions of political and social reality. In the following formulation the class struggle is thus what Lacan would call “Real” – i.e., as “a cause which in itself does not exist – which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted way” (*Sublime* 163). This sense of distortion runs both ways however, as the class struggle is present only in a distorted way and also as a distortion within the representational field. “The class struggle is present only in its effects, in the fact that every attempt to totalize the social field, to assign to social phenomena a definite place in the social structure, is always doomed to failure” (164).

Right's culture war caricatures is the supposedly elitist profession of a humanities academic, working part-time hours on a full-time salary and researching and publishing on esoteric subjects of little relevance to the economic crisis afflicting blue-collar America. One could also here note, in the family of Žižek's presidential example and as an example in which the transposition of politics into culture can effectively rewrite the past, the way that Ronald Reagan's actual movie star persona was considerably more liberal, at least connotatively, than the more John-Wayne-like persona he invented for his presidency. As Carl Freedman has noted apropos of his trenchant analysis of the meaning of Arnold Schwarzenegger's political career, "although it became common during his presidency to refer to Reagan as having been a 'cowboy actor,' the truth is that it would be difficult to name another male Hollywood star of Reagan's generation who appeared in *fewer* westerns" ("Schwarzenegger Reflections" 540).

It is against this background of the contingent and often inverted representation of the class struggle as a side effect of transposing politics into cultural texts that one should approach a final example of Wagner's role in the postmodern cinema: the half-forgotten, camp sci-fi action film, *The Running Man*, an Arnold Schwarzenegger star-vehicle loosely based on the bestselling novel of the same name written by Stephen King under his alias Richard Bachman. The film belongs to the dystopian science-fiction genre identified with and given its true mass appeal by Schwarzenegger's films, but it counts as an exception to the usual reactionary politics in Schwarzenegger's science fiction films, as represented by the *Terminator* franchise above all. This reactionary politics has been nicely and ironically characterized by science fiction scholar Carl Freedman as "Arnoldian anti-humanism," as in Arnold Schwarzenegger, not Matthew Arnold. Drawing on a perspicacious and forward-looking remark from Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Era of Its Technological Reproducibility" – i.e., "Mankind's self-alienation

has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.” – Freedman defines “Arnoldian anti-humanism” by emphasizing one of the features common to science fiction of the Schwarzenegger era: “the visual glory of humanity’s destruction most typically energizes filmic science fiction in the Schwarzenegger era” (545, 546). While still falling within this general framework, insofar as the film’s story is plotted around a series of highly choreographed homicides, *The Running Man*, along with the later and more acclaimed *Total Recall*, is an important exception to this rule’s nihilistic implications in that its story features, again in Freedman’s words, “genuinely liberatory elements” (544). These elements include a story involving a hero who is outcast from the police force after he disobeys a direct order to fire on an unarmed group of protestors and a “resistance” group fighting for control of the communications system in the dystopian, 2017 milieu of the film.

Where the film goes a step further in its exceptionalism than the similarly “liberating” *Total Recall* is in its satire of the very antihumanist violence it trades in. This occurs above all not in Schwarzenegger’s trademark one-liners that mark each homicide – e.g., “Looks like he caught a train” when an enemy is hit by a train – but in the way the film highlights its violence, none too subtly one might add, by framing it as a television game show, or what has since become known as a reality show, in which “America’s Most Wanted” prisoners are hunted down and killed by the game show’s heroes, or “Stalkers,” who are essentially an extreme version of professional wrestlers (played fittingly in one case by Jesse “The Body” Ventura). The show is wildly popular, and not a single prisoner has ever managed to survive and gain his freedom until Arnold arrives and “the revolution” ensues. The satire resides in the way the film’s studio audience enjoy actual murderous violence as if it were wholesome fun and in the way the game show’s host, Killian (played with verve by Richard Dawson), presents himself as an upstanding

citizen interested in justice and morality, while mocking his viewers behind the scenes and ruthlessly pursuing ratings targets even if it means breaking the law. The satire is a curious and crucial element in the film. Under the weight of so many failed attempts at comedy, the film collapses dramatically. On the other hand, the satire is one of the only signs of intelligence, albeit limited, in a film whose plot is otherwise awash in inane improbabilities – as though the price for creating a clear political message was to be paid by the film becoming ridiculous. The solution seems to be that the class struggle can almost directly surface in a Schwarzenegger film as long as the dramatic background is generally farcical.

A superfluous and yet repeated visual motif from the satire that follows the rule of distortion and inversion in the cultural expression of class struggle is the repeated mention of “Cadre Cola” as a major product endorsed by *The Running Man*’s host, Damon Killian. The major implication of this product’s name is that the film’s totalitarianism is in effect leftist, but the very notion of an advertisement of this sort is the invention of the modern advertising industry and consumer capitalism more generally. Cadre Cola is thus a political oxymoron combining the typical liberal bogeymen of the political extremes: vacuous corporate culture and militant leftism in an explicitly antidemocratic mode. The lesson would seem to be that a direct reference to leftist militancy can occur, but only if it is combined with its opposite.

Schwarzenegger’s eventual identification with the revolutionaries provides a further variation of this pattern.

The film begins with a displaced and counterfactual version of Willard’s trip aboard Kilgore’s helicopters in *Apocalypse Now*. The scene is displaced in so far as the helicopters are moving in for an attack on a “food riot” in Bakersfield, California rather than in a peripheral area of the US Empire, be it South Asia or South America (a common location for Schwarzenegger’s

paramilitary-oriented films). Although located in the relatively distant future, the notion of a riot or rebellion in Reagan-era America was to become very real within a few years of the film's 1987 release. The actual riots following the Rodney King verdict were hardly as desperate as those depicted at the beginning of *The Running Man*, but one should nonetheless note, more generally, the postmodernity of this premise, insofar as a major economic trend of the postmodern era is deindustrialization in the West and, as a consequence, "the emergence of an internal Third World" within the First World and the US in particular (Jameson "Modernism and Imperialism" 48-49). Indeed, in his famously analysis of police brutality in 1980s Los Angeles, historian Mike Davis polemically described the "War on Drugs" as "Vietnam Here," noting how many LAPD at the time were proud Vietnam veterans, furthering their careers at the expense of their fellow citizens' civil liberties (*City of Quartz* 268-270).

The film's counterfactual relationship to *Apocalypse Now* resides in the fact that Ben Richards (Schwarzenegger) decides to disobey orders and refuses to open fire on the defenseless protestors. Where Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) had merely looked on helplessly as Colonel Kilgore orchestrates his assault, Richards refuses to follow an order to fire similar to Kilgore's. Unsurprisingly, Richards' punishment – like Brünnhilde's in *The Ring* – is swift and merciless. First he is relieved of duty in a violent scuffle that ends in his subduing and shows his character is different from the invincible Terminator. Then he is made a scapegoat and accused and convicted of the crime of killing the protestors when in fact he was the only soldier who refused to fire. The film subsequently shifts abruptly to a prison camp in downtown LA eighteen months later, where an escape attempt led by Richards and two friends is about to take place. Upon succeeding in their escape, the heroes find their way to the resistance network's lair, where

Schwarzenegger is greeted coolly on account of his former profession in law enforcement and his notorious criminal identity as “The Butcher of Bakersfield.”

There are many details that one could note here regarding the film’s ironic distortions of the class struggle. A key one would be that Schwarzenegger, not unlike the hero in romantic opera, seems to stand outside of the class conflict in these early scenes in the film, a position he maintains to some extent throughout the film. As a “rugged individualist” in a dystopian world, he is punished for doing the right thing. But his decision not to fire on the protest is born out of a kind of depoliticized humanitarian consideration rather than as a result of an awakening to “class consciousness” regarding the economic circumstances behind the food riot. Thus, upon escaping he is not initially tempted by either vengeance or political conviction to join the resistance. Instead he opts to simply flee the country for freedom in Mexico. So, although at the level of denotation Schwarzenegger’s character is apparently a subversive figure, disobeying an unjust order and suffering at the hands of the same corrupt police state he recently served, at a connotative level, he remains a kind of honest conservative individualist, standing above political interests and ideology, acting on what he knows to be right at a gut level. It is little wonder then that when the apparent mastermind of the resistance, played by Mick Fleetwood (for all its flaws, the film’s casting is inspired), threatens Richards’ life in the scene immediately following the escape sequence (“Perhaps now he’s seen too much.”), Richards responds by removing his cigar from his mouth for a predictable tirade against the resistance: “I’ve seen too much? All I’ve seen is a bunch of oafs who think they can change the world with dreams and talk. It’s too late for that. If you’re not ready to act give me a break and shut up” (12:00).

Indeed, the way in which Schwarzenegger gradually becomes not only identified with the resistance but also its de facto leader illustrates his argument to Fleetwood’s character that

actions speak louder than words. He turns to the resistance only out of necessity after he and his fellow escapees are recaptured and forced to participate in *The Running Man*. As they manage to escape the deathtraps set for them by the game and, thanks to Richards, visit death upon the unlucky Stalkers pursuing them, Richards' compatriot Weiss (Marvin McIntyre) – from “computer nerd” central casting – realizes that the security system for the country's entire communications network can be hacked from an “uplink” stationed within the area designated as the game show's battlefield – the “game-zone.” At first Richards seems uninterested in the possibility for the resistance presented by this circumstance, directing his friends to disperse and reminding them of the immediate danger of the Stalkers. But after this initial reaction, Schwarzenegger almost succeeds in acting out conflicting psychological states by sighing, as if to signal that, after all, perhaps the opportunity to “jam the network” is too good to pass up.

The absurdity of the idea that “the network” could be “hacked” from within a wasteland where political dissidents are apparently routinely executed for a national television audience is so great that one is tempted to ironically read it as point of general significance in the film. As though the film needs this premise to exist regardless of how absurd it is. Indeed, to mask the absurdity of this premise, after the nerd character of Weiss finishes explaining that the uplink must be in the game-zone because all the satellites in the zone are pointed in the same direction, Richards' other friend, Laughlin (Yaphet Kotto), immediately offers a “fool-proof” explanation: “No wonder we could never find it, no one ever comes out here!” No one, that is, except probably an untold number of enemies of the state who had nothing to lose and were about to die. The only appropriate explanation would have been Poe's paradox of *The Purloined Letter*: that the best place to hide something is in the open. But when one has to start explaining a

premise of a film while the film transpires, this is a sure sign that things have stopped making sense.

And perhaps more than coincidentally, it is at this crucial moment in the film, when the absurdity of the plot is at its apex and yet where that absurdity gives the proceedings of the game show their wider political significance, that the figure of Wagner's music enters the film in the form of a post-apocalyptic Valkyrie-cum-professional-wrestler and opera singer. I am referring of course to the most absurd Stalker of them all, the memorable Dynamo (Erland van Lidth), who seems to have been constructed from all the leftover postmodern camp memes that were not of use in the screenwriter's creation of his other Stalker characters: e.g., Subzero (Toru Tanaka), the "oriental" hockey-player who kills his victims with a razor-sharp hockey stick; Buzzsaw (Gus Wesrich), the Germanic biker who in fact wields a chainsaw rather than a circular saw; and Fireball (Jim Brown), whose silver-streaked hair matches the color of his flame-thrower and jetpack. The miracle of the figure of Dynamo is that he makes these other characters seem normal by comparison to his odd mixture of features. Like the other Stalkers his name is derived from his lethal prosthetic feature, the fact that he can shoot electricity out of his hands apparently on account of the electrically charged Valkyrie armor he wears. But on the other hand, he also sings opera for no apparent reason. The only stranger fact about Dynamo is that all his characteristics were shared with the real-life van Lidth, who was trained as an opera singer, served as an alternate on the 1976 US Olympic wrestling team, and held a degree in computer science from MIT (*Wikipedia*, "Erland van Lidth"). In these ways, van Lidth's strange persona was (he died shortly after the film's premiere) the inverse of Schwarzenegger's celebrity. Both were recent European émigrés and entered Hollywood through the side-door of achievement in relatively obscure sports. But Schwarzenegger reached the pinnacle of his sport and of

Hollywood, whereas Van Lidth was a good but not great heavyweight wrestler who won only a few small but memorable roles in mainstream films.

Upon further consideration, however, one realizes that the contradiction between the futuristic electronic wrestling aspect of Dynamo and his operatic idiosyncrasy is part of the proud tradition in the cinema's appropriation of Wagner of associating the seemingly outdated conventions of operatic drama with technologies of domination that come after it. In this regard, the film marks an extreme point, a point of camp absurdity in the canon of such examples of Wagner's music's association with the technology of modern warfare, here rendered ridiculous by an attempt to imagine a future version of this technology that would also be agreeable to television audiences. The ridiculousness of Dynamo's technology has everything to do with the way the intended futurism of his costume fails to leave the present, in the way "the 80s are the future" in the film more generally.

It is thus both interesting and not all that surprising to note that in Dynamo's rendition of Wagner one also encounters, at the level of arrangement and musical style, an attempted synthesis of "Ride of the Valkyries" with the major trend in both the popular music and film-scoring of the 1980s – the so-called "synthpop" style. Indeed, as one of its bright spots, the film's score was written by the film composer synonymous with the synthpop sound: Harold Faltermeyer, the composer of such ubiquitous 1980s film score leitmotifs as the themes for both *Beverly Hills Cop* ("Axel F") and *Top Gun*. In Faltermeyer's arrangement, "Ride of the Valkyries" in *The Running Man* thus has the strange distinction of modernizing the very sound of Wagner's postmodern meme. But this aesthetic decision signals a betrayal of the foundational and anachronistic historical insight for the postmodern era entailed in John Milius' use of Wagner – the idea that Wagner's music itself, prior to any modern electronic effects of

arrangement, “lends itself to helicopters,” was essentially ahead of its time. There is thus nothing to update regarding Wagner’s music, and Faltermeyer’s synthpop arrangement is at best an amusing vulgarity.

It is little wonder then that when Dynamo enters into mortal combat with Richards, his camp soundtrack and the rest of his technological prostheses are of no avail. He misfires his electric weapons as an unarmed Richards runs incongruously towards him. Richards begins to think better of this strategy when Dynamo proceeds to chase him down in a futuristic car. Then, perhaps as a result of becoming distracted from trying to sing along to his synthpop version of “Ride,” Dynamo follows Richards up a trash heap that, on account of the incline, sends his car tumbling and leaves him helplessly trapped in the overturned vehicle with his electric powers and homologous soundtrack short-circuiting. In a flickering montage, both the studio and home audiences call for Dynamo’s execution, but Richards decides to spare his life. Here again Richards invokes pure humanitarian moral concern in his decision, “I won’t kill a helpless human being, not even sadistic scum like you.”

At the level of the class struggle as a distorted cultural representation, one here encounters the already familiar version of Richards’ individualist morality, going against the grain in sparing the helpless again, but doing so in a connotatively conservative, or at least utterly depoliticized, way. Indeed, only in the next scene, upon witnessing the death of Laughlin and hearing his dying wish that the cause of the resistance move forward, does Richards begin to fully identify with the resistance to the point that he turns down Killian’s bribes and delivers Amber (Maria Conchita Alonso) and her access codes to Mick in his secret lair, which of course is absurdly located opposite the “game zone,” as if no one in power would have noticed armed revolutionaries adjacent to a space of such high symbolic value for the establishment.

Thus in the encounter with Dynamo one witnesses the class struggle in a distortion that is really a fairly complex displacement, improbably analogous to Wagner's own, in which the two sides of the ruling ideology meet in a cultural transposition and engage in a struggle in which both sides lose. On the one hand, there is Schwarzenegger (as Richards) as an extreme version of the libertarian moralist outwitting his superiorly equipped opponent but failing to recognize the larger context of the revolution (until after this scene) or to live up to the antihumanist demands of the audience's blood lust. On the other hand, Dynamo here embodies the modern technological individual's antihumanist fantasy gone wrong, a Valkyrie-by-prostheses but whose prostheses encumber him and who is powerless when the power is switched off. In their encounter, Richards is thus right not to kill him not at a simple moral level but because he represents the antihumanist side of Schwarzenegger's own persona that he would be lost without in other more important contexts for his celebrity and political careers. From Wagner's perspective, their struggle repeats, but with all the powerlessness of an absurdly distant echo, his struggle between ruling factions in *The Ring*, while simultaneously his music's place in Hollywood and postmodern cultural history is allegorically at stake. In effect, the very aesthetic failure of his music in the synthpop form signals a kind of outer historical limit of his musical influence, an end of the line. Wagner's music, like Dynamo himself, however, does not die here. It is merely neutralized, turned on with synthpop technology so that it can seemingly be easily turned off. And thus perhaps the time has come, as Alex Ross has suggested, to switch Dynamo off permanently and return to Wagner's music without all of the historical baggage of its cinematic and cultural afterlife that burdens our understanding like Dynamo trapped in his Valkyrie suit and car after Richards discards him – except that such a move would be anti-

historical and therefore anathema to the philosophies of both Wagner's music dramas and their subsequent cinematic appropriation.

CHAPTER TWO

Historicizing the Condition of Music: The Logic of Exceptions in Several Films by Stanley

Kubrick

Several Conditions of Music and the Historical Condition in Kubrick

This chapter reflects upon the depth and breadth of the relationship between Stanley Kubrick's films and music: not only his films' well-known classical and popular soundtracks, but also the relationship between Kubrick's films and the more general condition of music as a medium of signification that paradoxically has both too much affective, and not enough informational, meaning. Charles Rosen has repeatedly emphasized this basic paradox of musical meaning, writing most recently,

The communication of information is one of the most important of the many different functions of language, but not of music (you cannot, for example, by purely musical means, ask your listeners to meet you tomorrow at Grand Central Station at 4 o'clock). However, language must seek out poetic methods even to approach at a distance the subtlety and emotional resonance of music. (*Music and Sentiment* 5-6)

Reading recent scholarship symptomatically, this chapter begins with the idea that by searching for the proverbial "right word" to capture their essence, without knowing it critics of diverse ideological and methodological approaches tend to characterize Kubrick's films as if they were music critics extemporaneously assigning adjectives to his films' general look and feel. The critical approach attempted here, by contrast, allows for a more complex historical and psychoanalytic account of the meaning of Kubrick's films that focuses on the underlying connections between his films' narratives and visual elements and their use of classical music. This practice is then modeled by closely analyzing the role of a singular musical work in several

of Kubrick's films, including two of his least appreciated works – *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Methodologically, the opening of this chapter attempts to rehabilitate and redefine the psychoanalytic concept of “suture.” The process of suture, usually described as the unconscious visual logic of cutting between shots in a given scene or sequence of a typical narrative feature film, is most often presented as the formal element of mainstream narrative filmmaking that stabilizes the meaning of a film's story, providing closure by delimiting the larger field of signification.¹⁶ But this is only one side of the story: yes, the suturing element provides closure, but only by “de-suturing itself” – by leaving its own meaning in important but variably senses ambiguously open. Slavoj Žižek sums up the contradictory nature of suture succinctly: “the only thing that actually de-sutures is suture itself” (*They Know Not 20*). Suture is thus a paradoxical and highly complex, but absolutely crucial, element of cinema form because it determines what is meaningful or meaningless, possible or impossible within a film, both intrinsically (in its story and its aesthetics) and extrinsically (in its broader historical and ideological contexts). Indeed, as will be illustrated with regard to Kubrick's films, suture allows meaning to short-circuit between the two levels of form and content. This “return to suture” takes place within the context of Žižek, Jameson, and other theorists' return to psychoanalytic film theory more generally in the wake of both its deconstructionist heyday and the “Post-Theory” cognitivist rejection that followed (Bordwell and Carroll, *Post-Theory*). For Žižek, both early engagements with Lacan in the domain of film theory (e.g. Daniel Dayan, Kaja Silverman) and their negation

¹⁶ The concept of suture has a long and complex history in Lacanian circles and film theory that cannot be fully repeated here. Some of the highlights include Jacques-Alain's Miller's intervention during Lacan's seminar that first introduced the term – “Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier),” Jean-Pierre Oudart's first application of the term to the analysis of cinema – “Cinema and Suture,” and essays by Stephen Heath and Daniel Dayan that presented the concept and its intellectual and historical context for an Anglo-American audience – “Notes on Suture” and “The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema,” respectively. The texts of Miller, Oudart, and Heath are all available on the web in *The Symptom: the Online Journal of Lacan.com* 8 (2007). Dayan's essay is reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism* (Sixth Edition) from Oxford UP.

(e.g. Noël Carroll's *Mystifying Movies*) relied on an oversimplified version of Lacanian theory (Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* 1-3).

Leaving aside the polemical tone of these debates, my intent in returning to the concept of suture is to show both the term's relevance and that of psychoanalysis more broadly for a linguistic, musical, and historical interpretation of Kubrick's films, and by extension problems of cinematic interpretation more generally. My way of accomplishing this involves not Žižek's "return to Lacan" – since the term suture is not a crucial one for Lacan himself – but a further displacement of Miller's concept of suture by indentifying it with Roland Barthes' notion of "the grain of the voice." Among other benefits, this approach from Barthes' perspective will usefully estrange the concept of suture from the clichés that surround it in today's academic film theory environment. More precisely, using Barthes' concept of the grain of the voice to "re-actualize" suture reflects a shift in the historical development of suture itself, in which the role of film sound has increasingly become a leading suturing element – on the one hand, rendering a film's diegetic world consistent and, on the other, rendering it unreal with sound effects that make impossible levels of detail audible.

Thus in order to forget the mistaken truisms about suture – i.e., it is incomprehensible, or paranoid, or primarily a matter of visual form, or something so general that, in short, it means everything and nothing – one could do worse than begin by underlining the connection between the point of suture in cinema and what Roland Barthes calls "the grain" of the singer's voice in musical performance. In other words, the grain of the voice is Barthes' idea of suture in the context of music. For Barthes, the grain is of interest because it marks the crucial point of contact between the singer's body (voice-box, facial contortions, etc.) and their breath (the latter being traditionally referred to, according to Barthes, as the soul of the voice) that determines a

singer's distinct sound. The grain is thus where the rubber meets the road in a singing voice, or where the singer's breath becomes "infected" by the foreign body of voice, to paraphrase Barthes' preferred metaphor. In one sense, the grain in Barthes reading is a constituent of the part of music that Charles Rosen claims is non-communicative. For Barthes, however, this part of vocal music's phenomenology also surpasses Rosen's notion of subtle emotional significance. In a psychoanalytic gesture, in its very material and bodily presence the grain is ultimately the location of the substance of enjoyment in singing (Barthes, "Grain" 269-271). The grain is thus not a point of extremely "subtle emotional resonance" but a point where such resonance is impeded and "stained" by enjoyment. The grain, however, is not therefore only to be associated with an unrefined or raw emotional quality. It is also, paradoxically, mechanistic and un-emotional – "an-empathetic" in film music scholar Claudia Gorbman's phrase – not only giving pleasure but going beyond it. Indeed, the connection of the grain to the idea of suture is to be found precisely in the Lacanian notion of enjoyment as going "beyond the pleasure principle," getting caught or "stuck" in the circularity of the compulsion to repeat (Žižek, *They Know Not* 18-20).

Kubrick's films are similarly noted and often misguidedly criticized for the way they seem to lack emotional resonance, leaving one feeling "cold." Upon closer inspection, however, this quality becomes symptomatic of, among other things, the very historicity of Kubrick's use of music and the condition of music more generally. Indeed, the complication that Kubrick introduces regarding musical moments that both surpass or de-suture communicative narrative meaning and figure an autotelic enjoyment in his films is that they are simultaneously points where his films' sense of history comes to the fore as well, where the suturing marks of his

films' historical imagination become apparent.¹⁷ My thesis is thus that, counterintuitive though it may sound, Kubrick's films are often at their most historical when they are at their most musical and the particular trope that this historical musicality is most strongly associated with is the historical development of the modern psychological subject. Thus music and the condition of music are central to scenes of indoctrination and to scenes of recognition and peripeteia in Kubrick that relate to historical shifts in the study of psychology and Kubrick's own sense of that history.

This complex pattern holds true at a number of crucial junctures in Kubrick films identified throughout this article. In *Full Metal Jacket*, for instance, the all-important term for what James Naremore identifies as Kubrick's unifying aesthetic – “the grotesque” – occurs for the one and only time in all his films, and yet in the way it is used its referent is both over-determined and unclear, both suturing and de-suturing. As in music, communication has failed and the force of expression has won in the uniquely prominent grain of drill-instructor Hartman's voice. The historical point corresponding to this moment of communication breakdown is that it was during the Vietnam-era that new psychological approaches to training cadets were implemented after many soldiers failed to fire during World War II combat operations – a fact rendered by Kubrick in his emphasis on the process of military indoctrination and in his representation of the grotesque, in John Ruskin's sense of mixing the terrifying and the comical, in the methods of this new form of indoctrination (Baum, “The Price of Valor”). Such a musical suture also marks Kubrick's representation of indoctrination in *A Clockwork Orange*, in that during the Ludovico treatment (with its name derived from Beethoven's given name), Beethoven's music proves the crucial detail in Alex's psychological reprogramming. Here the

¹⁷ Barthes too notes the historicism of “the grain of the voice” and speculates that its decline amongst prominent singers is correlative to the emergence of the long play record and its emphasis on clarity and refined singing tone (273).

historicism of the film points to the rise of behavioral psychology and its limitations in the therapeutic setting. Indeed, its failure to surpass psychoanalysis in its ability to reorganize the fantasies that give the subject access to enjoyment and the failure of any clinical model to deal effectively with the sociopaths of its dystopian future are both problems the film confronts.

Psychoanalysis returns with a vengeance in Kubrick's next film, *Barry Lyndon*, in the form of a displaced, historically-situated oedipal imbroglio. And again, in *Barry Lyndon* the crucial and anachronistic musical selection of Schubert's "Andante con Moto" from the Trio in E flat is imbued with a unique sense of history. The famous first theme of the second movement fixes the film's sense of fate and determinacy by emanating from the future history of music and Europe, but in so doing it is de-sutured from its historical context to reflect how Barry's attempt to join the front ranks of society is effectively occurring "too soon" on the stage of history. My thesis, that Kubrick's films are at their most historical when they are at their most musical, furthermore highlights the often underappreciated relevance of semiotic psychoanalysis for a historical interpretation in cinema studies. As Barthes said, "the historical meaning of the lied must be sought in its music" ("Grain" 274). The same is true of Kubrick, and the historical task of Kubrick's music is to represent histories his films otherwise repress and to do so by both fixing and rupturing meaning.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Kubrick

At the beginning of "The Grain of the Voice," Barthes perspicaciously notes that when it comes to writing or talking about music, one seems "condemned" to merely picking out adjectives for the piece of music we wish to grasp and convey an understanding of.

How does language manage when it has to interpret music? Alas, it seems, very badly.

If one looks at the normal practice of music criticism, it can readily be seen that a work is

only ever translated into the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective. Music, by natural bent, is that which at once receives an adjective. The adjective is inevitable: this music is *this*, that execution is *that*. (“Grain” 267)

In a further gesture, Barthes generalizes this problem of music criticism to the whole of art criticism. “The moment we turn an art into a subject there is nothing left but to give it predicates; in the case of music, however, such predication unfailingly takes the most facile and trivial form, that of the epithet” (179). Something similar goes on in the critical response to Stanley Kubrick’s films. The adjectival epithet is not just seemingly unavoidable, but also oversimplifies the discussion of his films by focusing almost exclusively on their content when the key to understanding them lies in a detailed analysis of the way their content and form overlap. At least in this pejorative way then, in the way many critics talk about them, Kubrick’s films have attained the condition of music.

Were one to bring the matter to a vote, the preferred choice among critics and scholars for the adjectival epithet to describe Kubrick’s films would undoubtedly be “cold,” both in the sense of an aesthetics of emotional detachment (or frigidity) and in the sense of being “cool.” There is a journalistic heritage in the former sense of coldness that goes back at least to Pauline Kael, no stranger to hyperbole, inveighing against Kubrick’s “arctic spirit.” Indeed, this position has wider currency, as evidenced by the prevailing derogatory opinion that the HAL 9000 computer, the “ghost in a shell” from *2001*, is one of Kubrick’s most emotionally complex characters, and the other cliché that Kubrick’s characters can be in the same room and yet in different moral and emotional universes. In *Paths of Glory*, for instance, General Broulard (Adolphe Menjou) is more upset at having to leave his lavish party for a brief tête-a-tête with the frantic Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) than with the facts the Colonel present to him: that innocent

men are about to be put to death. On the other hand, there is a truth about Kubrick in the latter sense of coldness as coolness. Kubrick was a hipster, a beatnik, a gifted street photographer, a jazz aficionado, and a sidewalk chess hustler. To paraphrase his collaborator Michael Herr, “coldness” is the name squares gave to Kubrick’s coolness, to the part of his art they didn’t get.

Beyond journalistic opinions, there are also recent scholarly approaches to Kubrick that take coldness as a starting point, such as the Lacanian position elaborated by film theorist Todd McGowan in his book, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*. For McGowan, Kubrick’s coldness is of interest for a paradoxical reason: the very lack of affect in Kubrick points to something one often associates with affect, fantasy. “This coldness would lead us to believe that Kubrick is a filmmaker divorced from any exploration of fantasy, which we tend to associate with an emotional response. But the opposite is in fact true: Kubrick strikes us as cold precisely because his films so thoroughly immerse themselves in the realm of fantasy.” In a more explicit turn towards Lacanian dogma, McGowan continues, “Fantasy proper has nothing to do with affect; it concerns, instead, our relationship to the ineffable and unapproachable maternal Thing that appears to embody the ultimate enjoyment, which is...[in Lacan’s words] ‘something that is far beyond the domain of affectivity’” (43). In this telling, Kubrick’s genius lies in his ability to render ideological fantasies of power and domination undisguised by stereotypical, Hollywood sentimentality. Or as McGowan puts it, “the radicality of...Kubrick...consists in his ability to use film’s fantasmatic quality to bring to light the hidden obscene dimension of symbolic authority” (44). At first this thesis seems most applicable to Kubrick’s two war pictures, *Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*, and their depictions of corrupt military officers and institutions. Taking the latter film as an instance, one has only to recall the wildly imaginative obscenities that the drill-instructor, Sergeant Hartman (Lee Ermey), uses to transform his marine recruits

into soldiers. They are variously asked to sing pornographic nursery rhymes, given insulting or derogatory monikers, and generally reeducated to equate military violence with sexual pleasure. One could argue that although such techniques for indoctrination are obscene, perhaps McGowan is wrong to think there is anything particularly “hidden” about them. Nevertheless, despite some misgivings about the details and the larger political moral McGowan draws in his interpretation, his Lacanian reading of Kubrick’s “coldness” has the merit of converting what is often considered an aesthetic weakness of Kubrick’s style into its chief ideological-critical accomplishment.

Kubrick’s Grotesque Suture

In his 2007 study *On Kubrick*, film theorist James Naremore also takes the epithet of coldness as his starting point. And like McGowan he too passes quickly from coldness to weightier issues in Kubrick’s films. But unlike McGowan, Naremore’s concerns are primarily aesthetic rather than political or ideological-critical. Interestingly, towards the end of his analysis of coldness as a marker of Kubrick’s critique of ideology, McGowan touches on Naremore’s subject when he begins to list obscene authority figures in Kubrick.

Whenever a character takes up a position of authority in one of Kubrick’s films, he – always he – inevitably finds an obscene enjoyment in this role. This enjoyment is often exposed in the over-the-top performances of the actors in these roles, such as Michael Bates (the chief prison guard in *A Clockwork Orange*), Lee Ermey (Sergeant Hartman in *Full Metal Jacket*), Jack Nicholson (Jack Torrance in *The Shining*), George C. Scott (General Buck Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove*). (McGowan 47)

This is certainly a representative list that establishes a pattern, but it seems to have nothing to do with the coldness of fantasy. In fact, these exuberant, show-stealing characters are quite the opposite of cold and aloof. Where McGowan's analysis ends then, Naremore's begins.

Although he is still preoccupied with finding a proper epithet for Kubrick, Naremore's epithet has the merit of being a concept with a venerable history in literary and art criticism – the grotesque. The immediate, "spontaneous" definition of this word, which Naremore takes to be "hideously ugly," seems to have little to do with a successful broad generalization about Kubrick. But its philological pedigree does take us quite far in the description of Kubrick (Naremore 25). For Naremore, the definition of the grotesque that is most applicable to Kubrick comes from John Ruskin, who writes,

It seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but that we cannot legitimately consider it under these two aspects because there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements: there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest. (quoted in Naremore 26)

Ruskin's grotesque is a little bit like the old adage apocryphally attributed to Napoleon: "From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step." The grotesque marks this step; that is to say, the grotesque is where these two opposed elements – terror (part of the romantic sublime) and ludicrousness – coincide. In Naremore's exposition of the concept, it shows up not just all over Kubrick's most definitive scenes, but also conspicuously in the history of modern art; arguably, "the grotesque functions almost as a guarantee of artistic seriousness and authenticity in the first

half of the twentieth century” (28). Naremore follows up these statements by beginning to catalogue instances of the grotesque in Kubrick’s films. This work is persuasive, but Naremore’s real stroke of genius comes when he cuts to an example that is in a strict sense exceptional: the one scene in Kubrick where the word “grotesque” actually occurs. The name designating such a linguistic exception is hapax legomenon, the term for when a word occurs only once in a work, body of works, or in the most extreme case the entire written record of a language. The significance of the existence of such a scene is that it makes the grotesque both general (perhaps universal) – as an aesthetic effect – *and* singular – as a word – in Kubrick.

Thus, opposites coincide in both the concept of the grotesque (terrifying and funny) and in the grotesque’s form of appearance (aesthetically general and linguistically singular) in Kubrick’s films. The scene in question is the opening one from *Full Metal Jacket*, where the aforementioned grotesque authority figure of Sergeant Hartman is seen verbally and physically abusing his recruits. The lines of dialogue where the word “grotesque” occurs take place during Hartman’s dressing down of a particularly pathetic recruit, Leonard Lawrence (Vincent D’Onofrio), whom Hartman quickly baptizes “Private Pyle.” Despite his nervousness and fear, Pyle cannot stop smirking at Hartman’s obscene witticisms, which of course only further infuriates Hartman. As his anger escalates, Hartman asks Lawrence, “Did your parents have any children that lived? I bet they were grotesque. You’re so ugly you look like a modern-art masterpiece!” Naremore includes these complex lines in his précis of this scene and returns to them to conclude his discussion of Kubrick’s overall “aesthetic of the grotesque.”

Whether or not the opening sequence of *Full Metal Jacket* is what Hartman would call a ‘modern-art masterpiece,’ it probably aspires to that condition. All its visual and verbal techniques are aimed at maintaining an exact style and a convincing picture of military

life while at the same time making us cringe and laugh uncomfortably. In the last analysis, it can be understood both as a meta-commentary on Kubrick's art and as a systematic demonstration of how the grotesque, whether in life or in film, messes with our minds. (39)

Naremore's idea that this scene is a meta-commentary is very much to the point. But he has passed over in silence certain details of linguistic ambiguity in Hartman's speech that broaden and complicate the scope of such a meta-commentary. In particular, one should bear in the mind that this scene and especially its exceptional bit of dialogue are extremely, albeit subtly, contradictory. In other words, at the moment when Hartman utters the word grotesque, the grotesque is both over-determined and under-determined. On the one hand, not only are the acting style and the language employed by Ermey and D'Onofrio grotesque, but the very word itself occurs. Yet, on the other hand, the figures Hartman's use of the word is supposed to designate do not appear in the film. Those marked explicitly as grotesque, Hartman's fantastical version of the Lawrence family, are not represented by the film's visual imagery. When one looks even more closely at the lines of dialogue they become even more under-determined. In "I bet they were grotesque," the antecedent of "they" is ambiguous. It could refer to either Lawrence's parents or his siblings or perhaps both. In short, there is, as it were, an epistemological "double negative" here: not only does one not see the referent of "grotesque," but who this referent might be is also unclear. We have thus reached a moment not just in the response to Kubrick, but in the very substance of one of his films where the dialogue approaches the condition of music. The grotesque is musical in this scene because, like music's signifiers, it lacks an unambiguous referent and, again like music, the very lack of a stable referent is coincident with an abundance of signification.

In psychoanalytic film theory, as has been previously mentioned, there is a precise term for the contradictory nature of this moment – *suture*. In film studies, suture is usually understood as a synonym for closure, in that it designates the way a film effaces the traces of its production in the movement of its shots and thereby ensnares the viewer in its production of meaning. In truth, however, as Kubrick’s use of the grotesque here shows, suture also designates the very opposite of closure, or the impossibility of it. It stands for a moment when the gap in a film, or, in our case, a director’s body of work, is closed, e.g. when the epithet for Kubrick’s aesthetic signature is named within a film. But also, in the same motion, the closure of the gap bears witness to the fact of the gap all the more, i.e., what the explicitly grotesque Lawrence family looks like and even who among them Hartman means is not disclosed. Suture both conceals and more importantly reveals the gap it attempts to cover over. Naremore seems to have found the moment that completes the puzzling search for the holy-grail like epithet, but the very use of the term in *Full Metal Jacket* is incomplete. The grotesque in Kubrick sutures everything except itself, providing closure by leaving its own meaning open.

The significant historical point to be made about Kubrick’s “grotesque suture” at the opening of the first part of a film centered, as it is, on the transformation of recruits into soldiers during boot camp, is that it marks the outset of Kubrick’s attempt to represent a crucial and fundamental historical change in the psychological training of recruits by the US military following World War II. In his famous 1947 study, “Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in the Future,” Army lieutenant colonel S.L.A. Marshall concluded, much to the surprise of military commanders and strategists, that something strange had happened during World War II combat operations:

Only about fifteen percent of American riflemen in combat had fired at the enemy. One lieutenant colonel complained to Marshall that four days after the desperate struggle on Omaha Beach he couldn't get one man in twenty five to voluntarily fire his rifle... 'Fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle failure in the individual,' Marshall wrote. 'At the vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector.' (Baum, "The Price of Valor")

Marshall's findings led to significant changes in the way the military instructs recruits.

Within months, Army units were receiving a "Revised Program of Instruction"...It was no longer sufficient to teach a man to shoot a target; the army must also condition him to kill, and the way to do it, paradoxically, was to play down the fact that shooting equals killing. "We need to free the rifleman's mind with respect to the nature of the targets," Marshall wrote. A soldier who has learned to carefully fire rounds...will...consider the humanity of the man he is about to shoot...Soldiers now acquired the skill of "massing fire" against riverbanks, trees, hillcrests, and other places where enemy soldiers might lurk...By the Vietnam War, according to internal Army estimates, as many as ninety per cent of soldiers were shooting back. (Baum, "Price of Valor")

This historical change is of obvious relevance to the evolution of the storylines in Kubrick's war films. In *Paths of Glory*, the story concerns a corrupt officer corps' attempt to cover-up the fact that an entire division disobeyed a direct order to attack in an unwinnable situation during World War I by executing a few soldiers selected at random from a unit. *Full Metal Jacket* (which arguably synthesizes the gravitas of *Paths* with the farce of *Dr. Strangelove*) tells the story of the opposite problem. What if rather than refusing to fight let alone to kill, soldiers become (uncontrollable) killers? This of course is the fate not only of "Private Pyle" but also of "Private

Joker” – Matthew Modine’s character who excels in boot camp and early in his Vietnam tour on account of his ironic detachment – who in the film’s climatic scene kills a Vietnamese girl sniper at close range as she lies wounded, in clear violation of various international laws of war.

The significance of the appearance of the hapax “grotesque” at this exact moment in Kubrick’s work also has to do with its depiction of the transfer of libidinal investment from the family to the state, from the Lawrence family to the obscene underside of the military’s official code of honor and discipline. In this transfer, the “master signifier” of Kubrick’s universe appears as if to mark the shift in its signified, the shift regarding which institution regulates the subject’s access to enjoyment. Kubrick’s genius consists in how he integrates this subjective shift in Leonard and the other recruits with the historical shift in the training programs of the military. Kubrick thus depicts what the “new instructions” for training only imply, that in order to play down “the fact that shooting equals killing” Kubrick’s drill-sergeant equates shooting with sexual pleasure rather than equating it with the more rational idea of indiscriminately firing at inanimate objects where the enemy might lurk. Finally, it is the film’s embodiment of both the raw power and the objective detachment of the military machine in the grain of the Hartman’s voice that renders this transposition of libidinal investment from family to state dramatically convincing but in a way that, as Naremore memorably put it, “messes with our minds.”

So, if the very epithet for and hapax from Kubrick’s universe, the grotesque, has a musical quality to its form of appearance in Kubrick, then whither music itself in Kubrick? And how can one speak about music in Kubrick beyond enumerating the series of epithets that his films themselves seem to be lending to it? Barthes suggested that to surpass the inevitable adjectives and epithets one might shift, or more precisely “displace,” the very subject one is

considering. For Barthes, this shift takes the form of a movement from music as the subject of his sentences and his inquiry to one of its unique, interstitial predicates – the aforementioned “grain of the voice.” “Rather than trying to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language” (“Grain” 269). For Barthes, this displacement of the fringe of contact between music and the language of criticism amounts to reflecting on the very fringe of contact between music and language in vocal music itself – a movement from the analysis of the words we use to describe music to a description of the very place where language and music meet in singing performance. This is not a simple matter of focusing on form instead of content, but on the content of the form itself. This is what he means by “the grain.” I would like to do something similar here with Kubrick – not to change the language used about his films, but to alter the object of his films as it presents itself to critical discourse by reflecting on “the space of the encounter” between his films’ narratives and other formal features and the exceptional classical music works they appropriate, musical works that share with Hartman’s use of the word “grotesque” the paradox of singularity and yet general significance for Kubrick’s vision.

2001 is a useful starting point for this “shifted” critical approach to Kubrick because it marks a shift in Kubrick’s use of music. When he rejected Alex North’s score for the film in favor of the classical “temp-tracks” he had used during shooting, it was the first in a series of films where preexisting classical music, often handpicked by Kubrick, was a defining feature of the film’s aesthetic identity. In other words, Kubrick himself already displaced his films’ focus towards the interaction of the images and preexisting classical music. The name for this point of contact between film and music in Kubrick could be called “the grain of his films” or alternately

the point of “suture” to use the term from psychoanalytic theory, or finally to use the Deleuzian term for this conceptual topology, “the fold” between the texts of the moving images and the musical compositions. To sum up, not only does critical analysis of Kubrick tend to unwittingly resemble music criticism, while the key “meta-commentary” scene from his films approaches the condition of music apart from its actual deployment of music, but also as he evolved as a filmmaker Kubrick himself shifted his filmmaking towards a unique and sustained interaction between preexisting classical music and his films’ stories and visual motifs. It is at such points – at once singular and of general significance – that the repressed historical record of Kubrick’s films lurks.

A Representation of Suture in A Clockwork Orange

If there was ever a scene in Kubrick to which the concept suture seems directly applicable, rather than tendentious or epiphenomenal as critics of psychoanalytic film theory like to charge, then it occurs during Alex’s (Malcolm McDowell’s) reeducation in *A Clockwork Orange*. This sequence is also uniquely suited to our purposes for a more important reason. It has the distinction of being the only scene in Kubrick where the effect of background music in films is discussed explicitly by characters in the film – making it another moment that is both a hapax and, even more explicitly, an instance of meta-commentary. *Clockwork* is definitely not Kubrick’s best work in that it unwittingly celebrates violence in a way that Kubrick never would again, as if he needed to make up for the implicit optimism of *2001* or was having his revenge on Warner Bros. for withholding funding from his Napoleon epic. And the scene in question, where Alex undergoes the experimental behavioral modification treatment – “aversion therapy” – in exchange for a speedy release from prison, is no exception to the rule that the film is difficult to watch for those squeamish about “ultra-violence.”

On day one, the so-called “Ludovico” treatment consists of Alex watching scenes of violence and rape, two of his passions in life (along with Beethoven, of course), while he feels the effects of a torture drug that simulates the feeling of dying – the assumption being that his mind will begin to associate the morally repulsive things he loves with this artificial sickness onto death and soon thereafter he will no longer love them or become sick at the thought of them. The first day’s film clips are almost indistinguishable from earlier scenes in the film itself, a clear indication that this is a self-conscious moment in the film. Kubrick once said the film was made purposely to resemble a dream, which he suggested meant that it required a “suspension of moral judgment” (Naremore 155). If so, then this film within the film is not unlike “a dream within the dream,” which Freud saw as a unique moment of certainty. Freud thought dreams within dreams were crucial for a paradoxical reason, although the unconscious agency responsible for the dreamwork means to depreciate them as merely “secondary dreams,” going against this grain, Freud wagered that this means they should be taken that much more seriously.

The part of the dream “dreamed” is to be depreciated in value and robbed of its reality; that which the dreamer continues to dream after waking from the “dream within the dream” is what the dream-wish desires to put in place of the obliterated reality. It may therefore be assumed that the part “dreamed” contains the representation of the reality, the real memory, while, on the other hand, the continued dream contains the representation of what the dreamer merely wished. The inclusion of a certain content in “a dream within a dream” is therefore equivalent to the wish that what has been characterized as a dream had never occurred. In other words: when a particular incident is represented by the dream-work in a “dream,” it signifies the strongest confirmation of

the reality of this incident, the most emphatic *affirmation* of it. (*Interpretation of Dreams* 328)

One should pause over the way Freud singles out and emphasizes the “dream within a dream” for its “reality” over and above the mere “wish” entailed within a normal dream. The utility of this distinction for the analysis of the “film within the film” and Alex’s reaction to it in *Clockwork* resides in the fact that together they touch on both the historical “reality” of modern psychology, especially behaviorism, and on the historical development of cinema aesthetics in anticipation and in syncopation with technical breakthroughs and aesthetic touchstones, respectively, in cinema history. In particular, this scene looks both backward to other unique close-up shots of the eye in the historical development of the visual logic of suture and forward to what Michel Chion has called the “soft revolution” of recent decades that has made suture a primarily aural aspect of film and no longer predominantly visual. Žižek describes this change as one that enables filmmakers “not only to reproduce exactly the ‘original,’ ‘natural’ sound but even to reinforce it and to render audible details that would be missed if we were to find ourselves in the reality recorded by the film” (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 40). In other words, Kubrick’s use of music in this indoctrination scene both marks and anticipates the crucial shift in the historical development of suture – when its logic became primarily aural rather than visual. The “reality” of the memory of *Clockwork*’s “film within the film” is thus a complex historical one pointing both forward sonically and backward visually in cinema history.

On the crucial second day of reprogramming Alex finds out why the treatment is named Ludovico (Italian for Ludwig, as in Beethoven) when an unfortunate choice of background music catches his attention. The scenes he is watching at the time are from Nazi newsreels and

propaganda films, the music is an arrangement for moog synthesizers of the Turkish March section from the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Alex: (VOICEOVER) It was the next day and I had done my best to play it their way...while they flashed nasty bits of horror-show violence on the screen, though not on the soundtrack, the only sound being music. Then, I noticed, in all my pains and sickness, what music it was that cracked and boomed. It was Ludwig van, Ninth Symphony, Fourth Movement.

Alex: 'No! No! Stop it! Stop it, please! I beg you! This is sick! It's a sin! It's a sin! It's a sin!'

Doctor: 'Sin? What's all this about sin?'

Alex: 'That, using Ludwig van like that. It can go up to anyone. Beethoven's just not music!'

Doctor: 'Are you referring to the background score?'

Alex: 'Yes!'

Doctor: 'You've heard Beethoven before?'

Alex: 'Yes!'

Doctor: 'So, you're keen on music?'

Alex: 'Yes!'

Doctor (Aside): 'It can't be helped. Perhaps that's the punishment element. The Governor ought to be pleased.'

Doctor: 'I'm sorry, Alex. This is for your own good. You'll have to bear with us for a while.'

Alex: 'But it's not fair I should feel ill, when I hear lovely, lovely Ludwig van.'

(1:17-1:19)

This scene and its more general sequence realize the old “paranoid leftist” description, from the heyday of Althusserian psychoanalytic theory, of the viewer dominated by the “cinematic apparatus.” Indeed, in light of this scene one is even tempted to rehabilitate Jean-Louis Baudry’s heavily criticized analogy between the position of the viewer in the movie theater and the prisoner in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” Like Plato’s prisoners, Alex is immobilized and forced to stare at the images passing before him. And in a detail that Plato might have appreciated, not only is Alex totally immobilized, but his eyes are pried open to prevent him from refusing the treatment’s visual medicine, while a thoughtful assistant adds moisturizing drops to them continuously to compensate for his temporary inability to blink. On the other hand, unlike Plato’s prisoners, Alex knows “the shadows of artifacts” he sees before him are not the real thing, that they are just images from a “professional piece of sinny.” Furthermore, he knows there is a reality beyond the theater, and that he is there as part of an experimental treatment. In this regard the unconscious factor that is so crucial to the power of suture over spectators is absent here. Kubrick’s version of suture is, on the contrary, seemingly fully conscious. The subject knows full well he is being indoctrinated and yet nevertheless the indoctrination apparently works. But this is not due to the refined workings of ideology in Alex’s actions and the disavowed beliefs that underpin them, as post-Marxian thought might have it. For Kubrick, the solution to transforming the test subject is much more brutal and cynical. The crucial torture pill intervenes in his physical and neurological experience, while the music activates his mind’s associative faculty. This is a picture of what suture would look like if one could bypass the need to manipulate the unconscious mind, the site of Alex’s deepest

pathological fantasies, with both a pill that intervenes more directly at a neurological level and a musical accompaniment to create “rewarding associations” with the pill’s effects.

On the other hand, what if what we are seeing here is not Alex’s psyche deprived of an unconscious, but his unconscious rendered conscious as in a dream? In essence, this is how this scene should be read. Indeed, crucial attributes of the Freudian unconscious are on full display here, including sensory perception organization and exemption from mutual contradiction (“The Unconscious” 584). Regarding the organization of sensations, what Freud called the “primary processes,” it is not enough for Alex to know it is wrong to want to commit violent acts and to do so – he must be made to feel it. Thus his primary sensory responses, in Freud’s terms his “mobilities of cathexes,” are being brutally reorganized with the help of the torture pill, in a nightmarish realization of “total cinema” that questions the very existence of human freedom, as so many critics of the film and the Burgess novel have suggested. As for exemption from mutual contradiction, there is almost an overload of irony in this scene: beginning with the sick if unoriginal joke of playing Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” alongside both images of Nazi violence and the exploitative machinations of Alex’s Pavlovian reprogramming. Then there are Alex’s own physical and logical states in their disconnection (i.e., he sees something he knows he loves but is forced to associate it with feelings of nausea and impending death).

Above all, the scene attempts to marry behavioral psychology and psychoanalysis. The methodology of the Ludovico treatment is of course behavioral, but the intended effect, the reorganization of the subject’s fundamental fantasies and his way of relating to them, is arguably the exclusive territory of psychoanalysis – a fact that is all but confirmed by the ultimate failure of the “Ludovico” treatment to help Alex. But it is not that the treatment is not radical enough; it is, instead, too radical – aiming at rewriting Alex’s relationship to his fantasies rather than, as

psychoanalysis would have it, helping him to understand them without attempting a final cure. Yet, for a patient like Alex the psychoanalytic setting is clearly not enough. Thus in a final gesture toward reality, Alex presents a historically difficult case for modern psychology – why is a person of intelligence raised in a stable home environment still a sociopath? In Alex’s very ever-present mockery of psychological explanations and his “liberated” sexuality, the film suggests that psychoanalysis is ineffective in such cases, but the alternative of behaviorism seems only capable of remaking him as a broken man not a free one.

The crucial shot as regards Alex’s unconscious appearing fully conscious, and therefore ready for its reorganization, is the extreme close-up on his eye as he screams at having recognized the Beethoven. For a proper sense of its place in the historical development in the logic of suture, this shot should be read in comparison with two other famous close-ups on the eye that precede it in cinema history: the infamous moment in Buñuel and Dalí’s *Un chien andalou* where a woman’s eyeball is sliced open with a razor, and the zoom out from Marion’s lifeless eye in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Both of these legendary “eye shots” and their accompanying sequences traffic in violence towards women and surrealism, and like *Clockwork*, *Un chien andalou* also has German art music in the background. Less obviously, both “eye shots” are also arguably metaphors for their preceding reverse shots that imply a certain depth – in the first case metaphorical, in the second case negative – behind the eye.

- In the Buñuel and Dalí sequence, the point cannot be emphasized enough that the woman’s eye is being slit open only in her male companion’s fantasy. Indeed, when he first comes out to the balcony he is alone and it is only after he looks up at the moon (the metaphorical counterpart of her eye) that she is magically seated next to where he stands. Moreover, he never stops looking at the moon as he moves behind her and forces open

her eye. When he cuts it open the film dwells on the depth of flesh and blood behind this most mystified of human organs all while it has been intercutting it with match-cut shots of the moon and a thin cloud crossing it. In a gesture of Freudian interpretation, this equation suggests that the image of the cloud with the moon running through it reminds the man of his unconscious belief in the primordial castration of women, a belief then realized by the film in a fantasy sequence. In the depth behind the eye that is cut open thus lays an unconscious belief of classical Freudian derivation, hardly surprising given the influence of Freudian thought on surrealism.

- As regards its similarly famous “eye shot,” *Psycho* seems to be a historically updated remake of *Andalou*; or as Freud put it in his comparison of Oedipus to Hamlet, they are “rooted in the same soil.” But whereas Freud saw in the historical difference between the Oedipus and Hamlet the “progress of repression in the emotional life of humanity,” in the case of the historical difference between *Un chien andalou* and *Psycho* almost the opposite occurs (*Interpretation* 277). The difference is not one of a progress of repression but one of a progress in de-sublimation, of sublimation coming undone – what is thus measured is not the progress of repression but the progress of violence in the means of representing “the return of the repressed” in the cinema – measured by the emergence of the epochal, “realistic” exploitative violence in *Psycho* and a certain obstinacy of interpretation on the part of the material in Hitchcock’s “eye shot” in particular. Thus, Marion’s death that precedes the close-up on her eye is not a dream-like fantasy but a brutal murder depicted in what is – despite surreal touches – essentially a psychologically realistic way. Similarly, the metaphorical relationship between the close-up shot on the drain and Marion’s eye shot cannot be explained in a classical

Freudian way. By equating her eye with the emptiness of the drain, Hitchcock seems to imply that there is no interpretation here beyond a negative one, no phallic mother, primordial female castration or even a soul behind the eye's window – only an abyss.

To go a step further, the shot of Alex's eye is thus, in a sense, the third part of this trilogy, in which Kubrick's historical difference can be summed up by the incongruous proposition that "one can hear with one's eyes." The historical point made here by Kubrick is that the cinema was moving forward technologically on the back of advances in sound production as well as images – and thus beyond the dialectics of repression and its return and towards a phenomenology of immersion with the boundaries between external and internal increasing blurred, not unlike the workings of Alex's torture pill that simulates the experience of death by external means but without the phenomenological experience of an outer threat on Alex's part. What are missing from the close-up on Alex's eye in *Clockwork*, in other words, are exactly the visual implications and/or explicit representations of negative depth or unconscious material that distinguish the sequences of Buñuel/Dalí and Hitchcock.¹⁸ Instead, we see the eye reduced to an instrument for detecting and processing light, connoted by the metal brackets holding it open, which make Dalí's hand brutally seizing the woman's face seem "humanistic" by comparison. But this is not to say that this shot is totally without implications – indeed, given the way Beethoven is not only heard but uniquely mentioned, the main implication is decidedly aural. The irony then is that

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson has also drawn attention to the lack of depth in Kubrick as compared to Hitchcock, but at the level of the depiction of minor characters:

In Hitchcock...minor characters were still conceived as idiosyncratic, as interesting/amusing...so we have, in *Vertigo*, the manager of the San Francisco boarding house who suddenly rears up from behind the apparently empty desk with the excuse that she was 'oiling the leaves' of her rubber plant; or the small-town sheriff, in *Psycho*, who sardonically syllabizes the name of the missing big city detective through his cigar smoke ("Ar-bo-gast")...Nothing of the sort in Kubrick: these depthless people, whether on their way to the moon, or coming to the end of another season in the great hotel at the end of the world, are standardized and without interest, their rhythmic smiles as habituated as the recurrence of a radio-announcer's drawn breath." ("Historicism in *The Shining*" 118-119)

although this is ostensibly the most intense shot of Alex's gaze in the entire reeducation sequence, the shot's true focus is external to the visual medium as such.

In this shift of the film's focus from the interplay of the "eye shot" with images that seem to imply a depth of meaning – even if only negative – behind the eye, to an "eye shot" where the main implication concerns the role of music and by extension film sound in the effectiveness of cinematic art for representing the subject's unconscious, Kubrick essentially predicts and commits to celluloid the future of cinema history in an abbreviated form. In other words, this sequence's emphasis on music effectively anticipates "the soft revolution" in film sound that was to take place in coming years and that was reflected by the contemporaneous rise of film sound studies within academic cinema studies. A propos the films of David Lynch, Žižek sums up this historical change in the cinematic experience noted by Michel Chion among others:

It is no longer appropriate to say that the sound "accompanies" the flow of images, insofar as it is now the soundtrack that functions as the elementary "frame of reference" enabling us to orient ourselves in the diegetic space. Bombarding us with details from different directions...the sound takes over the function of the establishing shot. The soundtrack gives us the basic perspective, the "map" of the situation, and guarantees its continuity, while the images are reduced to isolated fragments that float freely in the universal medium of the sound aquarium. (*Looking Awry* 40)

Among other things, at the level of rhetorical figures, this description implies the experience of immersion. One has only to add that in Kubrick's films the viewer and not just the images swims in "the sound aquarium," and for aesthetic and historically-conditioned reasons the sound in Kubrick's aquarium was mostly music.

This unique sequence in *A Clockwork Orange* is thus valuable for two related reasons. First, it is an emblem, albeit an exaggerated one, for the strange experience of seeing a Kubrick film and the crucial role of music in the experience of his films. In this regard, recall that prior to hearing Beethoven Alex was enduring his treatment well-enough. He was even resisting it with ironic detachment, holding out hope that he could continue to maintain the ruse of the choir-boy image he had adopted in prison. But once he hears his beloved Beethoven the fun is over. The logic of the cut that follows his second day of treatment is revealing in this regard. After his vociferous complaints about Beethoven's inclusion in the course of treatment, the film jumps forward to Alex's publicity appearance for media members and dignitaries to prove he's been "cured." It is as if once the music was (accidentally) included the treatment worked. In an instance of immersion, the music seems to have sutured the gap between his private inner fantasy and the physiological changes induced by the treatment. It is his most "rewarding association," to put it in his doctor's understated terms. And are not viewers of Kubrick in a less burdensome version of Alex's position? Not that they necessarily know all the musical selections they hear or that they are all cultured sadists, but that the effect of the treatment – i.e., of seeing one of Kubrick's films – isn't complete until the music grabs hold of us. This brings one to the second level of insight in this scene. At a historical level the power of music and by extension sound in this sequence effectively anticipates how the cinema would be revolutionized by new sound technologies in the years just after this film. Thus the scene is emblematic not only of the strange feeling that music lends to seeing a Kubrick film but also of the way sound would come to predominate in the viewer's experience in the second-era of the new Hollywood and, paradigmatically, its blockbuster spectacles. Finally, the sequence attempts to sketch the

psychological implications of this historical shift in cinematic experience in its hyperbolic figure of the viewer as a prisoner and the film as a means of direct ideological reeducation.

Music as History in 2001

In “Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge,” her acclaimed 1969 essay on *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which is often noted as a founding text in modern cinema theory, Annette Michelson perspicaciously remarks that critics who decry the lack of events in Kubrick’s films are missing the point because Kubrick’s films in fact “solicit...the relocation of the terrain upon which things happen” (204). For Michelson, *2001*’s relocation is toward its special effects, so that the very experience of them as “special” is lost, and they come to appear normal, thus compounding their illusory power. Michelson’s suggestive idea can be supplemented in two further ways. First, as in *Clockwork*, this “relocation” by Kubrick again historically anticipates technological advances, in this case in computer-generated images that allowed lesser and less well-funded directors to similarly have special effects comprise the majority of a film. Secondly, the relocation of the event in *2001* is not only to the epochal visual effects, but also to the musical score – or more precisely to the suturing and de-suturing interactions between the film’s temporality and that of its composite, modern classical score.

Thus, what is conspicuously historically absent in the diegesis of *2001* “returns” in the score’s interaction with the film – namely, modern history itself transfigured as a brief survey of modern classical music history. Michelson’s aforementioned essay on *2001* somewhat improbably resembles these remarks as well, for it too has a strange symptomatic absence. It is a wide-ranging, erudite affair that touches on many developments in film and art history while also foreshadowing the coming evolution of US cinema studies toward psychoanalytic film theory. It is thus an essay full of provisional and tentative ideas, but rendered with a sense of grand

proportion equal almost to the film that is its subject. Yet despite this open-minded approach, music is hardly mentioned in her survey of the film and its many contexts. And when it is, it is not the music in the film, but Wagner and Debussy and the crises in the music criticisms of their times that is mirrored, for Michelson, in the prevailing insipidness of film writing in the late '60s. Thus while the film's score figures the modern history otherwise repressed by the film's storylines set in prehistoric and futuristic times, the score is also repressed in Michelson's account of the film. But if, as Michelson suggests, *2001* is a film whose ontogeny recapitulates a phylogeny, whose development seems to restage the historical unfolding of the cinema as such, then given music's omnipresence in film history surely there must be a place for it in an account of the film as inspired as hers.

Going right to the point in supplementing Michelson, my analysis here will focus on one of the film's most iconic scenes – the space-docking sequence after the momentous match-cut from prehistory to the near future – precisely because if ever there was a place in cinema history where the music (Johan Strauss's *Blue Danube*) is effectively meant to replace historical representation as such, this is surely it. And yet the music seems happily unaware of its huge representational burden. Here is how film music scholar Royal Brown reads this and other defining moments of Kubrick's use of classical music:

The excerpts of classical music compositions that replace the original film score no longer function purely as backing for key emotional situations, but rather exist as a kind of parallel emotional/aesthetic universe...more as a separate artistic fragment expressing in a different medium what the film expresses in visual and narrative terms than as a generator of narrative affect...the music, rather than supporting and/or coloring the visual images and narrative situations, stands as an image in its own right, helping the audience

read the film's other images as such rather than as a replacement for or imitation of objective reality. (*Overtones and Undertones* 239-240)

There is much to agree with in these lines – above all, their emphasis on the ideational value of the work the Strauss waltz is doing in this sequence – “expressing in a different medium what the film expresses in visual and narrative terms.” Where this reading needs aid is on the matter of the historical connotations of the waltz, which one might begin to discuss by noting the irony of choice of the waltz for a space flight sequence. Thus, for instance, the leisurely tempo and feel of the waltz surely is an apt “parallel” for the sequence's long shots and repeated emphasis on weightlessness. Moreover, given its lengthy and uninterrupted quotation, Brown is also justified in the calling the music in such a scene a distinct “universe.” But neither of these terms accounts for the truly magical element of this scene: the comic juxtaposition of music from a bygone era with images of the future. What makes this sequence remarkable aren't just the parallels between the two universes, strong as they are, but also the historical discontinuity between them. The music here, so paradigmatic of the century that “ended in the birth of cinema,” as Michelson put it, is then an “aural image” of precisely the era that Michelson sees as integral to an understanding of the importance of Kubrick's achievement in *2001*, the same era that Kubrick ironically cut right out of his science fiction epic.

Alex Ross has generalized this insight, observing that the representation of modern history occluded from the film is transposed into the film's classical compilation score more generally, so that the music in the film itself represents not only history but also the history of modern music from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the time of the film's production, from Richard Strauss to György Ligeti. “The film neatly brackets the entire arc of twentieth-century musical history. It begins with Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*...in the final

section, the movie is subsumed into Ligeti's alternate universe, spiraling through the outer limits of expression" (*The Rest Is Noise* 469). Within this context of the musical score as an abbreviated version of modern history, a detailed description of the music in the space-docking sequence is justified because of the exceptional nature of this scene as not only the one truly comic moment in the film, but also – as such – the moment of the strongest temporal discontinuity between the historical moment imagined by the film and the one connoted by the score. Finally, it is the one prominent piece of music in the score that does not fit into the “arc of twentieth century music” otherwise discernible in the score.

Indeed, for Pauline Kael, this sequence was the only redeeming part of the movie because of the lightheartedness with which the Strauss waltz metaphorically reconfigures space as a grand ballroom in which machines flirt and play in a cosmic dance. The visual punch-line of the joke, as Naremore and others mention with some embarrassment, is that the space shuttle docking in the station resembles coitus – but the film is more concerned with the courtship than with the moment of consummation. Indeed, Strauss' waltz, like all his waltzes, begins slowly – not yet at dancing speed – which traditionally would have allowed the dancers' time to find their partners and assemble. So too, Kubrick's opening montage for this sequence introduces a few scattered spacecraft with the Earth and the moon as a backdrop. Kubrick then focuses in on the two partners who will be the subject of the dance/space-docking sequence. First, the space station is shown rotating in a deft allusion to the spiraling movement of the Viennese waltz itself. Second, one sees the much smaller space shuttle, which appears just as the main melody is stated for a second time, now at a proper dance tempo rather than as an introductory atmospheric. The dance within the dance follows suit when – while an important bureaucrat sleeps – his stewardess' mundane task of securing his loose pen is transfigured as she struggles to maneuver

in a weightless environment and capture the pen floating harmlessly in the aisle. Still, the ultimate joke in this small human moment seems to be that one can find time for a routine commuter nap with the greatest miracles of technology going on unnoticed. As film critic Joseph Gelmis acerbically put it in his largely negative review (that he recanted shortly thereafter), Kubrick succeeded in turning “the awesomeness of space travel [into] a banal commuting chore” (quoted in Patterson, “Music, Structure and Metaphor in *2001*” 445.) But rather than being a criticism, this fact points to how Kubrick tempered the introduction of the film’s first space sequence with a dose of understated humor.

But there is another level to the effect of the Strauss in this sequence that – in a gesture towards the idea of immersion not unlike the one in *Clockwork* – surpasses its role as a historical metaphor within a comic interlude and inverts the usual circuit of association between preexisting music and images. What if ultimately what the music is doing in this sequence, along the lines of Cézanne’s notion of rendering seeing itself rather than the thing seen, is accomplishing the feat of rendering the psychological process of hearing rather than the thing heard? What if the images one sees are meant to replace the personal associations so commonly reported in a listener’s reaction to music? This would be the authoritarian aspect of this sequence – the movie is listening for us. Viewers are not free to make their own associations, their own pictures of what the music is. They are practically compelled to accept the film’s association of Strauss with space flight as their own. For, indeed, after countless pop-culture parodies, this seems to have come to pass. The historical repression is thus redoubled here: the missing history of mankind that *2001* match-cuts passed is comically “under-represented” with a light waltz, and then this waltz’s historicity is supplanted in the viewer’s associative faculty by sequences of images from the future. Finally, the idea that the film is listening for us

foreshadows the most iconic character of the film, the sentient HAL 9000 computer who does our thinking for us.

Barry Lyndon, Oedipal Imbroglia, and Schubert's Historical Meaning

If one looks more broadly at the relationship between Kubrick's use of music in his films from *2001* onwards and the historical milieu implied by the films, instructive patterns begin to emerge. There are films where the musical selections are drawn from music composed contemporaneously to the time period of the film, that participate in the same zeitgeist as the diegetic world of the film: *Barry Lyndon* and eighteenth century classical music, *The Shining* and sonority-based post-tonal music of the post-war period, and *Full Metal Jacket* and pop and rock of the 1960s. On the other hand, *2001*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, and *Clockwork Orange* each draw more loosely on musical sources of various periods and styles. One could also make a third category that combines films from both these groupings based on the shared trait of a heavy reliance on the music of György Ligeti: *2001*, *The Shining*, and *Eyes Wide Shut*.¹⁹

Of the historically grounded compilation scores, *Barry Lyndon's* is probably the most easily recognizable as such. But there are two meaningful exceptions to the general coincidence of the film's eighteenth-century period and its music. The first exception is more obvious, the use of traditional folksongs performed by The Chieftains, which, perhaps unintentionally, represents both the folk revival of the film's mid-eighteenth century time period and also the Anglo-American folk music movement that crested a decade before but was still reverberating at the time of the film's release. As a pastiche of eighteenth century folksong performance, The Chieftains' music is equivalent to the other great formal lengths to which Kubrick went to create a realistic representation of the period, including the use of lavish costumes and make-up, and –

¹⁹ Ligeti's music seems to have appealed to Kubrick so much that one is tempted to see Kubrick in part as a filmic librettist for these Ligeti compositions.

most famously – his development of cameras and lenses that could film by candlelight, so that the period before electric lighting could be represented as such (Naremore 171-172).

The second exception to the general rule of the music coming from the depicted historical period is more hidden because the work in question dates from only shortly after the end of the eighteenth century – i.e., the “Andante Con Moto” from Schubert’s Piano Trio No.2 in E flat (1827), which is heard in lengthy excerpts at the conclusions of both parts of the film (and is commonly seen by musicologists as Schubert’s elegy for the death of Beethoven due to its allusion to the theme from the Funeral March from Beethoven’s 3rd Symphony and its premiere at a concert marking the first anniversary of Beethoven’s death). But more than a trivial anachronism, like many exceptions in Kubrick, this one too is meaningful. This becomes clear not so much the first time the Schubert occurs as when it is repeated at the conclusion of the film, which marks the end of the film as 1789, the year of the French Revolution, as the camera shows a close-up of a check Lady Lyndon is writing for Barry’s annuity with the conspicuous date in plain view.

Unlike the film’s other prominent musical works by Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart, Handel, the Schubert Trio dates from the nineteenth century, just like Thackeray’s novel on which the film is based. Born in 1797, Schubert came of age in the “new age” of the bourgeoisie. He does not belong to the historical setting of the film and his music is the one piece that the characters could not have heard. Furthermore, Schubert’s music is renowned for reflecting the difference between these two eras brought about by the traumatic eruption of the French Revolution:

In Europe, after the intoxication of the French Revolution, the failure of its many expectations, and the violence of succeeding decades, stability was conceived no longer as a characterless, passive state, as the absence of turmoil, but as an arbitrary condition

imposed by force and by the exercise of power. For Schubert's generation, the unspoken faith in a preexisting theoretical order of experience from within was beginning to weaken. The rapid and confusing succession of events in contemporary life was not, as before, a surface manifestation of a simpler order and more fundamental laws, moral and divine, but the basis of history and of existence. (Rosen, *Frontiers of Meaning* 124-125)

Thus, far from a sign of period authenticity, like the narrator's voiceovers, the music undermines the film's attempts to recreate its historical period in an immediate way. It is a mark not of history in the simple sense of trying to recapture the period as if no time had passed in the interim, as if we could actually return to it. On the contrary, the "Andante" bears witness to the way a moment in the past we wish to consider is filtered and altered by intervening periods and events. The "Andante" is quite literally such an alteration. Conversely, the Schubert's very juxtaposition with the wrong historical period bears witness to the way in which a historical event or person can occur at the wrong time, out of phase with its historical context, which is precisely the case with Barry and his attempt to gain admittance to the peerage of George III.

At a practical story-telling level, the most important features of the Schubert are its similarities with the narrator: temporally, they both look back on the events of the story from the future – formally, they remain outside of the diegesis, at least at a denotative level.²⁰ As many critics of the film have complained, the narrator often gives away what will happen by explicitly stating important outcomes before the film represents them: for example, that Barry's only son will not survive childhood. As music, the Schubert cannot be so explicit, but in its own more affective language it too foreshadows the film's important future events. Thus, in the fold

²⁰ The Thackeray novel is similarly written in a retrospective mode and, as fake memoir, it is pastiche of the picaresque, eighteenth-century novels of Henry Fielding. But as Naremore puts it, "the film utterly transforms its source" (177). Thus for a fuller account of the differences and similarities between the novel and the film, with the differences predominating, see Naremore's discussion in *On Kubrick* (175-179).

between the Schubert and the film the future is included in a double-sense: both at the level of the film's story and in the broader historical perspective. The Schubert foretells doom in both sequences in which it is heard. In the first sequence, where Barry makes his conquest of Lady Lyndon, it spells doom to Barry's marriage. In the second sequence, at the conclusion of the film, it spells doom to the whole aristocratic world he sought to inhabit. Finally, not only does the Schubert foretell the French Revolution, but also it expresses its failure and subsequent replacement by the rapid and chaotic succession of events that became the basis for modern experience rather than the Revolutionary faith in fixed ideas.

At the more immediate aesthetic level, one might say the "Andante" is similar to the narrator's voice as well: each has gravitas but also irony, an air of authority but a rhetorical preference for understatement. In its first appearance, the "Andante" plays continuously, though in an edited and arranged form, through three scenes that present Barry's desire for a good marriage financially speaking, dramatize his seduction of the rich and beautiful Lady Lyndon, and finally explain that she is now, a little more than six hours after meeting him, fully in love. The music gives dramatic continuity to these three distinct scenes, covering over the fact that although the events of these scenes are of critical importance to the film, little which has transpired so far has prepared us for them. Thus it is up to the narrator to intervene and give an account of Barry's motivations for marriage. Add this fact of a picaresque rather than a tightly plotted story to the way the whole sequence is over almost before it has begun, and Barry's conquest of Lady Lyndon is more of an afterthought than a proper ending to Part I of the film. Although the seduction scene is beautiful, it is mostly needed as a set-up for the second half of the film. It is thus clear that Kubrick is not terribly interested in lingering doubtfully over their courtship. But despite the way the music helps make the conquest of Lady Lyndon seem not so

much natural and convincing as simply preordained, there are key details and a few surprises in the Schubert's interaction with the film, particularly in the balcony scene, that emerge upon a closer inspection.

The "Andante" can first be heard when an establishing shot introduces the castle where Barry (Ryan O'Neil) will, in short order, secure the heart of Lady Lyndon (Marisa Berenson). As aristocrats leisurely mingle in the castle's park and garden, the narrator describes Barry's mental state after years of wandering with little to show for himself.

Five years in the army and some considerable experience of the world had by now dispelled any of those romantic notions regarding love with which Barry commenced life. And he began to have it in mind, as so many gentlemen have done before him, to marry a woman of fortune and condition. And as such things so often happen, these thoughts closely coincided with his setting first sight upon a lady who will henceforth play a considerable part in the drama of his life, The Countess of Lyndon...a woman of vast wealth and great beauty. (1:32)

The nice surprise of the coincidence of these lines with the Schubert is the effect they have on the music. Namely, they "relocate" the music to the threshold between love and death, estranging this funeral music by using it to dramatize love and marriage. The "Andante" thus emphasizes not only the cunning and restraint required by Barry to succeed in his conquest, but also the way his whole love for her is inauthentic, dead on arrival. This music is too precise and calculating to be mistaken for the state of emergency known as love; it confirms, instead, the idea that he is seeking a woman of fortune. Furthermore, while the narrator mentions Barry's motivations but not Lady Lyndon's, the structure of the music presents both their desires as it mirrors the implicit quid pro quo between them. Of course, on the one hand, she gives him

access to her fortune and social sphere. But, on the other hand, he gives her not just the immediate thrill of an illicit love affair, the standard *Bovarysme* fantasy, but also, when he begins to cheat on her and otherwise mistreat her, he further justifies her melancholia and incipient hysteria. The music renders this in the way the memorable C minor principal theme is heard in separate iterations first in the cello and then in the piano. Retrospectively, it is significant to recall that Lady Lyndon herself plays the piano in a few of the film's later scenes. The two instances of the melody coincide with a portion of the narrator's discussion devoted first to Barry (see the above quotation) and then to the Countess. In the latter instance the narrator introduces her twin burdens: her marriage to the elderly and crippled Lord Bullingdon and her melancholic son, whose oedipal desire for his mother is dwelled on repeatedly in the film. While the narrator speaks about Barry, the cello plays the melody – that the first statement of the principle theme would occur in a “lower” voice was a significant aesthetic development, with obvious historical implications, later normalized in the Romantic period. It is the film's first musical suggestion that Barry's attempt to reach the pinnacle of society is happening at the wrong historical moment. It is too soon, like hearing Schubert before the French Revolution, historically impossible. Then when the narrator turns his attention to Lady Lyndon's curriculum vitae, the same C minor melody is heard in the piano, her instrument. The melody when heard in the piano becomes a synecdoche for her staid manner amongst her daily worries and concerns.

As mentioned earlier, the Schubert then serves as a sound bridge to the next scene, which features practically no dialogue, a recurring trait of musically meaningful moments in Kubrick. It is evening, and the Countess and Barry are seated across from each other at the card table, trading small sums of money and amorous glances. The “Andante” has modulated to the relative major key of C minor, E flat major, and a new theme, but one that is based on developing a motif

from the conclusion of the principle theme. The music is wistful and calm, more light than dark. Then as they become more and more transfixed by one another, the Schubert (according to the film's simplified arrangement anyway) returns to the by now familiar C minor melody. The music seems to know more than the characters here. When it returns to the main melody it seems to say, "What are you two waiting for? Don't you know you have an appointment with destiny on the balcony?" It is only after the C minor melody has seemingly "reminded" them of this that Lady Lyndon absconds to the balcony, where she is soon met by Barry for their first kiss.

A crucial detail of the Schubert that I have neglected to mention thus far is the role of the violin in it. Regarding the exposition of the principal theme, the violin is a mere afterthought. While the cello plays the melody, it is accompanied only by the piano and the structure of the music thereby supports the thesis that Barry (as metaphorically represented by the cello) can get on perfectly well with only the support of his rich wife (for whom the piano is a synecdoche). But this, of course, is an illusion; there is a violin. In other words, there is a third party impeding their marriage's success and the rise of the social class Barry's represents more generally. In the more public social sphere of the gaming parlor, when the music has moved to a new key and different, lighter material, the violin is much more prominent, as if to say their love must deal with society's objections to their attachment across class boundaries. However, there is an even more precise way to read the violin, and the cello for that matter, that is discernible only when the C minor melody is in piano. Unlike when the cello has the melody, when the piano plays it, both the violin and the cello play the accompaniment figure; together they support the piano's melody. In this case, the third party that is introduced is not a generalized social order but the rival for Lady Lyndon's love, her son, the young Lord Bullingdon. The lesson of the structure of

the music here for characters in the film is that, although the violin cannot play the melody, it nevertheless prevents the music from being a sonata, a duet between Barry and Lady Lyndon. The film's judgment on the music is thus that the "Andante," especially as it is arranged for the film, is not so much a piece of music for piano trio as it is a "failed" cello sonata, one where a violin keeps interrupting the dialogue. And differences notwithstanding, the same goes for Lord Bullingdon's relationship to his mother and his new stepfather. He cannot couple with his mother, as he would like, or prevent her new marriage to the meddling upstart from the poor Irish gentry, but he can through cunning obstinacy thwart Barry's attempts to remain in his marriage and receive the title that would guarantee Barry's family aristocratic status for generations to come.

If this reading seems too speculative, consider the key moment in Part II of the film. After realizing that without an aristocratic title of his own he and his family will be penniless upon his wife's death, Barry sets out to buy a title by hosting lavish dinners, overpaying for lands and luxury goods, and administering bribes in high places – all thanks to his wife's deep pockets. His efforts in the clientelist universe have yielded a few well-connected allies and even a visit with George III when a fateful, one might say historically necessary, misstep dooms the enterprise. The scene in question begins harmlessly enough with images of Lady Lyndon performing a chamber music concert for Barry and an assortment of their guests, in what is no doubt another event to help secure Barry's peerage. Then Lord Bullingdon and Brian Lyndon, Barry's son by Lady Lyndon, interrupt the show by parading into the recital hall with Lord Bullingdon having put Brian literally in his too big shoes so as to cause enough noise to drown out the music. Brian is very much his father's son here: he has intruded on a social group to which he does not belong, with the only difference being that he is blissfully unaware of it. As

he walks next to Bullingdon, the difference between these half-brothers could not be greater. Brian is full of youthful energy, obscene smiles, amusement with his little joke, and happy ignorance of his manipulation. Meanwhile, Bullingdon has the pale complexion of his sickly father and dying class. Taken together they are a figure for the Schubert Trio's forward and backward looking character – its debt to and rewriting of Beethoven and its own originality – and for the stir such music from the future would someday cause.

Once the duo has made it to the front of the recital hall and the music has stopped, Bullingdon makes a sarcastic bow in front of Barry and asks his mother, “Don't you think he fits my shoes very well, your ladyship?” This is followed by a medium shot of Bullingdon kneeling to speak to Brian with Lady Lyndon in the background. The shot is from the point of view of Barry, and its composition encapsulates his predicament. Here is his stepson, his chief obstacle to securing his family's future, grabbing hold of his son while standing between Barry and Lady Lyndon. Continuing with the sarcasm, Bullingdon says to Brian, “Dear child, what a pity it is that I'm not dead for your sake. The Lyndons would then have a worthy representative and enjoy all the benefits of illustrious blood of the ‘Barrys’ of ‘Barryville.’” After this mocking reference to a fictional Barryville estate, Bullingdon turns to the person he has been addressing all along, Barry himself, and asks, “Would they not, Mr. Redmond Barry?” In the counter-shot, Barry is stone-faced with anger while Lady Lyndon rises from the piano bench and seizes her younger child from her eldest. “From the way I love this child, my lord, you ought to know how I would have loved his elder brother had he proved worthy of any mother's affection.” As she attempts to flee the room with Brian in tow, Bullingdon lets fly one final litany of abusive accusations against Barry, culminating with the pronouncement that he will leave their home and never return as long as Barry is alive. As a devastated Lady Lyndon leaves the room in tears,

Barry – no longer able to control his emotions – brutally assaults Bullingdon much to the horror of his guests. In this way he provides proof of Bullingdon’s accusations against him for all to see (2:11-2:15).

To sum up, the scene just described is a filmic representation of the antagonistic structure of the Schubert “Andante” transposed into the medium of cinema by Kubrick. It is a representation of the Schubert’s development section by other and more temporally contradictory means, at once more modern technologically and but also anachronistically preceding the Schubert in terms of historical period of the story’s setting. To put it speculatively, Kubrick has reproduced the metaphysical substance of the “Andante” in the film itself in an anachronistic historical guise. When we next hear the Schubert there is some proof of this theory. When it recurs at the end of the movie, the part we hear is the end of the “Andante.” So the central section of the piece never occurs, except by means of Kubrick’s dramatic rendering of the struggle between piano, violin, and cello as the struggle between Lady Lyndon, Lord Bullingdon, and Barry. To put it in a psychoanalytic way, the film repressed the central section of the Schubert on the soundtrack only to have it return not in but *as* the diegesis of the film. This necessarily leads to conflict because the music is appearing too soon in history, just as Barry, a figure for the coming era of the bourgeoisie is trying to overtake his aristocratic predecessors too soon, before 1789.

Turning to the end of the film, one can find many insightful differences between the final use of the Schubert there and the earlier one from the courtship scenes. The music begins as before, with the piano repeating the now fitting funeral march accompaniment with its signature dotted-eighth note followed by a sixteenth note figure. As Barry hobbles out of the lowly inn where he has recovered from the loss of his leg in a duel with Bullingdon, the melody once again

sounds in the cello. But this time its message has finally reached its sender; its prophecy has come true. His marriage effectively over, Barry has been impoverished, disfigured, and disgraced. “He never saw Lady Lyndon again.” As these words are heard, there is freeze frame on Barry as he enters the coach; this is the last we hear or see of him. With a cut to the familiar establishing shot of the Lyndon Estate, the Trio moves to the second instance of the main melody, with the accompaniment shifted to the strings and the melody in the piano, again in parallel with a shift from Barry to Lady Lyndon. Again we have the pattern of associating the cello’s turn at the melody with Barry and the piano’s with Lady Lyndon. The next shot shows the interior of the estate, with Lady Lyndon surrounded by her handlers, most notably, Lord Bullingdon. She is busy with the mundane task of writing checks, but the music, like a living memory of her lost love, transfigures this tedious situation. On the third check, dated 1789, she pauses, during which time a shot from her point of view of the name on the check occurs; of course it is Barry’s name she sees. The camera zooms in as she dips her quill in fresh ink and signs her name. The interruption of memory has seemingly passed, and yet the music is doing something new. The violin has taken the lead in the coda to the “Andante,” just as Bullingdon has supplanted Barry in the Lyndon home. The music is winding down; the melody is disintegrating into fragments of itself, and a medium shot shows a despondent Lady Lyndon. Barry is gone but not forgotten. The cello plays a low trill, a shadow of its former melodic glory, while the camera shows Bullingdon – his head lowered – waiting to proceed, fearful of the passion the mere name of his rival has stirred in his mother’s breast. He finally looks up only to find her still transfixed, gazing vacantly. Indeed, the Trio is not done yet either as one last iteration of the melody occurs in the piano with the accompaniment played in a haunting pizzicato by the strings. If the cello can no longer do it, it is now up to the piano. The tempo is

slower, this time with feeling. Her spell finally breaks. She looks down to continue her work, and the melody switches – mid-sentence – to the cello and violin together, as if they were fighting for control of it. The implication is that what her memory has now recalled is the horrible scene during her concert. One last flourish in the piano leads directly to a cut to a final title card, which reads:

EPILOGUE:

IT WAS IN THE REIGN OF GEORGE III

THAT THE AFORESAID PERSONAGES LIVED AND QUARRELLED;

GOOD OR BAD, HANDSOME OR UGLY, RICH OR POOR

THEY ARE ALL EQUAL NOW. (3:01)

This last proposition can of course be read in two ways. They are all equal now in death and in the sense in which the Revolution would render all of us formally equal, even those who have already lived and died. And of course it is finally here that the Schubert regains its proper historical temporality, back to a future the film has, in the narrator's previous words, "not the means of representing" – except with its music.

The Birth of Kubrick's Autumnal Work from the Castrating Spirit of Music

The category of "Late Style" or the quality of "Lateness," as it has been elaborated in, among other places, Beethoven studies and as it has recently found a wider currency thanks to Edward Said's posthumous work on "Late Style," refers not just to works from the end of an artist or thinker's life (chronologically late, that is) or ones that reflect somewhat clichéd dying poses of serenity and melancholic resignation (aesthetically walking with three legs), but ones that wrestle with contradictions that are quite often irresolvable. *Eyes Wide Shut* is "late" in all these senses. It is obviously Kubrick's last film and it is a film of more modest means than

previous ones: with no astonishing special effects breakthroughs, dazzling combat and battle sequences, or supernatural goings on. The music is similarly understated, with the signature pieces being the second movement from Ligeti's solo piano work *Musica Ricercata*, "Mesto, rigido e cermoniale," which at the level of pitch consists of only three notes, and a melancholic jazz waltz from Shostakovich. The film's technical and musical modesty correlates with a personal touch missing from other Kubrick films. He himself doesn't make a cameo, but his family members appear in the Christmas party scene. Consider also the paintings hanging throughout the Harfords' apartment; they are mostly by Kubrick's wife Vivian. Their apartment itself, which critics complained was unrealistically opulent for a Manhattan doctor, is said to resemble the one the Kubricks lived in as a young couple. Along these same lines, the film is set in Kubrick's hometown of New York City. Although the vast majority of it was filmed in locations in the United Kingdom chosen for their resemblance to New York, there is still a sense in which Kubrick was returning home, Ulysses-like, to his initial muse of New York City for the first time since 1956's *The Killing*. And musically, an irresolvable contradiction, or irony, resides in the fact that the film's signature piece of classical music, Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* for solo piano, is an earlier and more conservative work by György Ligeti than his works Kubrick had appropriated in the past. Indeed, the piece dates from before Ligeti's all-important relocation to West Germany from Hungary that essentially determined the aesthetic and ideological trajectory of his art.

On the other hand, the film's philosophic ambition is great, arguably surpassing many of his other movies. In this respect, it is clear that *Eyes* is in conversation with *2001*. Whereas the early movie envisioned a new age and a new man to live in it and surpass it, *Eyes* is about how to live in the postmodern age that hasn't ended yet, despite repeated obituaries, and how to live not

in the infinity of the beyond, but with the psychological infinities of love, fidelity, and fantasy. As Todd McGowan has claimed, the last of these is perhaps the most complicated and enduring concept Kubrick rendered in his art. To put it succinctly, in *Eyes Wide Shut* fantasy is both the innermost core of an individual's identity, the secret of his or her desire; but, for this very reason, it also appears as something unrecognizable to her when it enters consciousness and therefore its validity is questioned while its epistemological basis seems unstable. In his meta-psychological essay "Negation," Freud tried to capture this logic when he claimed "the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is *negated*" ("On Negation" 667). In *Eyes Wide Shut* it is not the repressed idea that is negated, but the regular identity of the character that vanishes on account of the fact that her repressed desires have entered into her conscious minds and actions.

It is from this perspective that one should consider the scene where Alice Harford (Nicole Kidman) confesses her fantasy about the naval officer to her husband Bill (Tom Cruise). She bears her soul to her husband, and what is the effect? She is temporally unrecognizable to him as he stares dumbfounded during her story; she appears monstrously selfish and cruel, an unfaithful temptress unworthy of his trust, let alone his marital vows. In her own estimation, she is also not herself in this scene. Recall her contrition the next morning and how she suggests they stop with the mind games and just "Fuck" at the end of the film. The same holds true of Bill Harford's relationship to his own attempts to act out his fantasies in revenge. When he begins his search for a sexual encounter to get back at Alice for revealing her secret, he becomes someone else: shirking his responsibility to his family as he wanders the night alone, forgoing his identity behind the mask he wears to the orgy, cutting out of work early to pursue leads in his investigations. The difference between them is that whereas for Alice her fantasy is a source of

power over Bill, and of women's power over men more generally according to her own argument (she says, "If you men only knew!" before she divulges it), Bill's fantasy odyssey turns into a debilitating series of failed encounters, compulsively repeated, that lead him out of the domain of desire and into the uncanny territory of what Lacan referred to as the Freudian drive (*trieb*).

But there is also a more practical historical deadlock, about the film rather than in it, that concerns whether or not it should be considered a completed work, given the fact that Kubrick died before post-production and the premiere, before, in other words, being able to apply the finishing touches, as was his custom with previous works. One of the most common and practical ways of dealing with the question of the problem of the film's completion is by way of disavowal. James Naremore's comments are emblematic of this position of "I know perfectly well...but still": "Kubrick died shortly after completing the lengthy production of the film; he probably didn't supervise the final sound mixing, and he had no opportunity to fine-tune the editing after the initial release. But *Eyes* is substantially what he aimed to accomplish and is a remarkable last testament" (*On Kubrick* 222). For Michael Herr, Kubrick's friend and screenwriting partner for *Full Metal Jacket*, the film is similarly an example of the proverbial unfinished masterpiece. Unlike Naremore, who had the luxury of a few years remove, Herr recognized the film's many merits in a heartfelt eulogy of his friend for *Vanity Fair* during the height of the denunciations that followed the film's theatrical release. For Herr, "not only is *Eyes Wide Shut* a flawed masterpiece, like *War and Peace* and Mahler's Eighth (and come to think of it, *Fidelio* [the film's password for entrance into the orgy]), I believe it's an unfinished masterpiece (like *The Castle*, and the Mozart *Requiem*), no matter what was said at the time of Stanley's death. He would have fiddled and futzed with it right up to the moment of release and beyond if he thought he could tune it any finer" (*Kubrick* 91).

What ultimately unites these arguments is not the logic of disavowal but a rhetorical detail. They both rely on a dead-metaphor, about Kubrick's inability to "fine-tune" the movie given his untimely death, that should give film music scholars and interpreters pause. What would be only a minor critical controversy about the extent to which the existing movie is faithful to Kubrick's vision is a more significant problem for a consideration of the film's music, since changes in music cues were often, precisely, the finishing touches Kubrick put on a film. The best close-analysis of *Eyes'* musical score and especially its classical elements overlooks this difficult and ultimately historically grounded question and thus arrives at the seemingly unfounded thesis that the music in *Eyes* "is deployed in perhaps the most carefully developed manner of all his films" (Gorbman, "Ears Wide Open" 11). But how can *Eyes'* music be deployed with a superlative degree of care when common sense tells us Kubrick probably wasn't finished deploying it? Can music be perfectly in tune with a film when the film as a whole has yet to be fine-tuned? The short answer is obviously, no. The long answer is that, on the other hand, perhaps both the film and its music's "underdeveloped" status offer a unique view of Kubrick's universe on account of their very incompleteness. What if because the final touches were not applied, *Eyes* is a more "transparent" variation on the usual Kubrick ideological preoccupations and stylistic tendencies? What if it renders the underlying meanings of his films and especially in our case the mechanisms of his classical music selections, like Nicole Kidman in the film's first shot, in a naked form? What if *Eyes* is both a prototype and an archetype for Kubrick's films and for the interaction between film and classical music that has been a defining feature of his work since *2001*?

The fact that *Eyes* as a whole feels a bit like it is assembled from parts of other Kubrick films is a nice confirmation of the idea that it is an anachronistic prototype of the way things

were in Kubrick. *Lolita* is running around in the costume store where her Humbert-like father has settled uncomfortably into the role of her pimp. Kubrick's early noirs are there in his return to Manhattan, albeit in avatar form only. "The Odyssey" of *2001*'s subtitle is converted by *Eyes* into one man's journey beyond the pleasure principle to an area of libido where enjoyment is had through repeating failed sexual encounters. The homophobic frat-boys that harass Harford recall *A Clockwork Orange*. Instead of the threat of nuclear winter as in *Dr Strangelove*, we have the threat, no less apocalyptic at a psychic level, of love collapsing when the treaty known as marriage is nearly abandoned. The decadence of *Eyes*' New York's aristocrats is on par with any of the elites in other Kubrick films, be it the *ancien regime* in *Barry Lyndon*'s England, the French officer class in *Path of Glory*, or the ghostly inhabitants of *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel. In terms of its cinematography, the film is a *mélange* of the Kubrick elements, with no feature predominating as in other films. There are steadicams and close-ups, zoom-ins and zoom-outs, profiles and portraits in *chiaroscuro* and full light, masked and revealed.

Musically, Kubrick's use of Ligeti's "Mesto, rigido e ceremoniale" from *Musica Ricercata*, which he relies on heavily in the latter half of *Eyes*, is a return to a composer he used in *2001* and *The Shining*; but, symptomatic of the contradictory nature of Kubrick's late style, the Ligeti piece in question is an early and modest work, which relies on traditionally defined pitch classes. In *2001* Ligeti's music chiefly embodied the psychological and physical turmoil of the shock of sudden and artificial evolutionary progress, as when first apes and later humans touch the strange monolith to the sound of Ligeti's *Requiem*'s "Kyrie" – or when Dr. Bowman (Keir Dullea), as "the last man," sets out for the infinite beyond Jupiter at the film's climax and the viewer is immersed in the sound of Ligeti's fittingly titled *Atmosphères*. And it is a return to a composer whose music had also embodied not only violent fits of "progress" but the turmoil of

regression in Kubrick, as when Jack Torrance stares blankly out the window of The Overlook Hotel in the early stages of his transformation into the monstrous primal father in *The Shining*.

Indeed, like *The Shining*, *Eyes Wide Shut* too has an expression to go with Ligeti's music. Not the awed and fearful one from *2001* or the grotesque one from *The Shining*, but an inhuman one altogether, that of a costume-party mask. Indeed, a haunting montage of portrait shots of masked party-goers accompanies the first iteration of Ligeti's stripped-down piano piece. And these grotesque masks are an ideal figure for the ambiguous structure of fantasy, the film's crucial figure of thought. "Fantasy conceals horror, yet at the same time it creates what is purports to conceal, its 'repressed' point of reference" (Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies* 7). Kubrick's masks in the orgy sequence and especially in these portrait shots have exactly this structure. They hide the identities of the powerful people attending the rite. To know who they are would be the true horror, as Sidney Pollack's character puts it later in the film, and yet in their very appearances the masked figures generate fear and dread. This is especially true of the leader of the rite, its central figure, who is the only one to address Harford while the Ligeti piece plays. Would his sardonic entreaties, questions, and threats be quite as potent if his face were revealed? And at level of psychological movement, "Mesto" finds an alternative embodiment to the progress associated with Ligeti in *2001* and the regress associated with his music in *The Shining*. In a kind of synthesis and cancellation of these movements in opposite psychological directions, the "Mesto" leaves Bill Harford "stuck" in a cycle of compulsive repetition.

This brings one to the ultimate effect of this piece in the film – that of the uncanny, of the feeling of dread when something that was supposed to remain secret and hidden is brought to light, to paraphrase Schelling's formula that Freud found so agreeable ("The Uncanny" 199). In Naremore's analysis of the film, he claims many structural features of the film have the effect of

being uncanny, of inspiring fear through an improbable mixture of the familiar and the strange. The recurrence of figures of doubling is, for Naremore, the central feature of the uncanny in *Eyes* – e.g., the two women who attempt to seduce Harford at the Christmas party; the two models who may be the same person, one winding up dead, the other having rescued Harford from the orgy; the identical shot sequences for Harford and the fiancé as they entered the apartment of the bereaved daughter who has just confessed her love to Harford; the way, in a dream-like structure, disparate scenes are “rhymed” or associated by words, such as the siren-like women’s expression ‘where the rainbow ends,’ which describes sex with the two of them and foreshadows the name of the costume store Harford visits before the orgy, ‘Rainbow Fashions.’ Perhaps the most obvious variation on the theme of doubling is the repetitious quality of much of the film’s dialogue: e.g., “I had you followed.” “You had me followed?” “She tested positive for H.I.V.” “She tested positive?” For Naremore, such repetitiousness fosters doubts about whether what we are seeing is real or merely dreamed and thus contributes to the effect of the uncanny in the film (*On Kubrick* 229-232).

But, in the spirit of Freud’s critique of Jentsch’s reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman*, one should point out that while there is something perhaps “strangely familiar” in these repetitions, they do not fill one with dread the way something or someone properly uncanny ought to (“The Uncanny” 202). For the uncanny’s “castrating experience” of the return of the repressed, one has to look elsewhere in the film: namely, to the masked leader of the secret order at the orgy rite, who reduces Harford to a humiliated and embarrassed child with his threatening and mocking questioning. Although there is a gendered bias to Freud’s archetypal example of a secret object of fear that reemerges in the logic of the uncanny, it is worth mentioning because of how much it bears on *Eyes*’ most uncanny scene: the ultimate example of

such a repressed experience reemerging is the unconscious primordial fear of castration in men. Thus in the classical Freudian sense derived from his reading of Hoffmann's *Sandman*, the uncanny occurs in moments when often quite by chance this primordially repressed fear of castration reemerges in adulthood with the same weight it carried during childhood. The very name of Kubrick's film is telling in this regard, given that, as Kubrick was probably aware, the eyes are often a metaphor for genitals in dreams and literary imagery. The oxymoronic eyes that are wide and yet shut refer then not just to the act of fantasizing but to the dimension of fantasy that is beyond the pleasure principle, to castration anxiety.

It may seem that this discussion of Freudian thought is quite removed from film's details and even further away from a discussion of its use of classical music, yet the orgy leader's orders to Harford are tantamount to castration. "Remove your mask." "Now get undressed." One wonders what would have happened next had not the mysterious woman intervened and offered to "redeem him" through her sacrifice. But is this not also a figure for castration in Lacanian theory, where the woman's body is one of the forms of appearance of the phallus? This is also one of the most oneiric scenes in the film, as is evidenced by the increased number and variation of shots, creating an undisguised montage-effect, one of the hallmarks of cinematic surrealism.

As for the question of the music, Claudia Gorbman's description of Ligeti's "Mesto, rigido e ceremoniale," which is heard for the first time in this castrating scene, is a more than reasonable starting point.

At first, the Ligeti sounds like something familiar in the movies, a suspense cue with its insistence on the semitone and on the spectral creepiness of octaves played deep in the bass. Thus it appropriately conveys tension, mystery, drama. But the cue goes on too long, and is repeated note for note too many times throughout the story to act as

conventional movie music. It thus becomes the sign of something else, and in the process breaks the transparency of ‘normal’ scoring... It takes rigor to edit a three-minute film sequence to a musical piece with such a distinctive sound and such starkly contrasting dynamics; each scene with the music is meticulously choreographed to its formal and dynamic dictates. For each scene, for example, Kubrick had to identify a ‘worst moment’ hitting Bill with shock, which that hammered G-natural underscores. (“Ears Wide Open” 11)

There is indeed truth in the interpretation underlying this description, particularly in the claim that the music is a “sign of something else.” The length of the cue does make us notice it, and undoubtedly gives credence to a belief in its symbolic depth. Furthermore, the fact that the editing of the film is in no small part controlled by the music’s movements and developments in the scenes where it appears is also significant. On the other hand, while she does note the shock of the dynamic contrast of the G- natural that characterizes the piece and the moments where it occurs in the film, one cannot help but notice that Gorbman shies away from other crucial details of the Ligeti that further her reading of its interaction with the film. Indeed, in the midst of an article that otherwise requires more than basic musical literacy for comprehension, and at the moment of her “deepest” interpretation, Gorbman strangely goes on to invoke the figure of the musically illiterate viewer. “All but the musically super-literate doubtless experience [the Ligeti] as merely a collection of disconnected notes –aleatory, hardly music at all, primitive in its sparseness, and well suited to the stripping away of the protagonist’s complacencies” (11).

Thus the question remains, what does a “musically super-literate” viewer like Claudia Gorbman hear in the repeated use of this abnormally long and significant musical cue? At a formal level, they might note that far from being or sounding disconnected and random, one of

the defining characteristic of this piece's musical structure is that it is, on the contrary, too connected and too repetitive. Its first musical idea consists of nothing more than two notes of the smallest (and therefore greatest) difference: alternating E-sharps and F-sharps a half-step apart (the smallest interval on the piano). But far from lacking a coherent structure, the two bar idea these notes comprise is arguably a kind of primordial example of antecedent and consequent phrasing in melodic writing. In other words, Ligeti's main theme in this piece is an elemental musical dialogue. The first measure starts on E-sharp, oscillates between E-sharp and F-sharp, and then "arrives," so to speak, at a long held F-sharp. The second measure begins with F-sharp, oscillates between F-sharp and E-sharp, and then "returns" to E-sharp for a sustained note. This "dialogue" repeats in a few variations and builds in volume and then it rather suddenly breaks off in the middle of one of its statements. Instead of hearing the expected consequent response to the first measure's arrival at F-sharp, at this point a G-natural is heard in a forte dynamic and relatively high register, repeating over and over, and faster and faster. It is a second elemental musical idea, in a new voice and in new character, interrupting the old one in a shocking fashion. The G seems both far away and yet it is close to home, only another half-step up from F-sharp not counting its octave displacement. Indeed, as the G continues, a polyphonic texture emerges when the E-sharp/F-sharp reappears with the interruptive now G layered on top of it.

Thus despite this piece's and its composer's avant-garde reputations, there is in effect and at a logical level something deeply classical in this structure of first opposing musical ideas that represent contradictory sentiments and then synthesizing them by juxtaposing them in a polyphonic texture (Rosen, *Music and Sentiment* 50-54). In this piece, one therefore sees Ligeti in a sense distantly echoing a composer as different from himself as Mozart. But this fact is not so surprising when one notes that Ligeti considered *Musica Ricercata* to be a "Cartesian" work,

his attempt to begin his musical style again from the beginning and *ex nihilo*, which seems to have led to a kind of distorted repetition of the classical preference for synthesizing ideas of contradictory emotion in the case of this movement (Rourke, “Ligeti’s Early Years” 532-535).

This elementary (in the profound sense) musical work’s meaning is then seemingly over-determined by Kubrick’s use of its contrasting themes to reinforce the return of the uncanny repressed in the scenes it directly accompanies. The problem with this piece in the context of the film is thus that unlike music in-itself that seems to have no fixed meaning, its meaning seems almost too certain, even too obvious. In the film, each time the two-part dialogue that comprises the first theme occurs it creates a mood of suspense that somewhat predictably but nevertheless convincingly pays off in an event timed to coincide with the “castrating” G. A brief account of the exact moments that the G-natural marks gives some idea of how predictable this structure is and how, although it took a lot of planning to coordinate the editing of these sequences to the music, it did not seem to take a great variety of thought, as though Kubrick himself were stuck in the same cycle of repetition compulsion as the character of Bill Harford. Thus, the dreaded G begins sounding at the following precise moments:

- When Bill admits that he has forgotten the second password to the uncanny orgy leader after enduring his withering questions...
- When Bill receives a letter with his name on it at the gate of the orgy mansion warning him to cease his inquiries, as if they somewhat impossibly knew he would come...
- When his pursuer emerges from around the corner, confirming Bill’s suspicion that he was being followed later that night...
- When Bill finds a mask from the orgy on his pillow beside his sleeping wife after his frank and awkward conversation with Victor...

In a closer analysis, one should note that the way the film interacts with the music in each of these scenes over-determines the question of repetition to the point where one is practically dealing with the phenomenon of “always-already.” Thus despite the way the musical idea of the repeated G corresponds to a traumatic moment in each of its iterations, it is somewhat misleading to call the antecedent-consequence E-sharp/F-sharp figure in the scenes leading up to the G suspenseful or the G itself particularly surprising, even in its first iteration. This is because the suspense is over in these scenes before the “suspenseful” music has really begun to conjure its sentiments of uncertainty and foreboding. Bill and the viewer both know he has been discovered at the orgy and that he is being followed on the street before the Ligeti begins. Similarly, although with a measure of dramatic irony, the mask on Bill’s pillow is seen in a shot that is juxtaposed with his entry into the house. The G thus seems to happen twice or to have “already” occurred in the film before it occurs on the soundtrack, insofar each of these scenes begins by revealing something dreadful to the viewer and then unsurprisingly, but in a way that is dramatically effective, reveals it again when the G itself occurs.

What could be the lesson of this “repetitive repetition”? If nothing else, it seems to confirm an axiom of the film and many of Kubrick’s others – the repressed always returns – with the complication being that its return in the case of these Ligeti interactions has the further quality of “already” added to it by the film’s score. This strange temporality of this “always already” tempts one to reverse the perspective here and view the film from the point of view of the structure of Ligeti. For in the “Mesto” is it not the G that effectively “returns” but the first theme of the oscillating E-sharp and F-sharp that reoccurs and, in a gesture of quasi-classical synthesis, becomes a kind of accompaniment for the G as they continue together? Thus perhaps one should turn around the intuitive reading that the G represents the “worst” moment in each of

the sequences it corresponds to. What if instead the G corresponds to moments where Harford simply gets what he wanted, but what he wanted, without knowing it, was not the banality of casual sex but the chance to enact his ancient nightmare of castration?

In a similar but broader reversal of perspective, and perhaps as a final contradiction that confirms the existence of a Kubrickian “late style,” what if the end of the film calls into question Kubrick’s usual axiom of the return of the repressed? Of course a majority of the evidence from the film is on the side confirming the return of the repress, especially in the fact that Alice and Bill both explore their repressed, secret fantasies. Thus generally, in the case of *Eyes*’ unique meditation on the complex issue of intimacy and its difficulty, the return of the repressed is represented here as a matter of personal and psychological histories rather than – as is the case in earlier Kubrick films – as regards issues of more obviously world- and cinematic-historical importance – as a microcosm rather than a macrocosm. Similarly, Ligeti’s *Musica Ricercata*, with its attempt to start over from zero and thus repress the whole burden of the history of Western classical music, itself gets caught in the logic of the return of the repressed when the classical opposition and synthesis of sentiments occurs in “Mesto, rigido e ceremoniale” – and thus seems both to confirm and overdetermine the film’s meditation on this mechanism. More broadly, in light of the constancy and historicity of the return of the repressed in both Kubrick’s cinematic imagination and its interaction with the grain of his film’s classical music scores, perhaps the end of the movie isn’t so happy after all. When Alice and Bill agree to return to their normal lives and stop worrying about their innermost desires, are they not effectively giving up a brief experiment with self and group psychoanalysis in favor of a return to the everyday practice of repression? Yet isn’t the whole point of the film and really all of Kubrick’s films that the repressed always returns, thus leaving little doubt that their prospective happiness will be short-

lived? But rather than reading the film's ending as merely a brief respite before another traumatic encounter with the objects both concealed and generated by fantasy, maybe, just maybe, here Kubrick was reading his own preoccupation with the return of the repressed against the grain. Maybe the ending isn't just happy in a sardonic sense, but mixed with hope and promise. Neither cold, nor grotesque, nor haunted – and so close to Christmas in the final scene – perhaps Bill and Alice will let the dead bury the dead.

To conclude, however, let us *return* to Bill's return to the mansion in the scene where he receives the letter through the front gate as the one exception to the paradoxical lack of uncertainty during the other iterations of the Ligeti. In this sequence, as one might expect, there is some doubt about who, for example, is in the car that approaches Bill from the other side of the gate and what they will say, give, or do to him when they arrive. The scene is also uncanny in a unique way, insofar as the uncanny often involves the illusion that normal causality has been suspended and that psychical forces are directly causing changes in physical reality. How could they have known he was coming back? The simple explanation is that he was being followed. But insofar as he and the viewer are as of yet unaware of the lengths to which the cabal is going to restrict his freedom of inquiry, it appears rather supernatural that they would have had such a letter prepared for him in advance of an unplanned trip. "Give up your inquiries, which are completely useless, and consider these words a second warning. We hope, for your own good, that this will be sufficient." The surprise for Harford here seems to be that there is no surprise in these words. They reiterate the admonishment he received at the orgy just as the Ligeti reiterates itself on the soundtrack. Finally, the message reads a little as if it were addressed from Kubrick to prospective interpreters of his achievements. It is as if Stanley Kubrick's ghost is standing there, silently admonishing a film critic who has dared to come this far. His hand holds a

perfunctory letter through the bars of his gate, behind which he keeps the ineffable meanings of his films and their musical selections. For your own good, give up your inquiries.

CHAPTER THREE

The Sound of Music When History Is in a Hospital Gown: On the Historical Significance of Classical Music in Several Films by Jean-Luc Godard

Godard's preference for using fragments of preexisting classical music in his films and on their soundtracks is familiar to anyone well-acquainted with two of his early films: *A Married Woman* (1964) and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966). In *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, to take the more essayistic and probably better known of the two, Godard's vivisection of Beethoven's String Quartet in F major, Opus 135 reduces it to only a few minutes of music; one hears the opening bars of the piece repeated a few times throughout the film, snippets of middle movements, and the final cadence of the last movement at the film's conclusion. So pronounced and enduring is this tendency, it would seem, that it was memorialized even before Godard was a well-known filmmaker: in Eric Rohmer's first film, *The Sign of the Leo* (1959), Godard, in a brief cameo, sits at the record player during a wild party obsessively playing and replaying a short fragment from another Beethoven quartet. Like Rohmer, critics imply that this preference for brief fragments of music was carried over, like so many other preoccupations in his films, from Godard's idiosyncratic personal life and his occasionally pretentious intellectual interests (M. Cooke 428, Brown 188). Be that as it may, this chapter's contribution to the discussion of this oft-mentioned inclination towards fragmentation in Godard's use of classical music consists in exploring the historical implications of exemplary instances of these musical fragments. In particular, my interpretation demonstrates that the details of formal musical decisions in Godard reflect his sense of both the history of leftist political struggles and of the history of the cinema itself. My main theoretical background for this interpretative gesture is the work of Walter Benjamin on the historicity of artistic form in

its allegorical dimension. This issue preoccupied Benjamin throughout his life, but found perhaps its fullest, if also its most concealed, expression in *The Origins of German Trauerspiel*.²¹ To some extent, one follows Godard himself in making reference to Benjamin: fragments from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" were read aloud by Godard as a voice-over during the opening minutes of his half-forgotten feature, *Hélas pour moi* (1993).

Godard's fragments of classical music are thus more than emotive refinements of narrative developments. In their very fragmentation, they are signs, on the one hand, for both the current state of history, which for Godard, with his peculiar attenuated Leftism, is generally a matter of immense dissatisfaction; and signs, on the other hand, for the collapse, the shattering into fragments, of historical memory, for the challenge to connect with the past in the midst of the a-historicism of consumer society. For many modern artists, the historical break with traditional society, including even early modernity, has often been felt as a rift with inspiration itself and the ensuing struggle to regain it. This struggle to create is not so much a problem for Godard as it is the precondition for his cinema. As he told a reporter at the Cannes Film Festival in 1960, two months after the triumphant premiere of *Breathless*, "I have the impression of loving the cinema less than I did a year ago – simply because I have made a film, and that film has been well received, and so forth. So I hope that my second film will be received very badly and that this will make me want to make films again" (Brody, "An Exile in Paradise"). Here Godard points out a crucial detail of the modern artist's creative struggle: it is a major indication

²¹ In making the connection between a formal procedure and its sense of history, one could cite a number of critical perspectives as venerable precedents; but perhaps musicologists Theodor Adorno and Charles Rosen views on the connection between formalism and historicism should be invoked here because they otherwise, and famously, disagree on so much else. In both his *Philosophy of New Music* and the unfinished *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno insists that artistic "form is sedimented content"; so that form itself becomes a kind of geologic historical record of phases in the history of artistic content. Similarly, but in an instance of what Kierkegaard would call "the same motion but in the opposite direction," as it pertains to the method of critical practice rather than the ontology of the art object, Charles Rosen claims that "even the most technical description of music will bring us eventually to history" (*Frontiers* 125). The unlikely link between Adorno and Rosen also expresses itself in a shared reverence for Walter Benjamin, although for Adorno this reverence was somewhat retroactive.

of their art's authenticity (if it is still possible to use this word), at least in the artist's own eyes if not most critics'. Without this sense of struggle Godard undoubtedly felt he would have only been making commercial entertainment, instead of connecting with the great traditions of modern art through a common sensibility predicated on social disaffection.

The name used in this chapter for Godard's method of using fragments of classical music to present his complex sense of history, where historical understanding is both lost and yet persists in fragments, is allegory. The justification for calling Godard's historicized musical fragments allegorical resides in a rhetorical feature that allegory shares with irony: the disjunction between the signifier and the signified, the gap between what is said and what is meant. Allegory represents this gap diachronically, irony synchronically.²² To signify the rift between contemporary times and early modernity, Godard quotes fragments of classical music in such a way that the disjunction between the two eras is felt in the film's form, in its fragmentation of classical music. The paradox in this is that the very process of bringing the present and past together, combining images and classical music in his films, is the way in which Godard nostalgically and ambivalently represents the gap between the present era and what in his view are its culturally more dignified origins. And at a simpler level, using music to make historical claims is disjunctive for the simple reason that music does not ordinarily excel at communicating factual information. The disjunction of Godard's allegory thus in part resides in the fact that he uses the language of the most subtle and refined emotions to make moral but nonetheless historical claims. You cannot tell someone the most basic information with purely

²² For a fuller account of this relationship between irony and allegory, and the modernity of the latter, see Paul de Man's authoritative "The Rhetoric of Temporality," reprinted as an appendix to *Blindness and Insight: The Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd Ed. Minnesota: Minnesota UP, 1984.

musical means, yet Godard is crazy enough to use music to attempt to create historical meaning. When Godard films “say” Beethoven, they mean modern history.

While the implications of Godard’s allegorical musical fragments are mainly historical in nature, as fragments they are also emblematic of a broader and “essential” aesthetic predilection in Godard, where fragments of literature and art, and of cultural history generally, are rarely in short supply. Indeed, my analysis proceeds from the assumption that the relationship between the formal analysis of Godard’s work and its historical interpretation is reciprocal, but that, as Charles Rosen rightly insists of hermeneutics as it pertains to music, one must start and stop one’s analyses with the films themselves. Thus at the level of film form, this chapter examines permutations of two main forms in which these allegorical fragments of classical music appear in Godard: on the soundtrack and within the film itself, both non-diegetically and diegetically, respectively. But given the lack of scholarship on the meaning of diegetic classical music in Godard, my strategy has been to emphasize the interpretation of these instances in more detail, while practicing a constructive criticism of the highlights from the scholarship on Godard’s use of preexisting music on his soundtracks in order to create a broader justification for the study of diegetic classical music in Godard.

When it comes to using classical music on the soundtrack, Godard takes two basic approaches. First, rather surprisingly given his avant-garde reputation, up to a point Godard uses classical music excerpts according to the traditional leitmotif technique. The difference, however, is that Godard takes the leitmotif technique to an extreme, so that isolated motifs are often the only music heard and they invoke not a metaphysical dimension but a historical one; indeed, to a large extent, they themselves are this historical dimension in an art-historical cast. In Godard’s leitmotifs the sense of “the beyond” is transformed into a sense for the past and the

way in which it is available to us but primarily in distorted, partial forms. Second, beyond his uniquely allegorical leitmotifs, Godard has deployed musical cues in ways that find their only precedents in his own more well-known visual stylistic innovations. For instance, Godard has applied the logic of his famous “jump-cuts” to many of his music editing decisions. In the case of *Prénom Carmen* (1983), both visual and auditory jump-cuts occur. In *Passion* (1982) and *Detective* (1985), Godard applied the logic of what Brian Henderson calls his “non-bourgeois” tracking shots, made famous by the 9-minute traffic jam shot in *Week End*, to his use of extended sections, fragments but not motifs, of works by Ravel, Fauré, and others.

In his use of diegetic or source music, Godard has also gone in two directions. On the one hand, in *Breathless*, *Week End*, and the later films *Every Man for Himself* and *For Ever Mozart*, he has created allegorical emblems for music’s significance that address both its historical meaning and music’s relationship to death. In *Prénom Carmen* and in his films that feature pop and rock music in their diegeses at length, *One Plus One* and *Soigne ta droite!*, one also finds a similar intertwining of interests in death and history along with the theme of revolutionary violence, but the difference in these films is that the use of diegetic music is pervasive rather than exceptional as is the case of the films that create allegorical emblems for their source music. Due to the exceptional nature of the allegorical emblems of diegetic classical music, they will be examined at length under the general methodological hypothesis of this dissertation: that exceptions are of general if not universal significance.

The topics of political and cinematic history, the difficulty of modern love, and the pervasiveness of death in the consumerist call to enjoyment are of course generally apparent in Godard’s work and I do not intend to argue that they are uniquely associated with his use of classical music. If one reverses the perspective, however, and considers the fate of classical

music in Godard's films rather than how it might substantiate familiar themes in his work, one comes to another insight. By associating classical music with the themes that populate and generate his work (art and cinema history and revolutionary politics being chief among them), Godard is doing his own small part to keep canonical classical music involved in the struggles of contemporary art and human development. Indeed, to go a step further, classical music in Godard, while it is often brutally expropriated, is also, as it were, modernized by his films. Godard is thus engaging in a process of creative destruction vis-à-vis the European musical canon, and his wide-ranging use of classical music has if anything guaranteed that the "newness" of the works he has used will remain apparent for years to come. This newness of course is felt in the way the classical music cues seem strange, out of place, and conspicuous in Godard. In his *Theory of Harmony*, Arnold Schoenberg remarked that new music "always attracts attention, and its sound is considered unpleasant" (69). Godard's use of classical masterpieces helps them regain this initial unpleasantness, the estranging effect of their lost novelty, before the acceptance of their beauty had become another mortifying cliché.

Godard's Allegorical Idea of the Leitmotif

In summing up what she calls the "Beethoven/Godard Connection," musicologist Miriam Sheer points to a suggestive irony that results from Godard's use of fragments from various middle and late Beethoven string quartets in three of his films from the 1960s: despite their avant-garde reputation, Godard's three '60s films that rely almost exclusively on Beethoven for music (the short film *The New World*, *A Married Woman*, and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*) all deploy their musical selections in a traditional way. As Sheer puts it, "in the 'avant-garde' films of the '60s, Godard embraces the traditional Leitmotif technique, using Beethoven quartet-themes for signifying certain feelings (in *Le nouveau monde* and *Une femme*

mariée) or a traumatic experience (in *Le nouveau monde*); grammatically abstracting them in *Deux ou trois choses*, but employing them in the same manner as in more traditional movies for linking scenes distant in time.” Even Godard’s ostensibly avant-garde mode of abruptly interrupting musical ideas mid-phrase is convincingly described by Sheer as “mirroring” the outcome of a particular event at that moment in the story, such as a lovers’ quarrel in *A Married Woman*. For Sheer, the ultimate irony of the music in these three films is thus that irony, at least in its undermining rhetorical capacity, has gone missing: “Strangely enough, it seems that Godard in these films does not choose musical cues that ironically negate the visual character” (188).

A first constructive criticism of Sheer’s conclusion becomes apparent, however, when one introduces the distinction between the logical function of the music in the context of the story and its aesthetic perception more generally. True, the use of the Beethoven middle and late quartets in the films mentioned above may not undermine the visual character or the narratives of each of the films, but the very way in which the quartets appear or, more precisely, are heard as part of the soundtrack nonetheless does ironically negate something, namely the original versions of these masterpieces of instrumental chamber music. This is above all because the quartets themselves are reduced to fragments of their former selves. The music has become, in a quite literal way, nothing more than a few preliminary sketches in Beethoven’s workbooks, deprived of its dramatic force and formal unity. The negation of the Beethoven is not only a formal choice here that allows Godard to borrow its themes for dramatic purposes; it also carries with it the effect of an accusation or critique, as if the film itself and the contemporary historical and ideological phenomena the film represents had done this to Beethoven.

In *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, Walter Benjamin claimed that “in the last analysis structure and detail are always historically charged” (182). This is a major premise in Godard’s approach to film form in general and to his use of classical music in particular. The historical charge created by Godard’s use of film’s formal musical structures is worthy of the nuclear age, often quite literally. The first of his films to use Beethoven, the science fiction short film *Le nouveau monde*, features a nuclear explosion in the atmosphere above Paris as its starting point. The last of them to use Beethoven’s quartets, Godard’s adaptation of *King Lear* (1987), surprisingly overlooked in Sheer’s discussion, features the Scherzo from Opus 135 heard in a disfigured, auditory equivalent of visual slow motion, as when a record is not spinning at optimal speed, while the characters of the film repeatedly invoke the Chernobyl disaster. In the first instance the nuclear disaster was based on extrapolating from possibilities implicit in world politics after World War II; in the later film the disaster was actually a part of history already. In both cases, the effect of the fallout is felt more strongly on the soundtrack in the fragmentation of Beethoven’s quartets than it is in the visual character of these films.

Furthermore, there is a crucial difference between leitmotif technique generally and Godard’s specific use of leitmotifs. In the leitmotif technique of musical romanticism, the motifs never stand alone musically as they do in Godard. Ordinarily leitmotifs occur in an expansive musical context alongside countervailing tendencies, above all the famed “endless melodies” from which the musical atoms of leitmotifs draw their saliency by way of contrast. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler made this point long ago in their critique of film scoring as a whole, but it is even more relevant to an assessment of Godard’s leitmotifs:

The fundamental character of the leitmotif – its salience and brevity – was related to the gigantic dimensions of the Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian music dramas. Just because

the leitmotif as such is musically rudimentary, it requires a large musical canvas if it is to take on a structural meaning beyond that of a signpost. The atomization of the musical element is paralleled by the heroic dimensions of the composition as a whole.

(Composing for Films 2)

The trouble in normal scoring is thus compounded by Godard. He makes the scores that Adorno and Eisler consider interruptive and insufficiently “gigantic” seem lush by comparison to the asceticism of his “leitmotifs alone” approach. Godard’s solution to the problem of the leitmotif’s insufficiency is thus ironically to provide a cure that is worse than the disease, to radicalize the tendency of film scoring by reducing the musical canvas further still, until only the motifs are left. For Adorno and Eisler:

The leitmotif is inseparably connected with the symbolic nature of the music drama. The leitmotif is not supposed merely to characterize persons, emotions, or things, although this is the prevalent conception. Wagner conceived its purpose as the endowment of the dramatic events with metaphysical significance. When in the Ring the tubas blare the Valhalla motif, it is not merely to indicate the dwelling place of Wotan, Wagner meant also to connote the sphere of sublimity, the cosmic will, and the primal principle. (3)

Leaving aside the fact that even merely competent film scores are of course perfectly capable of invoking this metaphysical dimension in their leitmotifs, this description is still useful for the way it describes an aesthetic that is quite contrary to what Godard achieves with leitmotifs. In contrast to Adorno and Eisler’s Wagnerian ideal of leitmotif symbolism, Godard’s Beethoven leitmotifs’ thoroughly allegorical nature comes across most obviously in the way in which leitmotifs are thus immediately perceived in Godard as fragments ripped from their larger musical context. The main implication of this is that the music thus employed is meant as a

“critical commentary” which, pace Sheer, undermines the dramatic situations it logically supports by contrasting the everyday reality of the situations with the sublimity of the Beethoven quartets that are mined for musical ideas and effects. Godard insures both this critical effect and the perception of the fragmentary form by often interrupting his leitmotifs mid-phrase.

In his encyclopedic recent biography, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, Richard Brody notes this allegorically critical aspect of Beethoven in Godard in its moral dimension: the Beethoven of the ‘60s films “was music that...put forth a lasting challenge to the moral compromises and empty banalities of the moment” (150). Brody, however, does not account for the historical implications of the fragmentary form favored by Godard in his use of Beethoven. Yes, the music is a challenge to the compromises and banalities of the films’ milieu, but the very fact that the music, as heard in the film, is a shadow of its former self is an indication of the power of capitalism’s consumer society to distort the legacy of even such supposedly uncompromising art. It is as though Beethoven’s quartets had quite literally been consumed and subsequently regurgitated on the soundtrack of Godard’s films. Godard thus uses Beethoven to perform a self-criticism of the cinematic form, to implicate the cinema itself in the moral degeneracy and unreality of consumerism (a point he has returned to with an almost mind-numbing regularity in his long career). The quartets maintain their autonomy in this relationship, but only barely so. The ruins of them are all that is left at this moment in history according to Godard’s films. They have a contrasting relationship to the world of the films, but the form they take in this relationship – that of the fragment – is itself determined and over-determined by the films and the sense of history coursing through them.

The allegorical tendency of Godard’s Beethoven leitmotifs is as follows: his leitmotifs express an implicit bourgeois morality in all its greatness and the decline and fragmentation of

that morality historically, all the while still serving logically, albeit in a highly idiosyncratic way, as affective reinforcements of narrative development. Walter Benjamin drew attention to this historical representational capacity of allegory by differentiating it from symbolism and by initially claiming that allegory was, contrary to the usual assumption, a more modern stylistic development in art history: “In comparison to the symbol, the western conception of allegory is a late manifestation” (197). In an even more crucial formulation, however, Benjamin further elaborated the difference between allegory and symbolism in terms of symbolism’s reliance on an economy of sacrifice in its representations versus a more uncanny and non-teleological notion of history entailed by allegory: “Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratia* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape” (166). Benjamin’s personification of history as a death’s head is not the face of death as such, but, more precisely, a *facies hippocratia*: characterized by the change in the face when death is imminent but still impending. Thus rather than approaching death or seeking it out for its sacrificial “pay off,” allegory’s sense of history is instead encapsulated for Benjamin as history’s face expressing the nearness of death with the further complication that it has “always already” been thus: that history is paradoxically eternal and strangely spatial rather than temporal – “a petrified, primordial landscape.” Thus no sacrifice can occur in Benjamin’s version of history as allegory because in his figuration of history it is not alive in a way that can be afflicted by death. Hence the generally melancholy affect in Godard of leitmotifs derived from classical works, when Beethoven’s music can only suffer but not sacrifice.

Furthermore, Godard’s belief in the fragment as an authentic artistic form is a paradoxical faith in its power over that of the totality from which it is drawn. Describing the rhetorical

characteristics of language in the German baroque *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin claimed that the sheer “linguistic virtuosity” on display in these plays showed two things: first, allegorical potential is entailed by the fragment as such: “word, syllable and sound are emancipated from any context of traditional meaning and are flaunted as objects which can be exploited for allegorical purposes” (207). Secondly, from this it follows that the fragment can surpass the whole in its potential significance. Precisely because so much is missing contextually from the fragment, practically anything (and everything) can be appended to it semantically. As Benjamin put it, “language is broken up so as to acquire a changed and intensified meaning in its fragments” (208). In Godard, the intensification of meaning acquired by fragments is exploited not only in regard to his treatment of language, especially written text, graphics, and inter-titles, but also regarding editing processes for images, sound, and musical cues.

To return to a previous example, *Le nouveau monde*, Godard’s first film to use Beethoven quartets, is also his first film confronting History’s *facies hippocratia* in the current era. The “New World” of the film’s title is one in which a nuclear explosion high above Paris has changed both everything and nothing. At first a state of emergency is declared; then the authorities claim that nothing harmful has occurred. Life goes on before, except that everyone, excluding the film’s hero, has lost their humanity. They have forgotten how to love. In *Le nouveau monde* history is not redeemed by heroic sacrifices; it expires harmlessly and no one notices. The story follows the last man as he seeks to restore the humanity of his former love. In this context, brooding fragments from Beethoven’s Great Fugue and Quartet in C-sharp minor, Opus 131 not only capture the inner turmoil of the hero, but more importantly they perfectly express how little mankind’s greatest achievements matter to anyone anymore: to a melancholic lover after the end of history, to his beautifully vacant darling, or to all the rest who have lost

their humanity from nuclear exposure. In *Le nouveau monde*, history is too sick to go on living but apparently too bitter to finally die. As it persists in its post-nuclear vegetative state, globules of Beethoven quartets drip from the lips of its *facies hippocratia*, staining the hospital gown that covers its angel wings, as Benjamin might have said.

In Godard's *King Lear*, the allegorical *facies hippocratia* of history is in a further gesture spiritually identified as Beethoven's face, when Godard's exposes another Beethoven quartet to nuclear radiation. A fragment from the "Vivace" second movement from the String Quartet in F, Opus 135 is heard not just in a slower than usual tempo; rather, as was mentioned earlier, the actual recording of the piece is slowed down, so that the effect is similar to a record playing at less than optimal speed. This of course is perfectly in keeping with the context of the film, where *King Lear* is similarly decomposed, as is reality itself, by the prominence granted the Chernobyl disaster, which is invoked as both a historical trauma and an impediment to rediscovering the dramatic art of Shakespeare. When thus rendered by Godard, the Quartet's motto – "It must be" – thus takes on new significance. Never was the fate it implies less amiable than in the incestuous, post-nuclear disaster zone of Godard's *King Lear*. The slow motion Beethoven is also an allegory for itself, or rather, for its composer. "In music – in the string quartets of these last years," writes musicologist Joseph Kerman in his canonical monograph on the quartets, "Beethoven ordered what he was so pitifully unable to order in any other aspect of his existence. Outside of his art, the disarray of his life was practically total, extending to objects, appearances, dealing with the world of affairs, and human relationships both deep and superficial" (*The Beethoven Quartets* 350). Godard's deformed Opus 135 in a sense reverses this final achievement by negating the sacrifice on Beethoven's part of his worldly affairs for artistic glory. In slow motion, Beethoven's music sounds more like it is contaminated by his

failures in his human relationships. This is deeply unfair to Beethoven, who like the film itself, as Godard's title sequence puts it, appears to have been "shot in the back." It also marks an extreme in Godard's historical interpretation of Beethoven, in which his personal history is effectively rewritten. Thus in his final feature film to use Beethoven's music: Godard leaves the composer injured and his music mutilated at the site of the Chernobyl disaster. The look of agony on his face is not just his, but that of history itself in the late twentieth century. The difference between the films is that whereas in *Le nouveau monde* only a fragmented Beethoven is used to signify the involution of history, in *King Lear* Godard found it necessary to implicate Shakespeare and a bevy of Hollywood stars in the process of history's permanent undoing as well.

Music Becoming Cinema

The exception to the Beethoven-leitmotif rule, now qualified as historical in significance and non-teleological at that, is Godard's 1982 film, *Prénom Carmen*. The most obvious difference between this film and the previous and subsequent "Beethoven films" is that the act of making Beethoven's music heard is part of the diegesis of the film, with the story of Carmen often interrupted by footage of the Prat Quartet rehearsing Beethoven quartets. The quartets are also part of the soundtrack during the film's main story, where Carmen is portrayed as a vaguely leftist lumpenproletariat bank robber and kidnapper living in contemporary Paris. As Miriam Sheer has again perspicaciously noted, while the film uses longer musical cues than the other "Beethoven films," interrupts the story to film the musicians who provide the soundtrack, and even includes the quartet musicians as characters, Godard compensates for these aesthetic experiments by utilizing the chosen quartets in the roughly chronological order and by loosely

associating each quartet with certain points in the story. Sheer's analytic summary illustrates this succinctly:

Even though Godard does not use passages from every quartet or all the movements of each, he clearly follows their consecutive opus numbers and movement orders...The change from one quartet to another is also planned as a point of narrative demarcation in the overall structure of the narrative: Op. 59/3 belongs to the exposition: introducing the participating characters and their aims, before the real action starts (location: the mental hospital). Op. 74 is used for the robbery scene (location: the bank). Passages from Op. 131 are played while Carmen and Joseph are on their way to the apartment; Op. 132 is devoted to their love scenes (location: the uncle's seaside apartment), while excerpts from movements of Op. 135 accompany Carmen's change of heart and Joseph's growing despair and jealousy (location: Hotel Intercontinental). (183)

The break with the leitmotif technique in this film thus resides in the lack of recurrent musical ideas and its replacement by a narrative logic of presenting non-repeating fragments of the quartets in roughly chronological order (i.e. order of publication not composition). Although Sheer's analysis of *Prénom Carmen* points to many suggestive parallels between the images from the film's story and the quartet rehearsals (such as the way aggressive string-crossing ostinatos in the inner voices of the Harp quartet coincide with the violence of the bank robbery sequence), she falls short of capturing the general logic of the deployment of the music in this film, as she does when she astutely discerns the '60s films' reliance on the logic of the leitmotif technique. Thus, after offering many precise insights into how the film's dialogue often doubles as a commentary on the music, the characters' actions often mirror the motions of the performing musicians in the following scene, and the music also sometimes still functions as a series of

leitmotifs, Sheer's main conclusion is a safe generalization that few would argue with even before reading Sheer's painstaking analyses: "The main conclusion is that [Godard] experimented [in *Prénom Carmen*] on a grand, unprecedented scale, aided by his detailed knowledge of Beethoven's music as well as of music's affective language in general, in order to achieve special and memorable effects" (187).

My intention is not to offer an argumentative refutation of Sheer's conclusion regarding *Prénom Carmen*. As with my further development of her insight into the leitmotif technique of Godard's other uses of Beethoven, I would like to consolidate the gains of her analyses by suggesting what more precisely the "experiments" of this film's use of music are. In brief, if in his early "Beethoven films" Godard still treated the quartets, at least at a logical level, in one of the standard ways one would traditionally use music in film, i.e. as a series of leitmotifs, in *Prénom Carmen* Godard treats Beethoven's music as if it were cinematic material by subjecting it to the discontinuous editing techniques that he is best known for at the visual level of filmmaking. In other words, for Godard, music was often homologous to the footage he collected for his films; both were subject to all the editing processes normally associated with the visual dimension of a Godard film. Godard's dictum "everything is cinema" thus means that music too is cinema. (Indeed, it would be a useful exercise to identify which types of shots and editing techniques from Godard's visual vocabulary find their corollaries in some of his most unusual and otherwise formally unclassifiable uses of music.) In the case of *Prénom Carmen*, Godard seems to have, above all, applied the visual trait with which he is most identified, the "jump-cut," to the Beethoven quartets in *Prénom Carmen*. This is how one can account for the new style of moving from quartet to quartet in chronological order over the course of the film, but with interruptions that return to a later moment in a particular quartet, sometimes only

seconds later in the piece or movement. One image from the film perfectly captures the idea that Godard had subsumed music into his notion of cinema. The image is of Godard himself, as a film director gone mad, holding a boom box on his shoulder and aiming it downwards. It is a new kind of camera, he claims, as his “camera” emits a fragmentary and only faintly perceptible piano melody. In any case, it bears witness to the fact that Godard, mad or not, identified music with the visual side of filmmaking and thus had taken music to be literally a part of the cinema.²³ My supplemental thesis to Sheer’s analysis of *Prénom Carmen* is thus that the influential editing decisions Godard’s movies are known for at the visual and narrative levels were the model for his use of music in film. When Godard applied these originally cinematic editing options to his musical cues and scores, he changed film music in fundamental ways. The fact that these techniques of musical editing have only sporadically entered the mainstream of filmmaking confirms their radical nature.

We might also quote Godard himself on the matter of the cinematic nature of the musical choices in *Prénom Carmen* and other films. During *Prénom*’s preproduction, Godard was

²³ From the perspective of existing scholarship on Godard’s use of music, there is an enigma here: why have perspicacious critics missed this constitutive feature of Godard’s use of classical music beyond the leitmotif approach? In the case of someone with Sheer’s discernment and painstaking, formalist methodology, had she started from the larger context of Godard’s work as a whole, rather than the less daunting but more arbitrary grouping of “Beethoven films,” she would in all likelihood have avoided such an oversight. This is because Godard’s manipulation of musical sound through the logic of the jump-cut is not unique or even new to *Prénom Carmen*, although his combination of this technique with match-cuts and broader narrative parallels between the film and the music is truly exceptional. In the prominent earlier film, *Pierrot le fou*, Godard had already applied the logic of a jump-cut to the film’s score. Film music scholar Royal Brown has rightly pointed out this distinctive moment, where during a sequence of a car heist, the soundtrack is stopped abruptly and then picks up again, not where it left off, but where it would have been if the music had continued to play. But despite the evident similarity between this jarring yet comical effect and the highly influential jump-cuts from *Breathless*, Brown highlights this scene in the process of making precisely the opposite argument. Whereas our thesis is that Godard was using music as though it were cinema; Godard, according to Brown, was making his films “musically.” In his discussion of *Vivre sa vie*, Brown generalizes his thesis: “Godard’s use of music in *Vivre sa vie*, as in many of his other films, actually leaves the director the structural space to construct his movies in a musical way” (194). But how more precisely one constructs a film “musically” remains a nagging question in Brown’s detailed descriptions and interpretations of the music in *Vivre* and *Pierrot*; and one is ultimately left thinking that perhaps this idea of a “musical” film is no more than an euphemism for a film that is often confusing, difficult, and/or defiant of audience expectations.

clearly thinking about Beethoven's music through the lens of cinema. In a broad sense, like a film, Beethoven's quartets are a story that Godard's film attempts to tell. As Richard Brody put it: "On the tape [i.e. the audiocassette that functioned as Godard's "script" during preproduction], Godard states his intention of using Beethoven's later quartets, in the order in which Beethoven composed them, so that the film would 'follow the story of his music, and his music is a part of the story'" (447). Later, during the shoot, Godard makes the same point, but in a more radical way, one that proves his thinking about music was thoroughly cinematic. Again as Brody tells it, "As he had done in his preliminary audio script, Godard films musical phrases as if they were literary phrases: he takes the music at its word, and he was explicitly aware of this effect: 'Here, it's Beethoven, he's telling me something... Everything depends on the story that he's telling me, finally'" (453).

Here, however, things get more complicated. On the one hand, in both his intentions and in their product, Godard is clearly abstracting classical music and the original scores written for him by treating them as so much raw material, similar to stock footage and dailies, that is subject to the editing techniques that define his films' visual character. On the other hand, as an autodidact of a high order, Godard's senses of music history and of music's place in the history of modern life and art are second-to-none among auteurs in the way they inform his use of music in his films. Godard's antinomy of film music is thus: his films simultaneously historicize and de-historicize the music they use; or more precisely, their very de-historicization is the form of their more radical historicization. In this regard, Miriam Sheer, following film critic Alain Bergala, does not go far enough in explaining why Godard chose Beethoven's quartets as the music for his *Carmen*: "But why did he specifically choose the Beethoven quartets? One answer is given by Bergala: Godard is interested in the parallelism existing between attacking a bank

and attacking a piece of music” (182). But since any piece of music with a fast tempo and an aggressive character would suffice to create this parallel, Sheer’s tentative endorsement of Bergala’s speculation does not account for either the choice of the genre of the quartet or the work of Beethoven. Godard’s own thoughts are more suggestive here: “The story of Carmen, according to Godard, required music, but he had no intention of using Bizet’s opera. Instead, he wanted to develop the film from ‘fundamental music. Music that marked the history of music. Music that is at the same time the practice and the theory of music’” (Brody 447). But even Godard’s point about the music needing to be “fundamental” and historically important in both theory and practice still does not explain why Beethoven was chosen over other household names in European art music that fit this description.

The first clue to the meaning of pairing the Beethoven quartets with Carmen resides in the polarity of the musical genres of chamber music and opera that implicitly interact in *Prénom Carmen*. (Sheer notes how the two genres are “mixed,” but not that they are related to each other as opposites. Instead, Sheer sees them as part of a broader phenomenon in Godard of collage: “Godard enjoys mixing cinematic, as well as musical, genres and breaking their boundaries” (182).) On the one hand, opera is the genre where music explicitly unites with other arts to create a spectacle for an audience. Indeed, given that, as Charles Rosen puts it in *The Romantic Generation*, “serious opera from its inception has almost always been subsidized by the state,” one is justified in calling opera as *the* most public of music genres (600). On the other hand, due to the small number of musicians, chamber music is somewhat literally a genre that, without the aid of the modern technologies of recording and amplification, cannot reach more than an intimate and private audience. Furthermore, chamber music could rightfully be called music for musicians, i.e., music whose life does not depend on audiences so much as on performers who

are interested in playing it whether there is an audience there or not, and music that does not require an audience to generate the substantial revenues needed to justify performances beyond the traditional state subsidies.

Godard further complicates matters in this pairing of opposed genres by choosing examples of each that both epitomize and transcend their respective genres. Beethoven's string quartets, especially the late ones, are not just fine examples of chamber music, they are often considered the foremost examples of "absolute music," that is, music in its purest and freest expressive state, one in which pairing it with another mode of artistic representation would enliven the words or the images but only at the price of placing a limitation on the infinity of indefinite meanings conjured by music when it is heard alone. Similarly, *Carmen* is not just one opera among others. As opera scholar Marshall Leicester puts it, "to a degree unparalleled by any other opera, *Carmen* has become a discourse, a multiply-authored, historically developing tangle of bits and pieces from Bizet, Mérimée, high-art criticism, melodrama, femmes fatales and doomed lovers" (quoted in Sheer 181). (In 1983, *Carmen* had also recently transcended a boundary long ago cleared by Beethoven: it had entered the public domain and was no longer subject to copyright, leading to a spat of adaptations alongside Godard's in the early 1980s.) From this perspective, the two extreme examples of the already disparate genres combined by Godard seem very different indeed. Beethoven's quartets are music in-itself, music in its most ethereal form, while *Carmen* is music for-another: its original musical and dramatic parts have taken on lives of their own. Godard's film represents the afterlife of the dramatic element of *Carmen*, just as "Looney 'Toons" cartoons familiarized generations with the music of *Carmen* even if the original source was obscure. And yet a closer inspection of Beethoven's late chamber music reveals that the contradiction between opera and chamber music was already an animating

force in Beethoven's chamber music itself. In other words, if it seems like another one of what Godard himself has called his "silly conceits," or what many Godard scholars respectfully refer to as his "deconstructions," for Godard to set the paragon of absolute music, Beethoven's heroic and late quartets, alongside the rudiments of one of classical music's most notable instances of kitsch, one should simply bear in mind that Beethoven's late chamber music, ironically enough, often features both explicit and implicit references to operatic form and that it has, in turn, had a great influence on the history of opera. One well known example here is the late Piano Sonata in A flat major, Opus 110. After first and second movements in customary forms, sonata and minute-trio respectively, that even sound somewhat old-fashioned in comparison to the romanticism of Beethoven's heroic period, the originality of the third movement of the sonata is rendered even more surprising. The third movement oscillates between two main forms that do not often appear in instrumental compositions of this period as major formal structures: the first is marked *arioso*, meaning aria-like or lyrical but not quite a full-fledged aria, which is true in the simple sense that the piece is for solo piano. The second main section is a fugue. One thus sees here that Beethoven himself built the opposition between a "pure" instrumental musical form (of which a fugue could be said to be fairly representative) and the form of opera (in the lyrical passages marked *arioso*) which entails a relation between music and the other arts, into his "pure" instrumental chamber music.

The operatic element of Beethoven's late music also appears in his late quartets, if somewhat more implicitly. Consider the example of the Quartet in C sharp minor, Opus 131, a piece used in *Prénom Carmen* as well as Godard's '60s era Beethoven films. This piece abandons, like many of Beethoven's late works, the conventional multi-movement structure of four movements of alternating tempi and form in favor of seven movements that are thematically

and dramatically linked to an unprecedented extent when compared to the standard four movement model. Indeed, the “organic” nature of such a large scale form for Opus 131 not only reflects the dramatic influence of opera of the era, but also anticipates later developments in operatic writing pioneered by Wagner. (Indeed, Wagner cited Beethoven as the primary musical influence on his operas, alongside Shakespeare as a dramatic influence.) When the eighteenth century formula of recitatives to advance the plot and arias to stop the show had lost its effectiveness and was perceived as artificially contrived, Wagner replaced it with the “formlessness” of unending melodies and repeating leitmotifs that had the effect of fully integrating musical developments with dramatic ones. All of which is to say, strange though it may sound, Beethoven’s absolute music is in a sense not absolute at all; it has been “corrupted” by the spirit of opera. Pairing Beethoven with *Carmen* is thus not a “silly conceit” on Godard’s part. On the contrary, it shines a light on a fundamental irony of Beethoven’s quartets. Godard’s *Prénom Carmen* both emphasizes and realizes the operatic potential of Beethoven’s chamber music, but only by turning it into something else, a work of cinema.

The historical point here is that the idiom Beethoven invented with the “operatic chamber music” of the quartets and other late chamber works happened, as it were, “too soon” in the history of art. This anticipation on Beethoven’s part of the cinema is an example of a larger pattern of disconnection in the history of invention and utilization of musical works summarized cogently by Charles Rosen in his critique of Richard Taruskin’s *Oxford History of Western Music*. As in history, so in music history, especially for artists of Beethoven’s caliber it seems:

The processes of invention and exploitation are out of phase. Inventions arrive before they are needed and continue to be employed when they are no longer useful. The history of society and the history of scientific invention do not fit neatly together...Nor

does the history of music fit neatly with social history...as the musical system changes over the centuries, possibilities of exploiting the musical language suggest themselves that are too fascinating to ignore, but the works inspired by this stimulus may possibly have to wait a long time for their exploitation. A musical system appears to have a logic of its own that can be inflected but not completely controlled by social pressures; it can act as an inspiration to composers, who often felt as if they were discovering rather than inventing. That is what the greatest of music critics, E.T.A. Hoffmann, conveyed when he wrote that Beethoven was not the wild, untamed genius as so many of his contemporaries thought, but the soberest of all composers, because everything he wrote came from the nature of music itself. (“From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra”)

Rosen goes on to describe how some of Bach and Beethoven’s important musical breakthroughs were a step ahead of the social conditions of their moment, including those of the late string quartets:

Bach’s great Mass in B minor was never performed during his lifetime: as a Catholic Mass, it could not be played in a Protestant church, and the use of an orchestra was forbidden in Catholic churches during Bach’s lifetime, although he hoped it might eventually be possible. His “Goldberg” Variations is the most successful of all his works in concert performance today, yet the kind of concert in which it can be performed did not exist for another century, and it had to wait for recognition and acclaim for still another hundred years...The first great set of works to become the staple of serious public piano performances was the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas: only two of these were played in a concert hall in Vienna during Beethoven’s lifetime. To judge a work...by how it sounded in the conditions that existed when it was written is useful and

even necessary, but it can lead at times to profound misunderstanding. This is where the irritating contradiction between the work as written and the work as heard begins to rear its ugly head...In any case, many works like Beethoven's Great Fugue for String Quartet appear principally as a response to possibilities of the musical system of the time, possibilities that are irrelevant to any kind of contemporary social conditions, and the system itself develops both as a response to social pressures and in ways that are completely independent. ("From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra")

Regarding Rosen's final point here, Godard's achievement was to turn the screw once more: by subsuming Beethoven's quartets into his own forward looking artistic practice, Godard has guaranteed that Beethoven's quartets will continue to be part of the unique tradition of art that has been created in relative independence from its social conditions. Godard's promise to Beethoven is that he will guarantee that his music remains "ahead of its time" even as Godard uses the technology of cinema to realize Beethoven's vision in a way that was not possible during his lifetime.

Detour: The Naked Expression of the Idées Fixes in the Short Films

Rosen's far-reaching point above bears reiteration not only for its relevance to Godard's use of Beethoven's quartets in *Prénom Carmen*, but also for the way it captures the relationship between the two foci around which Godard's films orbit in an ellipse, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin's famous point about Kafka. Rosen claims that "inventions arrive before they are needed and continue to be employed when they are no longer useful." This idea was first advanced by the legendary French historian Marc Bloch in his essay on the history of the water mill. Bloch developed this idea based on the fact that the water mill was not fully integrated into the Roman Empire's economy until nearly five centuries after its invention. Only with the

decline of slave labor did the mills begin to make financial sense for those in power. On the other hand, the use of the water mill continued in nineteenth century England long after the superior steam engine had been invented “because the local lord could force his tenants to continue bringing the grain to his mill” (Rosen, “Troubadours to Sinatra”).²⁴ Bloch and Rosen’s idea of the non-coincidence of invention and exploitation is crucial not only for understanding Godard’s treatment of two of the *idées fixes* that have inspired his films, but also for grasping classical music’s role in his films’ development of these ideas.

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: the first of these *idées fixes* is the cinema itself, as an invention, possibility, art, business, and tradition; the second is the figure of radical leftist politics, which in Godard’s films has had many guises, including anti-colonialism, Maoism, communism, and perhaps finally today, socialism. In Godard, both the cinema and radical leftism are over before they have properly begun, and yet the desire for them remains. The cinema, for Godard, is both ahead of its time, a potential that has yet to be realized, and also, in its mainstream Hollywood manifestations, an artistic practice that has already become outmoded politically, that is in the late Godard’s view inherently regressive. Godard first announces this obsolescence of the cinema, famously, at the end of *Week End*, the final feature film from his torrent of productivity between 1960 and 1967. After their weekend getaway turns apocalyptic for Godard’s allegorical, bourgeois couple, culminating in cannibalism, the title cards at the end read first “End of Film” and then “End of Cinema.” The destruction of the conniving bourgeoisie in *Week End* brings one logically to the centrality of what would replace the middle-classes for Godard at the pinnacles of culture and politics, a revolutionary international new Left. And here too one encounters the non-coincidence of invention and

²⁴ A parallel exists between this continued use of obsolete technology in the nineteenth century and the staunch opposition on the part of the fossil fuel extraction industry to renewable sources of energy production.

exploitation. Leftist politics in Godard's films are also an invention whose full utilization, despite many failed attempts, has yet to arrive in history. Yet, at the same time, at least since '68, in Godard's films, the enthusiasm for leftist politics has been counterbalanced by a struggle between resignation to and defiance of the neoliberal post-communist consensus. The Left in Godard has not yet properly existed and it is already obsolete. One hastens to add that Godard's version of romantic love also adheres to this temporality.

The film that most plainly acknowledges this disjunctive temporality that defines Godard's *idées fixes* is an obscure one: the short film *L'Amore*, from a compilation film called *Amore e rabbia (Love and Anger)* released in 1969, which featured shorts by Bertolucci, Bellocchio, Lizzani and Pasolini as well as Godard. In Godard in general, short films have often functioned as clearer if not practically naked expressions of his ideological and aesthetic views. It was in the aforementioned short *Le nouveau monde* from 1963, for instance, that he used the quartets of Beethoven and his own handwriting in a film for the first time, both of which would become enduring features of his films. The same goes for his *Scenario du Film Passion*, with which Godard supplemented 1982's *Passion*. The shorter and some argue richer *Scenario* features Godard explicitly elaborating and reflecting on the assumptions behind the actual feature.

L'Amore oscillates between two distinct but overlapping scenes, both of which feature a couple comprised of an Italian-speaking man and a French-speaking woman. In the first scene, a couple leisurely read the paper, smoke, and display a passing interest in each other and in something that is happening not far away from them on the roof of a Parisian apartment building. This something is the film within the film, which features another more passionate couple, "the actors," discussing their love and the tumultuous political events of the 1960s. The viewers are

conscious of the fact that the actors are “from a film” and in their dialogue the viewers acknowledge their boredom about the love relationship of the actors. Their lack of interest in the actors and their little film (the wish is that they will break up) prompts the viewers to express their more general dissatisfaction with mainstream cinema as an art form and what they see as its political analogues: the political economies of the first and second worlds. In both cases, the problem is that old leaders are leading a new world. The debate is thus about both the past and the future of both cinema and political life. The actors stage this debate in their allegorical film within the film. The ambiguous fate of their relationship provides Godard’s tentative solution to the problems raised by the viewers.

The viewers’ crucial debate begins around halfway through the thirty-minute film. The moment in question coincides with the first instance where the two couples speak to each other. “What are you doing?” asks the first couple of the second, as the latter lay about naked on the rooftop. Not receiving an answer, as is only natural considering this first couple is, at least in principle, watching a film, they begin to speculate about the “film” they are watching.

1st Woman: What are they talking about?

1st Man: Considering the images, probably love.

W: But sometimes, images lie.

M: No, images never lie.

W: Yes, images often lie. In fact, cinema is a world of lies. [Man laughs.] Why are you laughing?

M: I’ve got the right to laugh.

W: Yes, but why?

M: I’m laughing because of what you said...that cinema is the art of lying.

W: So, why is that funny?

M: Why's that funny? Because you're of a certain age but you're speaking about something that's very young.

W: I'm not that old, I'm just 20. But the cinema is not so young. It has the age of Roosevelt, Churchill...Stalin after the war.

M: Yes, cinema has the age of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, but they were old and that's why everything's going wrong today.

W: Is everything wrong 'cause they were old? Why?

M: Because they were old people who lead a new world without knowing it was new.

W: Like Kosygin, de Gaulle or Johnson today. Old men who don't know they are leading a new world.

M: Yes.

Here we have a historical claim within Godard's cinema that follows perfectly from part of Charles Rosen's formula about the discrepancy between exploitation and invention. In the formula Rosen states that inventions continue to be employed after they are no longer useful. For Godard, Stalin, Churchill Roosevelt or Kosygin, de Gaulle or Johnson are names or, more precisely, synecdoches for forms of political-economy that have exhausted their usefulness but nevertheless still dominate civilization. The implication of this idea completes the picture: new ideas and forms of political economy exist that are not yet fully exploited. As the conversation continues, it transitions to thoughts about the place of cinema in a world where obsolete political and economic systems continue to dominate.

W: Yeah, alright, but what's the relationship between cinema and me?

M: What's the relationship between you and cinema? It's that you talk about something you don't know.

W: I talk about things I don't know? That's not true. I go to the cinema very often.

M: Perhaps you often go to the cinema, but you see very few films...or, on the contrary, you see lots of films, but you see little cinema.

W: How can you say I see little cinema if I watch lots of films?

M: (Looking directly into the camera for the first time) Because cinema doesn't exist yet, or films either.

One should not try to understand this crucial last statement literally. The claim that the cinema doesn't yet in 1969 exist is, from a literal historical point of view, absurd. But one can very easily account for its spirit from the point of view of the non-coincidence of invention and exploitation. The cinema exists but the idea of it has yet to be fully exploited. As the conversation continues, the woman draws a comparison with the history of mathematics:

W: Cinema doesn't exist yet? So it's like mathematics before Euclid, and before Einstein. It's stuttering...It's clumsy. [The camera shifts about in a confused manner in connection with these last claims.]

M: [Again, he is looking directly into the camera, although now the camera shifts around his face in the same clumsy way as before.] It's like mathematics before Euclid and Einstein. It's a stuttering, clumsy science.

W: And the things we see, what are they?

M: Nothing.

W: Really nothing?

M: (The screen goes dark here) Sometimes...in an old Murnau film, or...a young Bertolucci film...you see something happening.

W: Yes, it's true...sometimes in a young Dreyer film...or in an old Rouche film...you can see something different...like a flash...that is the truth of cinema.

M: Like a bolt of lightning, that represents the truth of cinema.

W: Let's watch.

M: Yes, let's watch.

Here the film begins to return to its allegorical film within the film, but within the weightier philosophical frame of “the truth of cinema.” In the previous dialogue on the cinema, however, the oscillation between young and old films and filmmakers is a substantial corroboration of the idea that for Godard the invention of the cinema is not being fully utilized. These two stages of man's development, the “not yet” of youth and the “too late” of old age correspond to or are identified with the cinema's inability to fully realize itself. The cinema has not yet happened and it is already over. The latter point, that the cinema is no longer useful is emphasized, presented as its truth in the concluding section of the film, where it is figured as the fact that the relationship between the actors – he is the revolutionary; she is the enlightened bourgeois – cannot continue. Godard's cinema as it has so far existed, as a love that involves a political compromise between these two classes, can no longer exist according to the logic of the film within the film's story. He leaves for Cuba. She stays in Paris. Indeed, the revolutionary's decision reflects Godard's own present circumstance. He was in the process of stepping away from the institutions of the European and American film industries in order to make more doctrinally pure and communally produced films with the Dziga Vertov Group. He would not return from the wilderness for more than decade.

The end of *L'Amore* is thus an allegory for Godard's break with the film industry. Indeed, the revolutionary character explicitly connects the militancy of radical politics to the possibility of avant-garde art; he makes the latter conditional upon the former: "Without an armed struggle there is no avant-garde." But it is the lead into the final allegorical tableau that most literally stages the disintegration of Godard's relationship with the film industry with its use of discontinuous sound editing and its fragmentation of the dialogue of the viewers into a repetitive series of oracular and existential statements, e.g. "America will be a theatre of great wars"; "I met a being who fought all humanity to live only for what fascinates us." The deadlock confronting Godard as he leaves the film industry behind for more militantly avant-garde projects is encapsulated in one such rhetorical and philosophical flourish spoken by the viewers over a montage of plant life and fragments of the second couple in close-ups. "If existence is not free, it becomes empty, or neutral. If it's free, it's nothing but a game." The first of these statements perfectly captures the problem confronting Godard at this moment in his career. He felt the existing practices of the cinema to be too conventional, to be the embodiment of the aesthetic corollary of capitalist and totalitarian political economies he could no longer abide. The second statement foreshadows the failure of his movement away from the film industry and gives a reason for his eventual return to it in the early 1980s. The price he paid for his creative freedom was a decade of obscurity from which his reputation if not his films themselves have arguably never fully recovered.

The "Truth" of the cinema that flashes through the subsequent, brief allegory and its filmed commentary is thus a prophecy concerning Godard himself. It is contained in the title of the film within the film that the viewing couple remembers just before the end of the larger film. The secret idea here is that the departure and return of the prodigal children amount to the same

thing, actions of rebellion and contrition that both bear witness to the enduring role of authority in the lives of the prodigal. The irony is that while Godard probably intended for this to signify that he was in a sense returning to the “true” project of the revolutionary people’s cinema after years of prodigality as a student of Hollywood and practitioner of commercial cinema in general, the effect of his actions has been largely interpreted as exactly the opposite, the general opinion being that the Maoist cinema of the late ‘60s through the ‘70s marks the prodigal period in Godard’s work before his return to the industry in the early ‘80s. But the films he made upon his return, a decade after *L’Amore*, did not mark a return to the ‘60s style but a kind of radicalization of his older style, with the compulsion to allegorize as a central feature along with the theme of the Left’s and the cinema’s obsolescent persistence.

Godard the Melancholy Allegorist

The result of this non-coincidence of invention and exploitation in the representation of the two most important thematic areas of Godard’s work – i.e. the ideas of the cinema and of leftist politics – is a profound sense of melancholy that is the “cosmological constant” of Godard’s universe. For Freud, as is well-known, the melancholic is someone who cannot accomplish the work of mourning, who cannot accept the lost object as lost. For Godard, this psychological state is his heroic stance, a form of ethics both personal and political. Godard is a cinematic insider who refused to be one and an avant-garde outsider who has never quite become one. Walter Benjamin connected the stance of the melancholic to the artistic practice of allegory and one cannot help but note, once again, the relevance of Benjamin’s formulations for reading Godard. In this case, it is the melancholic’s compulsion to allegorize that, according to Benjamin, resembles Godard’s practices as a filmmaker:

For the only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory. It is true that the overbearing ostentation with which the banal object seems to arise from the depths of allegory is soon replaced by its disconsolate everyday countenance; it is true that the profound fascination of the sick man for the isolated and insignificant is succeeded by that disappointed abandonment of the exhausted emblem, the rhythm of which a speculatively inclined observer could find expressively repeated in the behavior of apes. But the amorphous details which can only be understood allegorically keep coming up. (*Trauerspiel* 185)

Benjamin's melancholic, like Freud's classic neurotic, is one for whom the libidinal satisfaction from the creation of meaning has become a debilitating form of enjoyment. For the melancholy allegorist, the preferred procedure for the production of meaning is that of fragmentation, the limitlessly repeatable practice of finding meaning in elevated fragments of a totality, but then only momentarily. Yet no matter how disappointing the outcome of this search amongst the fragments, the process goes on indefinitely. If ever there was an allegorist in the history of cinema in the sense outlined here, it is Godard, for whom not only his principal themes of the cinema and radical Leftist politics, but all traditions and tropes of Western art, culture, civilizations, and thought along with the role of text and image and music in his films are so many *disjecta membra* (which Benjamin singles out as the aesthetic ideal of modern allegory) that assume new and easily discarded meanings in their figuration and disfigurement by Godard's cinema. The role of the Western artistic tradition in Godard has been a noted feature of his work at least since Robin Wood's and Lee Russell's debate on Godard in *New Left Review* in the mid-'60s, but seldom has the point been made that the way tradition is not only asserted, but also rendered in fragments and ruins by Godard, finds its strongest precedent in the structure and

tradition of the allegorical in Benjamin's characterization. Indeed, considering how often Godard has attempted to reinvent his methods for producing new works, the consistency with which the allegorical fragment defines and populates his films is truly remarkable.

Where does classical music fit in this version of Godard? At first glance, the answer would simply be: music is another instance of such allegorical *disjecta membra*, since Godard employs classical music in a decidedly fragmentary and allegorical way. But what if any are the unique or exceptional features of classical music fragments as allegories? Perhaps this question should be turned around. What is the effect on the music that Godard uses? Our earlier thesis was that the effect was one of estrangement, of making the music appear in its state of becoming. The irony in this is that classical music is being "reinvented," or more precisely returned to its chaotic newness, just as history itself is being put on life support in Godard by his critique of consumer society's ahistorical attitude. My methodology, of seeking universal or general significance in exceptions, provides a general way not forward but of ordering the instances of Godard's historical allegories of his classical music selections. By beginning to think more systematically about the various modes of appearance of music in Godard, perhaps one can move a step beyond this general sense in which musical fragments are allegorical *membra disjecta*. At the most general level, there are effectively four categories for the mode of appearance of music in Godard.

- Original scores: the exemplar of this category is a film like *Band of Outsiders*, perhaps Godard's most audience friendly work, which features a score by the great film and musical composer Michel Legrand. Godard worked with some of the best, including Legrand on multiple occasions (*A Woman is a Woman*, *My Life to Live*) and George Delurue (*Contempt*).

- Musicals and musical numbers: Godard's only musical, also with music by Legrand was 1961's *A Woman Is a Woman*, but his films in this period often featured whimsical musical numbers. Indeed, the numbers in *Pierrot le fou* are some of the most charming moments in all his work.
- Compilation scores: emblematic of this category is a score that "raids the classics," compiled from Beethoven's aforementioned quartets, but also Mozart, Dvorak, and Ravel in *Passion*, more modernist works alongside Sibelius in *Notre musique*, and so forth. In the '90s, Godard applied this approach to the ECM jazz and "new age" catalogue as well, creating yet another signature sound and period in his filmmaking.
- Diegetic music: starting at the beginning with *Breathless*, which features Mozart's Clarinet Concerto heard on a record player among other instances, diegetic music, both classical and popular, has reoccurred throughout Godard's films. In *One Plus One* and *Prénom Carmen*, Godard essentially made documentaries about the rehearsal and recording process of popular and classical masterpieces, "Sympathy for the Devil" and Beethoven quartets, respectively, that he paired with agitprop and stories that provided counterpoint and figurative correspondences for the music images. And one should not forget *Soigne ta Droite!* here either: the late '80s film that also features the loose story of the rehearsal and recording process of the French pop duo Les Rita Mitsouko, who were briefly prominent in France thanks to the 1985 music video for their song "Marcia Baila," in its diegesis.

The last of these categories is not just of greater interest because of the topic of this chapter and dissertation. It is also, in my view, an important one for studying Godard's use of music as such for the paradoxical reason that it consists of the most exceptional or rarest cases of his use of

music – such extreme uses of music are special interest given the hypothesis of Charles Rosen that they might provoke informative reactions in other formal elements of a film. As exceptions, they offer Godard's allegorical formations regarding music in a hybrid of the more traditional mode of expression of modern allegory, the emblem, and the newest, moving images and sound experienced simultaneously. Godard is famous for the quip that a film must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order. Taking diegetic uses of Mozart's music in *For Ever Mozart*, *Breathless*, and *Week End*, the remainder of this chapter will first present exemplary instances of this phenomenon of the musical emblem but not in chronological order. This is because this unconscious tendency, like the Freudian unconscious itself, is outside of time, in that it recurs and varies in ways that, like the allegorical itself, defy a linear notion of progress. The paradoxical if extreme conclusion that can be drawn from this is that history itself in Godard is eternal, outside of time, not surviving its own death but still persisting, continuing to struggle even after the struggle itself, either the emancipatory leftist project or its cinematic corollary, is seemingly defeated. Godard himself made a comment sympathetic to this view in *Le Gai Savoir* (1969), a "learning film" from the height of his radical days. When his characters discuss the despicable nature of time itself, they conclude that eternity and infamy are twin concepts; that they were "born together." The implication being that infamy assures one's eternity, or in historical terms that the catastrophic finds a place in historical memory by remaining a site of interpretive struggle, a view that the Benjamin of "Theses on the Philosophy of History" would perhaps have sympathized with.

The Dream of Being Mozart Equals Work and Love Alone Together

Perhaps the most straightforward and therefore unusual instance of a musical emblem in Godard occurs in his late film, *For Ever Mozart* (1996). This instance is a useful beginning also

insofar as it occurs at the literal end of a film, punctuating the film, and marking in a sense the temporary cessation of the melancholic's allegorical impulse, with the figure of diegetic classical music. The end of the film also marks a temporary end to the struggles that define Godard's *idées fixes* of leftist politics and cinema. This film, one of several of Godard's references to the conflict that followed the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, features a tragicomic and absurd series of events that lead the director character, who is an avatar for Godard himself, to seek refuge at a concert of a Mozart's piano concerto. First, the struggling film director, Vicky Vitalis (Vicky Messica), frustrated with casting issues, joins his daughter, her nephew, and his maid in a foolhardy if well-intended expedition to Sarajevo, where they want to put on a play. When their mission fails and the young people have died mercilessly, the film turns its gaze from politics to filmmaking. Vitalis had abandoned the young people before they were captured by paramilitaries. Back on the set of his film, which now seemingly involves filming the burial of his young relations and friends, he is finally able to finish his film, entitled "The Fatal Bolero." There is a faint trace of sacrifice in this development: young idealists dying so that a corrupt old director's creative juices can begin flowing again. The melancholic, post-sacrificial effect of allegory comes later, as the film winds down. Richard Brody describes the sequence of events at the close of the film succinctly. "When [his film] is rejected by the public he retreats to a concert hall where a seraphic young man is playing a Mozart piano concerto with a youth orchestra" (Brody 569). To sum up, when life fails in the trip to Sarajevo to stage a play, the film within the film persists and "fails better" in that at least it is completed and premiered, albeit no one watches it. Finally, when his film fails, all that remains to the director is to linger on the outside of a performance of Mozart.

It would be easy to say something to the following effect here: without this musical performance, the film would leave Vitalis and by extension Godard himself staring at the void; that in Godard's mature works, music is apparently the last thing left, the only thing covering the void after the struggle to realize a new cinema and a new politics has been rejected in favor of "Terminator 4," the film the children in line for Vitalis' film claim they would rather see. This interpretation has some value for the way it approaches Rilke's insight that beauty is only the beginning of the terrifying. But it fails to account for the simple dignity of the (admittedly fragmentary) musical performance after the ridiculous, non-naturalistic struggles of the film prior and for the way the film, with comparative mirth, approaches the subject of classical music as something with a greater aura of the sacred than the cinema.

Thus, the film's final diegetic musical performance embodies Godard's notion of struggle as the coincidence of freedom and discipline. The most crucial detail of the performance in this regard, as a progressive definition of struggle, is that it is both informal and formal, combining the more relaxed atmosphere of the rehearsal process and the stricter conventions of actual performance with its ritualized silences and decorum. On the one hand, the conductor talks to the musicians about interpretive and phrasing issues while curious people, many of whom were featured in the film previously, wander in at their leisure and act freely. Some in the audience seem to be coming out of habit, but others arrive as if for the first time in some alien and enchanted place, in one case even approaching the soloist in wonder just before he begins to play, only to be asked by him to turn the pages of his part. On the other hand, it is more than a simple rehearsal in that the orchestra is wearing concert dress, the table is set with a fine spread recalling a traditional still-life painting, one even hears a call for a proper beginning after the soloist's entrance into the room. If nothing else the meaning of this estranging combination of

rehearsal and performance is that the culture of music provides a space for both discipline (on the part of the musicians) and freedom (on the part of the audience). The musicians, all in their youthful student days, appear without the slightest trace of cynicism; the audience, on the other hand, improvises a repartee as if the performance depended on it: “I prefer Wagner!” “No! Not Wagner! You’d hear him at the bottom of the sea! Whereas Mozart...it’s gentle and sweet.” “That’s what people think.” This is followed by the infamous criticism of Mozart, “It has too many notes,” which receives the same response as the clichéd complement that preceded it, “So they say.” In any case, it is Mozart who speaks out after this. The point is that in contrast to the often messy and ridiculous rehearsal process of “The Fatal Bolero” that had occupied so much of the previous film, the simple rehearsal process for a performance of Mozart is already, one might say, ennobled artistry.

The sad but obviously not tragic irony of this state of affairs is that this idealized utopian blend of spontaneity and order, of life and work, that Godard has pursued for so long in his deeply personal art, thus appears at the end of an otherwise bitter and mostly forgotten film. In this regard, a particularly modest and sincere detail in this final sequence is that Vitalis never makes it into the performance space; he halts just as he reaches the top of the stairs and sits down to rest, exhausted from the climb. Godard’s restraint in this detail is as exquisite as its implied indictment of himself is severe, as if the mere presence of the director there would corrupt the utopian mood. But this choice is also symptomatic of his melancholy. After all, many of the other characters from the film, including those involved in the production of “The Fatal Bolero,” are enjoying the performance within. The director would have found his artistic ideal if he had entered the performance, but he stays just outside instead, as if the Mozart performance space represented some kind of noumenal ideal of his art. In this state – alone, outside, reflecting,

listening, conducting to himself in jest – he is allowed not only to embody his recent failure and the memory of it, but also to contribute to the staging and maintaining of the gap between classical music and the cinema at the very moment when they seem united within.

Furthermore, this gap is maintained in the film's sound form by the competing interests of the Mozart and the new-age soundtrack. The soundtrack's signature legato cello figure keeps interrupting, even menacing, the Mozart until finally Vitalis reaches the top of the stairs, and lights his cigarette. His craving satisfied, the Mozart gets the last word over the ECM sound that has become a fixture in Godard since the '90s. The final image of the film is also an unorthodox coincidence of music and cinema that indicates their distance rather than their proximity. After the image of Vitalis managing to make his way to the top of the stairs for a smoke, the film cuts to a close-up point-of-view shot on what is presumably the score for the concerto. Someone is casually leafing through it, with a carefree indifference to whether the music heard corresponds to the notes they are perusing on the page. The film then cuts to the credits, but the sound of the turning of the pages of the score remains, as if the ideas for another, a next movie and its series of musical fragments were readying themselves to occur. Or as Walter Benjamin put it, "the amorphous details which can only be understood allegorically keep coming up."

If there is one thing in Godard's life that just keeps coming up it is obviously his first film, *Breathless*. One of the most heroically defiant confrontations of Godard with the question of *Breathless* in fact occurred while he was working to promote *For Ever Mozart*. After a screening of the latter film, Godard was being interviewed by, of all people, "Danny the Red," Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the student leaders of May '68, and the two took questions from what was essentially a hostile audience, not unlike the one that left "The Fatal Bolero" in search

of “knockers” in *For Ever Mozart*. Here is Cohn-Bendit’s version of the story as related in a recent interview:

We watched the film, and the spectators didn’t understand it.... During the discussion, they were really rough on it. They were disappointed, they were angry, and they really tore into Godard. Then I made the mistake of my life. When I saw that things weren’t going well, I said, “Look, you’ve got one of the greatest directors in the history of cinema in front of you, and you’re just sitting there and grumbling, rather than trying to understand. Godard made the greatest film of all time! It’s called ‘Breathless.’ ” With which Godard went on a rampage and yelled that he wished that this film didn’t exist, that it was the worst, most awful film that he had ever shot, and that if he had the power to do so, he would destroy every single print of it, so that nobody could bother him about it anymore. (Brody, “Breather from ‘Breathless’”)

In Richard Brody’s interpretation, this outburst by Godard is not only “utterly justified,” but also “the hyperbole” is “sublime.” Yet the stranger fact is that while Godard has for years dealt with the pressure and the expectations of remaking *Breathless* from audiences hostile to his ever-evolving work, at the level of certain musical procedures, particular the piling onto the briefest diegetic musical fragments densities of historical and personal associations, Godard has been effectively remaking *Breathless* in a conspicuous way ever since. Indeed, one could very easily imagine a more sober-minded audience member on the occasion of Godard and Cohn-Bendit’s live-audience interview asking Godard to comment precisely on the use of Mozart Concerti at or near the ends of both *For Ever Mozart* and *Breathless*. Godard’s reaction may well have been as violent to this more precise reference to *Breathless* as it was to Cohn-Bendit’s identification of

Godard with the film, but in any case, the matter is hardly to be left to the opinion of Godard, who is clearly less likely to judge the matter in a calm, reflective manner.

The scene in question in *Breathless* that features Mozart in yet another diegetic allegorical emblem for music and history occurs as the police are closing in on Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who is wanted for the murder of a police officer. Michel has tried to call in a loan from a friend to fund his and his girlfriend Patricia's escape from France, but all he is able to extract from the friend Antonio is a place to lay low and hide out. The hideout, which adds to the litany of Hollywood and more specifically noir clichés of the film, is the most self-consciously theatrical and cinematic part of the film's otherwise neorealist *mise en scène*. This is made clear initially by the fact that the hideout is being used as a location for a photo shoot, complete with lighting equipment, props, a photographer giving instructions, close-ups on a rather meretriciously overdone model, and a conversation between Michel and Patricia (Jean Seberg) in which he finally acknowledges her movie-star good looks. "You could model," he tells her, to which she replies, "But then you have to sleep with everybody."

All of this makes for nice a semiotic prelude to a moment of sincere connection between the lovers who have otherwise been playfully at odds with one another the entire film, including over music, as when Patricia plays a jazz record earlier that day in her apartment and Michel vociferously complains. In Mervyn Cooke's analysis, the disagreement in this earlier, longer, and far more famous sequence in the apartment is further compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the source of the music that is played in the apartment scene:

The most striking use of music occurs in the film's extended bedroom sequence, in which the protagonist's girl stops playing classical music on her gramophone because he dislikes it: a jerky edit at the moment she is assumed to turn on the radio makes the

spectator uncertain of whether the ensuing piano jazz is in fact diegetic, and this ambiguity is strengthened when – no fewer than seven times – the music stops abruptly and later restarts (in the majority of cases identically) after appreciable pauses. This disconcerting manipulation of the soundtrack occurs under a long stretch of commonplace dialogue. (321-322)

The difference between this playfully ironic musical editing and the use of Mozart in the film's diegesis near the end couldn't be greater. In the latter case, there are no games, no experiments with or on the soundtrack, no disagreements over the music selected. With Mozart, Patricia has hit upon not just a composer or musical genre that Michel adores, but a particular piece, in fact the only piece he likes, Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, that is a source of familial pride and moral grounding for the otherwise drifting Michel. His father was clarinetist, he tells her, and a good one, "a genius."

The exceptionalism of this piece, however, does not stop with the paternal association for Michel. It passes quickly over into being of general significance, and specifically the territory of Godard's *idées fixes*, when it is heard with a truly exceptional shot for the film: a close-up on a text that is not drawn from popular culture, a Lenin quotation – "We are dead men on leave," the meaning of which is less surprising than the source. Indeed, without knowing it was said by Lenin, one might have attributed it to Godard himself and the existentialist angst and forebodings of death that have marked Michel's character throughout the film. But with the inclusion of the name, the quote, like the mention of Mozart in relation to the fragment of his Clarinet Concerto that would have passed practically without notice had it occurred on the soundtrack, occupies the position of an emblem. What is the point? Lenin's line is of course a wry and radical reformulation of what amounts to the major premise of Western philosophy: all men are mortal.

Indeed, it is technically an enthymeme, or a syllogism in which one of the premises is implicit. But the attraction of this line over the more traditional way of putting it goes beyond its polemical attempt to awaken the masses to action. For Godard, in this scene and this film and his career, the allure of Lenin's line is its strange temporality: that one is already dead while nevertheless being still alive, and the melancholy connotation this implies.

This point is reinforced but from the opposite direction by the Mozart. As Godard pointed out to reporters and film critics while promoting the film upon its original release, the Clarinet Concerto was the work of a dying man: it was one of the last works Mozart completed. But rather than having the obvious stamp of a dying man like the more famous and unfinished Requiem, the work, or at least the excerpts we hear of it in the film, sounds "gentle and light" to quote the audience member in *For Ever Mozart*. The way the scene is filmed, however, in effect undermines the human warmth of the music. It is played on a LP, which is seen spinning in a medium close-up, highlighting the mechanical reproduction of the music heard, and more abstractly confirming the Lenin quote that appears in close-up in the ensuing shot. The music in this state has lost some of its aura, in Benjamin's term, as it is heard outside of the context where its "live" performance would be possible. It is between existences now: already dead, preserved forever on the unalterable recording, but yet still living, being heard and enjoyed by audiences otherwise unavailable outside of the concert hall. The point of all this reference to death at the level of allegorical fragments is not only that it overdetermines, as in a dream, the impending death of Michel, something that has been going on throughout the film, as when he claims he would chose nothing over grief in an argument about a line in Faulkner with Patricia. Nor is it just a symbolic manner of introducing the topic of sex, le petit mort, as the two of them are about to spend a final night together before she turns him in.

The “true” point of referring to Mozart and Lenin, one as a figure and the other as the exponent of the living dead, is to point out how Michel is already dead: not in the sense that he is very near to being apprehended, but in the sense in which Godard’s characters are all, according to both his own Brechtian designs after a certain point and also according to some of his critics, “depthless”: repeating slogans, not touched with the unreal exaggerations of sentimentality and expression that realism ironically demands. Stanley Cavell put this point to Godard long ago in *The World Viewed*, his canonical film theory text of 1967, in an oddly second-person mode of address:

If you believe that people speak in slogans to one another, or that women are turned by bourgeois society into marketable objects, or that human pleasures are now figments and products of advertising accounts and that these are directions of dehumanization – then what is the value of pouring further slogans into that world (e.g. ‘People speak in slogans’ or ‘Women have become objects’ or ‘Bourgeois society is dehumanizing’ or ‘Love is impossible’)? And how do you distinguish the world’s dehumanizing of its inhabitants from your depersonalizing of them? How do you know whether your asserted impossibility of love is anything more than an expression of your distaste for its tasks? Without such knowledge, your disapproval of the world’s pleasures, such as they are, is not criticism (the negation of advertising) but censoriousness (negative advertising). (99)

Cavell definitely touches on something fundamental about Godard’s project with these questions. The affectless universe of Godard is often frustratingly short on drama and long on clues for the initiated and is, perhaps (emphasis on perhaps), ultimately emptier, if not at least more pretentious, than the bourgeois consumerism it condemns. But there is another point Godard is making, perhaps more radical than Cavell realizes. What Godard calls into question is not

society so much as, again, the role of the cinema within it and particularly in the struggle to change society in a left-leaning direction. His question, which has mostly been answered in the negative by the industry but remains outstanding in his own art some fifty years on, is whether it is possible for film as art or art as such to be critical, in the Frankfurt School sense of the term, awakening people with illustrations of withering accusations against the state and private sector. Can film rise to the level of the negation of advertising or can the best it hope for be negative advertising? For Godard this question is unresolved; but recalling his outburst against *Breathless* fifteen years ago, one need only point out, at last, that he would freely admit to the error of only attaining to negative advertising in early, pop-culture obsessed films like *Breathless*. In any case, the one moment in *Breathless* one can be fairly certain he wouldn't disown is the one in which Mozart meets Lenin, after each of their own deaths, but before the cinema's own. The latter's death is affected, however, by Godard's principle actors in *Breathless*; in their indifference to their own and each other's fates, it as if they inhabit a modern subdivision of the primordial petrified landscape that is allegory's historical topography. Michel doesn't go to his death; his leave merely ends.

The Sense of an Ending in the Middle of Godard's Week End

Given the presence of fragments of Mozart at the end of both *Breathless* and *For Ever Mozart*, a pattern-seeking critic would most likely wish that Godard's "last first film" (and really his only last film of any kind to date), the notorious *Week End*, would end with a bit of Mozart as well. After all, this is the shocking film that in many ways both further enhanced Godard's general cultural cachet and global cinematic celebrity and brought the wild ride of his early years to a halt. Godard thought he could go no further in the commercial cinema and he arrogantly if not incorrectly interpreted this fact as the end of the cinema itself rather than merely his

involvement in it. And above all of course, the film's story leads viewers through a world in which the social order of what it calls "class society," and what we could more simply call France in the late 1960s, is self-destructing.

Yet, while Godard's *Week End* does prominently contain an instance of Mozart's music, it does not figure in the ending of this film. Indeed, while in the main the film both figuratively and literally shows modern society falling apart, the Mozart scene has often been viewed as belonging to a series of contrasting interludes that interrupt the Beckett-like main plot (in which the money-hungry Parisian couple of Roland (Jean Yanne) and Corinne (Mireille Darc) struggle to reach the provincial town of Oinville to write themselves into the family will before her father dies. In particular, the Mozart provides a needed respite from both the descent into barbarism that animates the film's overall story and most if not all of the other interludes, as if Mozart still represented an untouchable sacred sphere. But the melancholic historical and aesthetic framework elaborated throughout Godard's work points to another and more consistent interpretation of Mozart's place in this film. Indeed, both a detailed formal analysis and a historical-materialist sensibility reveal that the Mozart scene is closely related to the major interlude that follows it, in which sanitation workers make political speeches about the Algerian and Kenyan struggles for independence from colonial rule. This "revolutionary" scene, that is ostensibly very different from the Mozart scene, in which the film director Paul Gegauff plays a travelling piano salesman or Gaullist cultural ambassador performing a Mozart sonata in a farming village to promote his wares, offers the proper perspective from which to understand the significance of the Mozart of *Week End*.

Reviewing *Week End* for *The New York Times* during its initial US release in the fall of 1968, Renata Adler's comments can be taken as representative of what is typically felt to be the

contrast between the Mozart scene and other interludes and the one regarding the revolutionary climate in the politics of the Third World in the late-'60s.

The movie is interspersed with little essays, idylls, jokes, a Mozart sonata, a frantic love song sung by Jean-Pierre Léaud in a telephone booth, noise, rituals, battles with paint sprayers and tennis balls. It ends in slaughter and cannibalism... There is a moment near the end when the movie cracks up—long, dogmatic, motionless diatribes on behalf of Africa and the Arab countries with a peroration against black nonviolence, which keeps one thinking Biafra, Biafra, and wanting to walk out. (In fact, it might be advisable to walk out when the speeches begin for a cup of coffee and a cigarette.) It's unprofessional, like a musician stopping a concert to deliver a bit of invective to a captive audience. But perhaps, like any serious artist, Godard cannot help including all his preoccupations raw right now, even if they bring his movie down. (Adler)

To sum up Adler's criticism, the Mozart scene belongs in the film; the revolutionary one does not. Aside from the hindsight wisdom that with this scene Godard was announcing the new didactic style that would define his films for many years to come, my counterargument would be, if the revolutionary one does not belong to the film then neither does the Mozart one. They are more alike than they are different. Thus, pace Adler, if this moment is like a musician who stops playing, it is so he can explain the meaning of the music, as the pianist in the film's earlier Mozart sonata scene does. For Godard, the self-destruction of France in *Week End* is payback for colonization in the form of a dream-like wish-fulfillment on the part of the emblematic sanitation workers in this scene.

There are, of course, many crucial and obvious differences between the two scenes that will help throw their underlying commonality into starker relief. In the Mozart scene, while

Gegauff plays the opening movement of the late Sonata for Piano in D Major K. 576 for farm-workers and the other assembled villagers, Roland and Corinne are clearly beyond bored with this unnecessary pit-stop on their journey; whereas, they are more interested in the workers' speeches not only because they have provided a means of transportation and food to the formerly prosperous couple, but because of a certain *je ne sais quoi* they see in the workers' enthusiasm. Although they hardly join the cause, they are certainly listening. The Mozart scene is shot in a way that reflects the boredom of the principles at a formal level: it is one long circular panning shot that pauses only briefly on the point of supposed interest, the piano and the pianist. The revolutionary speeches are, however, correlated with long-take close-ups of the opposite worker from the one who is speaking, with the silent worker staring directly and with confident nonchalance into the camera. These are among the only such "psychological" shots in a film otherwise characterized by long-takes of shots with a certain detachment if not objectivity built into them by their distance from characters and actions, and they are correlative to another unusual shot for the film, a crane shot that opens the scene.

Yet despite these and other significant differences, on the other hand, these two interludes, with Mozart and the revolutionaries, are united by important if more subtle and hidden features. In both instances, first the musician and then the salvage crew provide transportation for the bourgeois couple who are figures for their social class as such. The meaning of this shared feature of transporting the couple is to a certain degree determined by how it contrasts with an earlier scene where, lost in the woods, the couple encounters Alice from Lewis Carroll's story. When they ask her for directions she answers only in riddles. Growing frustrated, they set her on fire, justifying their actions with the thought that she is not real, but only a character in a story. Having said this, however, they quickly note that so too are they.

The allegorical significance of the later transport scenes thus becomes clear: at an art historical level, it is music and not literature that can carry the bourgeoisie forward on their journey, or with which they can be more closely associated symbolically. Taken in isolation and without reference to the later revolutionary transport, this interpretive point would be ambiguous at best. Roland and Corinne are hardly commendable characters. One would hope in fact that after their brutal treatment of the innocent if unreal Alice they would receive no further aid on their journey. Instead, Gegauff as the piano salesman or cultural ambassador takes them part of the way, but not without stopping off for his appointed recital. Indeed, it is only with the further example of the sanitation workers delivering the couple to their destination, where they promptly murder Corinne's mother after negotiations sour, that it becomes plausible that both incidents of transportation by truck effectively contribute to the demise of Roland and Corinne and by extension their social class (somewhat literally in the case of her mother whom they kill).

Indeed, they fail to arrive in time to change the will before her father's death, and after murdering her mother they abscond into the woods only to be set upon by cannibals, with Corinne joining them in devouring Roland in the final scenes of the film. The point here regarding the historicity of the Mozart is that it is perhaps unwittingly but nevertheless effectively a partner to the sanitation workers in furthering the self-destruction of Roland and Corinne. Furthermore, in both cases the couple is transported in the back of a commercial vehicle alongside the identifying commodity of the respective workers: a piano in the first case, garbage and scrap in the second. These two commodities may seem opposed as instances of high and extremely low culture, but are they not rather the same commodity in two different phases of not only both the production-distribution-consumption network and the commodity-form, but also, somewhat more figuratively and at a more abstruse level of significance, the same

commodity in the course of historical development itself? The piano is a commodity in all the glory of what Marx called the commodity's "theological niceties and metaphysical subtleties." The leveling of the particular use-values of the products, or rather the remnants of products, in the refuse in the sanitation vehicle effectively represents, in a further step, the exchange-value of all particular commodities. Their universal equivalence, normally arrived at by intellectually abstracting from their particular features, is here rendered, in an ironic twist, by simply destroying them all. A further proof of the speculative identity of the piano with the garbage resides in the implicit Leninism of the sanitation workers. With Lenin being famous for having denounced the pastime of playing and listening to music as a enervating distraction in the midst of revolutionary activity – "It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid nice things, and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell" – one cannot help but conclude that the sanitation workers' haul contains the remnants of one or two pianos already (Ross, *The Rest Is Noise* 218). At the very least, they would probably welcome disposing of a piano or two. The placement of Roland and Corinne on the pile of trash during the lectures is in this regard a finishing touch. Both the bourgeoisie and the instrument most identified with the affluence of their culture are being disposed of.

There is a further way still in which the two scenes are united that may escape a cursory examination. It has to do with the disconnection between voice and image in the case of the sanitation workers' monologues and with the alternation of music and image and lecture in the Mozart scene. In an apparent and more obvious discrepancy, in the trash collectors' scene, the film emphasizes the gap separating the sound from the image by having the off-screen worker speak on behalf of the pictured worker. In the first instance, the figure pictured is purported to be an Arab-Algerian; in the second instance, the worker is an African meant to stand for

solidarity in the face of exploitation both colonial and post-colonial. The effect of having the worker pictured remain silent should not go unnoticed. By remaining silent and calmly eating his daily bread during his accompanying speech, each worker displays both quiet dignity and steeled resolve concerning the talked-of revolution; this would not be possible had they each spoken in the same impassioned manner on their own behalf. The interchangeableness of each for the other at the level of the message they communicate furthermore underscores what Godard and many others saw as the breathtaking, if sometimes overstated and oversimplified, revolutionary spirit displayed throughout the Third World on the part of historically colonized people.

If there is a leftist criticism of this scene it is that Godard is engaging in an idealization of the struggle against capitalism elsewhere, in the midst of his despair over the unlikely prospect of a similarly successful overcoming of bourgeois cultural and economic power within France and the First World more generally. In the broader perspective, this criticism is corroborated by Godard's previous film. *Week End* is in this sense a sequel to Godard's other 1967 film, *La Chinoise*, in which French students, some of whom effectively play themselves, form a militant Maoist cadre in the hopes of sparking a wider revolt among their peers with their assassination of a Soviet Cultural Minister. The plot fails when they assassinate the wrong man by mistake, but the doubts about the effect of such a violent measure and the possibility of awakening the population more generally through student violence were already criticized persuasively in a dialogue between one of the Maoist students, Véronique (played by Godard's lover and soon-to-be wife Anne Wiazemsky), and her philosophy professor, Francis Jeanson, himself a communist operative during the Algerian War. The dissolution of existing society in *Week End* is an

extreme but nonetheless logical consequence of the failure of the students to spark a broader demand and struggle for a different world in *La Chinoise*.

But to focus on Godard's idealization of the revolutionary Third World as a pronounced contrast to both the student struggle in *La Chinoise* and the involution of modern France in *Week End* overlooks the way *Week End* itself establishes links between the First and Third World not only by placing the revolutionaries within the deteriorating situation in contemporary France, but also, in a formal way, by introducing corresponding gaps between sound and image in the revolutionary scene and image and music in the Mozart scene. In this way, albeit probably unconsciously, Godard does connect the struggle abroad, that he idealizes, to life on a typical estate, complete with an array of workers, in provincial France. The Mozart Sonata ventriloquizes not so much the consciously politicized psyches of the workers in the farming community; instead, the music embodies what in the course of the film's revolutionary speeches is called "the contradictory character of all class-based societies." This contradictory character is apparent in a number of ways in the scene: most obviously, it is represented visually in the slow panning shot that reveals both the farmhouses and the laborers in juxtaposition to the venerable, ivy-covered estate villa. The characters in the scene also exhibit contradictory behavior: Roland and Corinne are bored to death, having no doubt failed to develop an interest in Mozart after receiving lessons as children; the farm laborers seem mildly interested; and the young girl (Anne Wiazemsky) from the manor house seems most attentive, as if she were emerging from Mozart's own era, the imagined newness of the music being one way to account for her rapt attention as she approaches and hovers at the side of the piano.

At another level, the music and the farming community together form a similar contradiction, with the utility of the farmers' and domestic workers' way of life standing

comically at odds with the useless luxury, sociologically speaking, of the music they are almost forced to listen to, as if finally after nearly two hundred years it had occurred to the landowners that their workers might want to hear the music they had been playing in the parlors all this time. Indeed, in yet another example of the contradiction between invention and exploitation, the music here is persisting too long, after its historical period has ended, when it must be artificially and inorganically trucked in from far away, no longer being spontaneously a part of the spirit of the age – an idea reiterated by Gegauff’s comment that Mozart would make a killing on royalties had he composed in the present day. Indeed, the fact the film comes to a halt here and labels it an “Action Musicale” corroborates this point while also referring distantly, in the term “action,” to the hidden Marxism of Godard’s Mozart.

One thus arrives at the truly important point about the use of Mozart in this scene. The sonata itself, which is a representative work of its era to be sure, also embodies not only the contradictory nature of class society but also the utopian resolution of such a contradiction. As Charles Rosen has noted in his most recent book, *Music and Sentiment*, the classical style of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven is to a great degree defined by contradictory or contrasting sentiments contained in the principle themes of their instrumental works. As fate would have it, Rosen even selects the very same Mozart sonata as Godard, K. 576, as an instance of the way contradiction and resolution are inherent to melodic writing in the classical style of the late-eighteenth century.

Mozart’s late Sonata for Piano in D major, K. 576, employs exactly the same device as the ‘Jupiter’ Symphony, beginning with a theme with two opposing motifs: a peremptory hunting horn-call and a light and graceful answer of a half cadence, and repeating the theme at the supertonic minor with the same opposition. As in the ‘Jupiter’ Symphony,

the theme is repeated at once, and in this counterstatement an obbligato is added in the soprano that unites the two motifs and removes the opposition of sentiment. Following this synthesis is a display of conventional brilliant passagework that closes this opening paragraph. (53-54)

Rosen's characterization of the two themes, on the one hand, as a hunting horn-call and, on the other, as light and graceful could be interpreted along a number of standard axes: it is gendered, with the first theme represented the leisure activity of male nobleman or well-off bourgeois and the second epitomizing the feminine archetypal characteristics of the period. The contrast is also one of the domestic sphere and the natural world, action versus tact, barbarism versus cultivation, violence versus non-violence, etc. In a further complication, however, one might add that the horn-call motif's identity itself is contradictory, having its origins in a practical function but its continuance in a leisure activity. Indeed, the very frivolity and obsolescence of the hunting-call and its re-appropriation as leisure are effectively causes for its placement in this sonata. Music that was once useful is now material for music for enjoyment and the cultivation of sensibility.

Earlier in his discussion of this typical synthesis of opposing motifs in the classical style, Rosen, as non-ideological of a critic as one is likely to encounter, feels compelled both to mention the Hegelian nature of this trait and to distance himself from the Hegelian interpretation:

I should not like seriously to propose an analogy with Hegelian logic (invented only a couple of decades after Mozart's death), with its succession of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but I was once taken to task by a musicologist I admire for not mentioning Kant's aesthetics in [another of his books] *The Classical Style*, so I mention Hegel here just to play it safe. In any case, the presentation of an opposition and its resolution is

fundamental to a good deal of dramatic form, if not actually to all, and certainly basic to the theatre during Mozart's era. The instrumental style of late eighteenth-century German music developed some of the dramatic effect of opera, making it more concentrated and more efficient, and the new power was given back to opera by Mozart. (52-53)

In the passages I have quoted Rosen both elucidates the contradictory nature of the thematic material in Mozart and describes its resolution, and makes reference to an ideological and historical correlative in the philosophy of Hegel. In Godard's use of this sonata's first movement, including the repetition of the above-analyzed first theme, both the contradictory nature of the music material and the political implications of its incipient philosophical background in Hegel are compounded by the cinematic materials associated with it by Godard.

Indeed, in addition to containing perhaps the first ever instance in academic literature of a reference to Hegel being considered "safe," this passage from Rosen and the previous one are, furthermore, notable for the way they contrast with the attempts at musicological description and commentary carried out by the pianist, played by filmmaker Paul Gegauff, during the Mozart scene in *Week End*. Whereas Rosen's analysis excels at presenting almost exceedingly familiar musical material in a new light and develops a convincing interpretation of its implications for artistic form more generally, as well as revealing a pattern across different works and composers, Gegauff's pianist is a satirical self-parody of a music professor and of Godard himself, as he smokes one of Godard's signature cigars and recites platitudinous contraries about Mozart and his music: e.g., he died a pauper (what a shame!), "Mozart is too easy for beginners and too difficult for virtuosi," etc. There is however one notable exception to the boiler-plate irony of his

clichés: the dichotomy Gegauff draws between Mozart, as an instance of “music one listens to,” and what he calls “modern music,” or “music one doesn’t listen to”:

There’s music you listen to and music you don’t. Mozart you listen to. Just imagine the royalties the poor man would get nowadays. Music you don’t listen to is what’s called modern “serious” music. No one goes to the concerts. Real modern music, paradoxically, is based on Mozart’s harmonies, you hear bits of Mozart in the Beatles, the Rolling Stones or whatever. Fundamentally, they use Mozart’s harmonies. Modern “serious” music looked for others resulting in what is probably the biggest disaster in the history of art. I’ll continue the sonata, as all this bores you. (51:00-53:00)

Of course, despite its acceptance as conventional wisdom, none of this is true as it pertains to the supposed distinction between Mozart and modern “serious” music. The fact is that not enough people go to see classical music performances of any variety, including Mozart, to allow for the great orchestras and opera houses to survive without state subsidies and philanthropic aid. A better barometer of the reputation and/or legacy of a composer is not how many people listen to his or her music, an obviously rather market-oriented and therefore limited method of assessment, but rather how many musicians are interested in or in fact do continue to play his or her music. By this measure, “serious” music is doing quite well, with many professional groups devoting their time and considerable resources to its performance. If it is played less often than works by Mozart, this has more to do with the considerable difficulties involved in mastering such music on the part of would-be performers than with the complaints of the audiences who are so unlikely to attend in either case.

Indeed, the chief irony of this disparagement of “serious” music and also the clue that the pianist’s views are a self-conscious parody of Godard’s own, is that Godard’s own filmmaking,

especially in the years since *Week End*, is effectively the modern cinematic equivalent of the “serious” music derided in this monologue as an art historical “disaster.” Indeed, if there are films to be watched and those not to be, then at an empirical level post-*Week End* Godard mostly belongs to the latter category, with audience members staying away when they are even aware that Godard has a new film in the first place. Yet, on the other hand, Godard’s films, even the more obscure ones, do have a following among the most important audience, filmmakers and cinéphiles. Indeed, if they lack a more general audience, as is well known, this was a conscious decision on Godard’s part to walk away from the film establishment both financially for most of the ‘70s and aesthetically since long before then and all the way to the present. Still the difference between the cinema and classical music industry becomes clear in this comparison as well, as the cinema is still, in however limited a series of forms, commercially viable where classical music is not. Godard would probably in a more combative mood take its very commercial viability as a sign of its lack of viability at an artistic level, however.

The broader point here is that like Mozart’s antithetical melody and its resolution in the opening bars of K. 576, the antitheses of music you listen to and music you don’t, and films you view and films you don’t, are relatively easily resolved. However the method used to resolve these latter contradictions between films seen and unseen and music heard and unheard is qualitatively different than in the case of Mozart’s contradictory musical ideas. In both cases the resolution of the antithesis occurs when one simply looks at the second part of the antithesis, the negative part, in a different way. In the case of classical music, the briefest of reflections leads one to realize that the category of music that is not listened to actually encompasses both sides of the dichotomy introduced by Gegauff. This is a resolution that undermines the whole standard of measure. If one is not content with a generalized negative result, however, a slight change of

perspective allows one to consider the importance of the composers as measured by a more venerable standard: whether other musicians want to play their music. By this measure “serious” music and Mozart belong to the same affirmative category: the music that musicians want to play. It would be easy to say that something analogous has occurred in Godard’s own fate: his late films are not part of the unseen, but part of those seen by the most enthusiastic filmmakers, critics and other students of the cinema, even if a consensus about them eludes us.

But the cinema being a more passive art in comparison to music, at least at the level of mobilizing individual performances, its dichotomy of the seen and the unseen at best forms an imperfect analogy with *Week End*’s listened to and unheard music. And yet the resolution of the films seen and those unseen is even more important not only for a consideration of Godard, but also for the resolution of the contradictions undoing society in *Week End* and in the reality of society outside of the film but reflected and refracted within it. Godard’s solution to this crisis in the film is an infamous and ominous one: “the horror of the bourgeoisie can only be countered with more horror.” The bourgeoisie, through the figure of Roland, are devoured by cannibals, and in the figure of Corinne they become cannibals. In this double-gesture Godard’s film fulfills the old Marxist prophecy about capitalism bringing about its own destruction, but he does so in a way that leaves society no better off for having endured this moment. The dignity and heroism of the workers as the ones who will capitalize on this ironic self-destruction, while a part of Godard’s imagination and cinematic emblem-chest in general, is not part of *Week End*’s ending. There are only various and competing groups of outlaws: the adult bourgeoisie and their inherent other, the prodigal youth who consume them (and would become them). The Mozart scene, by contrasts, offers some of the only at least neutral if not more beneficent depictions of ordinary people taking a break from their work to gain an appreciation of music and an ordinary musician

laboring over his music. It is these features and not the actual “horrifying” ending of *Week End* that has proved the more enduring feature of Godard’s late films. Indeed, his three films to focus for sustained periods on the process of creating music, *One Plus One*, *Prénom Carmen* and *Soigne ta Droite!*, were all made after *Week End*. Moreover, fragments from classical music have become increasingly common in Godard’s films as well; and, the kind of non sequitur moment which the Mozart scene typifies foreshadows the difficult and often non-narrative “new normal” of Godard’s future filmmaking.

In conclusion, one should return to the fact that the Gegauff character is the closest thing the film has to a stand-in for Godard himself. Recall then what transpires after the recital and impromptu lecture ends. Gegauff is seen dropping off Roland and Corinne, shaking hands, and politely going on his way. This is the true ending of Godard’s first period. He has left the hopelessly barbaric and allegorically exaggerated bourgeoisie behind and set off with his piano and his music for an undiscovered cinematic country. One has only to add one or two details to this cargo for it to be a complete emblem for Godard’s work since *Week End*. The back of the truck should contain both that “Bechstein” piano and the scrap and junk from the revolutionaries trash men, with the Third World revolutionaries riding shotgun in the cab. This counterfactual picture would be a comprehensive portrait of Godard in his own cinema. And it should be both painted as graffiti in the streets of Paris in 1968 and hung on a wall in a museum as a finishing touch, so that Godard’s melancholic sense of history as both too soon and too late shines through in the resulting contradiction. To put it optimistically and from his point of view, the revolution Godard dreams of has yet to arrive; and, on the other hand, it already occurred and failed. Meanwhile, the cinema’s obsolescence was a foregone conclusion before he even began making films. But happily Godard managed to resolve this contradiction. If the world could not be

revolutionized, at least his own cinema could be. And he accomplished this in a paradoxical way: by clinging to the past, most notably in his use of classical music, and making it seem new again.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Anachronistic Prequel to *Winterreise*: Michael Haneke's Critique of Film Music in *The Piano Teacher*

In his perceptive reflections on Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* (*The Piano Teacher*), film critic Robin Wood makes the following claim about the role of Franz Schubert's song-cycle *Winterreise* (*A Winter's Journey*) in the film. "One can understand *La Pianiste* without access to *Winterreise*, but one cannot understand it completely" (59). Taking this thesis as a starting point, my interpretation of the film both endorses and radicalizes this idea. In a sentence, I read *The Piano Teacher* as an anachronistic prequel to *Winterreise*. When Erika (Isabelle Huppert) hits bottom after her affair with her student Walter (Benoit Magimel), the film ends when she is finally ready to depart on her winter's journey. At this moment she resembles the singer in Schubert's cycle and the speaker in Wilhelm Müller's monodrama: she has failed at love and abandoned the other defining characteristics of her life.

Winterreise is thus the inter-textual aspect of the film that defers our understanding of the film by referring us to another text, another complex work of art apart from the film itself. In this sense, the minute one pays attention to the music one has already passed from the film in-itself to the film in dialogue with *Winterreise*. It is the goal of this chapter to propose an interpretation of the film in relation to *Winterreise* that shows how once we pass to the inter-textual aspect of the film there is no going back to the film "in-itself." The effect of this is that Schubert's *Winterreise* does not "complete" our understanding of the film so much as it emphasizes and exacerbates the complexities of the film. In more commonsense terms, I depart from Wood's thesis in that I think the music in the film, especially by Schubert and especially his *Winterreise*, is crucial not to understanding the film overall so much as to grasping the most

ambiguous aspects of the film, the parts of the film that, in part because of their violence and perversity, do not want to be understood, that defy or frustrate interpretation. Haneke's controversial films in general are known for such overwhelming and usually violent moments, and this fascination with violence is indeed a crucial aspect of his films. But one must here distinguish between types of violence in Haneke's films. For Haneke's most important contribution to the cinema resides in the ways his films overcome their own (and the contemporary cinema's) fascination with sensational violence and foster a sensibility for often overlooked modes of violence: both structural violence and semantic violence.

In order to make clear what is so singular and yet of general importance in *The Piano Teacher*, I will first discuss some of the unifying features of Haneke's work: (1) his cinema as critique, (2) his cinema as an exploration of modes of violence, (3) and the *musique concrète* of his sound design. These three features form a "negative dialectic" when they are thought together. The cinema of critique seeks to negate existing cinema practice; this process, however, generates an ambiguous remainder in the form of a fascination with violence. This remainder in turn can be redeemed through an examination of the way violence is at work not just in the content of Haneke's most infamous sequences and images but in certain formal features of his films as well as in their social and political themes. Indeed, when they are analyzed closely, common features in his films – e.g. long takes, silence, abrupt cuts, de-familiarizing close-ups, multiple narratives, and above all a palpable disenchantment with the new world order of globalization – all point *beyond* the obvious violence he is sometimes accused of hypocritically exploiting while nominally condemning and towards the hidden modes of violence that define social reality at a more fundamental level. Paradoxically, it is through the indirect perspective of

the trope of music in Haneke's films that I think the most consistent and detail-oriented interpretation of these levels of violence can be articulated.

The Piano Teacher is exceptional in a number of ways within this framework. Its critique questions both a fundamental element of film form – music – and its related film genre – melodrama – whereas typically Haneke's early films meditate on aspects of film form while his more recent films address genre categories. Similarly, it is Haneke's only film that features sustained implicit reflections on the relationship of cinema to the other arts and on the construction of desire and sexuality. What do the two, art and sex, have to do with one another? To put it bluntly, in *The Piano Teacher* music is the safest kind of sex and sex is the worst kind of music. Schubert makes for arousing foreplay in the film, but the sexual relationship it leads to ends in what is widely considered one of the most depressing sex scenes in any serious film, a tragic spectacle in which Erika's worst nightmare occurs when Walter fulfills her masochistic dream. Finally, after his films had explored a variety of modes of sound design as *musique concrète* and featured limited appearances of music by Berg and Bach, culminating in complex references to and uses of silence in *Code Unknown*, *The Piano Teacher*'s art music is rather like what George Eliot called “the roar on the other side of silence,” the hidden, invisible musical fabric of cinema that overwhelms our senses when we become momentarily aware of it.

Haneke's Critique of Cinematic Reason

Because one might initially want to categorize *The Piano Teacher* as uniquely belonging to a traditional genre form, that of melodrama, as opposed to the films that proceed and follow from it in Haneke's output, perhaps one should begin by pointing out the interconnectedness, the fundamental intellectual activity of all Haneke's films, including *The Piano Teacher*. All his films are united by the project of the critique of media and cinematic forms and the critique of

the ideologies that are entailed by these forms. But because the word critique is so often used, but so infrequently defined, it will be helpful to review perhaps *the* benchmark definition of “critique” from the introduction to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant describes the task of critique through the metaphor of a tribunal:

It [i.e. the critique of pure reason] is a call to reason to take on once again the most difficult of all its tasks – viz. that of self-cognition – and to set up a tribunal that will make reason secure in its rightful claims and that will dismiss all baseless pretensions, not by fiat but in accordance with reason’s eternal and immutable laws. This tribunal is none other than the critique of reason itself: the critique of pure reason.

By critique of pure reason, however, I do not mean a critique of books and systems, but I mean the critique of our power of reason as such...Hence I mean by it the decision as to whether a metaphysics as such is possible or impossible, and the determination of its sources as well as its range and bounds. (8)

An adaptation of the major points in this passage would go a long way towards understanding how critique functions in Haneke. Indeed if we substitute “cinema” for “reason,” we would have something like Haneke’s artistic program or manifesto. *It is a call to cinema to take on once again the most difficult of all its tasks – viz. that of self-cognition – and to set up a tribunal that will make cinema secure in its rightful claims and will dismiss all baseless pretensions and propagandistic distortions, not by fiat but in accordance with cinema’s eternal and immutable laws. This tribunal is none other than the critique of cinema itself. By critique of cinema, however, I do not mean a critique of books about cinema and systems of cinema aesthetics, but I mean the critique of the power of cinema as such...Hence I mean by it the decision as to whether*

a cinema as such is possible or impossible, and the determination of its sources as well as its range and bounds.

The first idea to be emphasized in this paraphrase is that of “cinematic self-cognition,” which is to be distinguished from the cognition of cinema that takes place in the writing about it. Cinematic self-cognition is a critique of cinema within cinematic form itself. By this account one can note a similarity between Haneke’s and Godard’s agendas: both practice film criticism “self-cognitively,” by making films critical of cinema form and its ideological consequences. Of course, Godard’s own work began to surpass the limited field of film criticism almost immediately, when he turned his critical attention away from questions of film genre and film form and toward consumer society, neocolonialism, capitalism, and other familiar foes of the Left – and returned to the critique of cinema only much later in his “filmed criticism,” his deeply personal and highly idiosyncratic television documentary series, *Histoire du Cinema*. Haneke, on the other hand, is much more focused on a critique of cinema and media form that remains located in the formal elements and genres of feature-length world cinema; so that one could say that Haneke’s dictum is: if you want to criticize the cinema, make a film that focuses on a precise issue therein – e.g. a film genre or particular type of shot. Each of Haneke’s films is thus not a total critique of cinematic form, but a small contribution to the larger project of his general critique of the reasoning of cinematic form. Of course, on the other hand, in tandem with this formal critique, and like Godard again, the content of Haneke’s films tend towards politically-charged topics: e.g. social alienation, political and economic dislocation under globalization, our desensitization to violence, the psychosexual pathology of artists, blowback from imperialism, and the emergence of fascism, to name a few. Each of his films thus simultaneously interrogates a specific hegemonic media form and corollary “real world” issues and current events. Put

another way, each film, to continue the conceit of the tribunal for a bit longer, is rather like seeing two conspicuous witnesses questioned at length: the first witness is a formal element of cinema, either a genre or a smaller unit of film form; the second is a set of political issues. The suggestive difference between Haneke and Godard is a sign of the historical times: Haneke's films deal in the same issues the films they critique trade in – “culture war” and “family values” issues – rather than Godard's questions of the political left's temporality and possibility.

The following is a brief overview of the cinema and media forms that appear before the cinematic tribunal that *is* each of Haneke's films. Beyond their shared attribute of “coldness,” critics and Haneke himself are justified in seeing his first three films as belonging together. The mode critiqued by each of his first three films in the so-called “Glaciation Trilogy” is an elementary unit of the cinema's and the contemporary media's vocabulary: (1) the close-up as the exemplary shot of advertising; (2) hand-held and surveillance camera footage as exemplifications of the omnipresence and overlapping of amateur and state/private security documentation; and (3) the news-broadcast format as exemplary of the culture of crisis, the politics of fear, and the triumph of sensational information over historical context and storytelling élan. The drift or trend across the three films is to include a broader and broader cross section of society, from the suffocating isolation of an alienated family (in *The Seventh Continent*) to the interaction of different classes within a national ethnicity (recall how Benny's victim is provincial and intimidated by the extensive collection of technology his rich parents have purchased), to the dynamics of a multiethnic, globalized Europe (one of *71 Fragments*' main character is a homeless, undocumented immigrant child). *The Seventh Continent*, Haneke's first feature film, critiques the close-up shot as a basic element of the syntax of television advertisements and, by extension, the society that relies on said ads as a substitute for communal

experience. The family that commits suicide in the film is surrounded by the consumer goods of advertising fantasies, and yet they aren't any better off for it, quite the opposite as the story goes. What commercials are for that film, home videos and surveillance camera footage are for *Benny's Video*. *Benny's Video* critiques these amateur modes of documentation by correlating Benny's fascination with them to his act of meaningless violence, the central event of the film.

The final film in the trilogy, *71 Fragments of a Chronicle of Chance*, critiques television news media for the way it de-contextualizes the catastrophes it breathlessly reports. As in *Benny's Video*, the film form interrogated is the first footage we see in the film and periodically reappears throughout the film. In *Benny's Video*, the material is a home video shot by Benny of a pig being slaughtered at his family's farm. In *71 Fragments*, it is a series of nightly news broadcasts dated from 12 October 1993, a little over two months before the climax of the film, up to the day of the film's climax. On a first viewing this relationship between the news footage and the film itself can be inferred from a brief title card that appears on screen before the first images of the film are shown. It describes a senseless killing, the real event that inspired the film: "On 12-23-93, Maximilian B., a 19-year-old student, shot three people in a Viennese bank and killed himself with a shot to the head shortly afterwards." The news footage that follows these words is arguably more depressing than the subject of the film, as it consists of new developments from the seemingly interminable Bosnian War, the US intervention in Somalia, and, most desperately of all, an interrupted piece about the coup in Haiti and the resulting food shortage. Haneke seems to argue here that the news media do not provide the proper context for the events they describe, that we do not see the underlying causes for these tragic and/or desperate situations, and that instead we come to see them as the "natural" or "inevitable" background noise of Western civilization. *71 Fragments* is an attempt to elucidate the structural

necessity behind what the news reports manage only to represent as contingencies. Its approach, however, is a paradoxical one: rather than being more continuous than news reports, its procedure is to be even more discontinuous than they are: to cut away abruptly from a scene mid-sentence, to exclude voiceover, and so forth.

Since his next film after *71 Fragments*, his adaptation of Kafka's *The Castle*, Haneke has taken his critique of media and cinematic forms in the direction of questioning particular film genres. The genres specifically brought in for questioning are: literary adaptations in *The Castle*, exploitation films in *Funny Games*, disconnected multi-narrative films à la *Rashomon* or *Shortcuts* in *Code Unknown*, melodramas in *The Piano Teacher*, disaster films in *Time of the Wolf*, thrillers (and arguably film noir) in *Caché*, and, most recently, historical-period films in *The White Ribbon*. The motive for adapting *The Castle* would seem to stem from losing some kind of bet. Why else would one adapt a book that is famously unfinished, that abruptly ends with K the land surveyor wandering into the home of yet another enigmatic villager who he hopes will help him reach the castle? Haneke's version is true to many things about the book, including the absurd humor, the mysticism, the eroticism, and, with minor changes, the ending, which is as abrupt and unsatisfying as any I know of. The wager of this choice of work and the execution of the interpretation seems to be that if commercial pulp-novels often make great "serious" films and serious books tend to fail as films, then perhaps the way to make a compelling film of a "great work" is to choose a work that is in a superficial sense a "failure," that the author was unable to finish. To critique post-Hayes Code Hollywood's ugliest symptom, the exploitation genre, with *Funny Games* (1998) Haneke set out to make a movie that it is effectively immoral to watch. The wager Haneke is making – and it is a losing bet – is that the cure for the "normal" fascination with violence of contemporary audiences is to give them an

overdose of it, and thus attempt to undermine the exploitation genre by over-identifying with it. The fact that Haneke has remade the film shot for shot in Hollywood only confirms this thesis. The limitation of this critique in particular is that *Funny Games*' ironic exaggeration of the exploitation genre is practically indistinguishable from the films it criticizes. Indeed, in effect it is a summation of the genre.

Code Unknown (2000) is unique because it critiques what is perhaps the least established or newest of any genre in cinema: the de-centered multiple-perspective narrative genre form. This genre has, in Slavoj Žižek's analysis, two predominant forms: "Either life is experienced as a series of multiple, parallel destinies that interact and are crucially affected by meaningless, contingent encounters, the points at which one series intersects with and intervenes into another (see Altman's *Shortcuts*), or different version/outcomes of the same plot are repeatedly enacted (the 'parallel universes' or 'alternate possible worlds' scenarios – see Kieslowski's *Blind Chance*, *Veronique*, and *Red*)" (*The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime* 39). While *Funny Games* dabbles in the latter category of alternate possible worlds when the main villain infamously rewinds the diegetic reality of the film itself in order to save his accomplice from being killed by their victims, *Code Unknown*, like *71 Fragments* before it, falls squarely into the former category of multiple destinies intersecting in change encounters. But it departs from *71 Fragments* in two seemingly self-conscious ways. First, *Code Unknown* is effectively a criticism of *71 Fragments* and other multiple-destiny films that share its structure of lives coalescing at the (usually violent) climax of the film. In *Code*, on the contrary, the lives of its characters converge in the second scene of the film and only tangentially in the rest of the movie, the message being that the dominant teleological version of the multi-narrative film is misleading. Furthermore, *Code Unknown*, as the title suggests, addresses the absence of a proper artistic medium for

contemporary experience, implying that the multiple-destinies genre is a symptom of the inability of existing cinema forms to represent the complexities of today's society. This absence of a new art form is a correlative to the sociological critique in the film, which might be called, to paraphrase Walter Benn Michaels, "the trouble with diversity." The film's milieu is a late-capitalist Babel in need of a common language and shared values, just as artistic expression itself seems to need a new mode to keep up with the vicissitudes of globalization.

Time of the Wolf is clearly intended as a critique of the big-budget spectacle of the "disaster movie," epitomized by the "blockbuster" films of Roland Emmerich: *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and most recently *2012*. Haneke's disaster film falls into the subgenre of surviving after the disaster has already taken place and is similar to recent films like *I Am Legend* and *The Road* in this regard. However, it is antithetical to these films in that it is in no way fascinated by the spectacle of contemporary architectural symbols reduced to ruins. By leaving aside this kind of "architectural necrophilia," Haneke is able to focus much more on the conditions of the survivors as refugees in their own nation. In this sense the film's insight into our fascination with disaster films can be phrased as a thought experiment: what if the first-world turned into the third world? What if rich Europeans (or Americans) were suddenly dispossessed refugees? *The Time of the Wolf* is an attempt to depict this scenario.

Caché is related to *The Time of the Wolf* in that both make connections across the global divide between the first and third worlds. What *Time* does implicitly however, *Caché* does explicitly when it examines the blowback from colonialism through one prominent French media personality's troubled past. And *Caché* is also a critique of the thriller genre, particularly thrillers that trade in the morality of revenge: revenge against agents of criminal conspiracies and also the gender-biased revenge against female sexuality. In the latter regard, Haneke's

achievement is to have made a thriller without reference to the usual noir tropes of female sexuality: the femme fatale, the angelic mother/wife, the punishment for sexual promiscuity, and the subjugation/domestication of femininity through the production of a romantic couple at the end of the film. To put it ironically, the film is the answer to the question: what do you get when you combine David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* with Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*? What if the interior psychological split in Lynch's film was a "real" antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized? What if rather than being one's own self, the person sending videos was someone whom you had grievously wronged in your past, a young Algerian boy adopted by your parent whom you cast aspersions on so that they would disown him, leaving you as the only child? This is the situation in which Georges (Daniel Auteuil), a successful TV talk show host, finds himself in the film.

The White Ribbon's (2009) stated purpose is to examine the origins of Fascism. To this end it features a first for a Haneke feature film, a prominent voiceover narrator, in the form of the village schoolteacher vaguely recalling the film's events in his old-age. This accounts in large measure for the film's accessibility if also for its presumptuous moralizing. We get a tentative hypothesis to start: maybe the generation born around the turn-of-the-century turned to Fascism after studying and experiencing the hypocrisy and depravity of their forefathers. The secret message of the film, however, seems to be that these children are at bottom unaccountably evil. This film is also a critique of the historical film as a genre, and like *Funny Games* seems to take the genre to an almost ridiculous extreme, as if it could propose an answer to the question of the origins of Fascism that would be factual and not mystifying. In the final account, Haneke's explanation of the rise of Fascism is tendentious at best, and it is not psychologically convincing either, as it needs to rely on an almost mythic criminality that is tantamount to nihilism. The

achievement of this film lies not in its stated relation to events outside itself, but in its detailed representations of often harrowing social-class relations in a rural village on the cusp of modernity.

Briefly then to conclude this preliminary overview, aside from examining the genre of melodrama, like *Code Unknown*, *The Piano Teacher* marks a repetition in Haneke's project of critique insofar as it returns to the earlier mode of critiquing an element in the form of the cinema, which in this case is the role of music in cinema. More than involving a clever etymological connection, the film's simultaneous critique both of the melodrama (literally: "music drama") genre and of the use of music in film generally makes it exceptional among all of Haneke's films. For Haneke, it would seem that an extended use of musical selections in film is justified only if the film itself is about music and musicians. The interest in the film thus resides not as much in its rather severe implicit judgment of other films' over-reliance on music as in the way its critique of film music corresponds to its attempt to create a more relationship between film and music in which the introduction of music is motivated by the narrative. The limitations of this attempt and the engrossing film that results will be the main concerns of this chapter.

Violence as the Remainder from Haneke's Critique

The main criticism one is likely to hear of this interpretation of Haneke's project is that his films are not critical of but complicit with the modes of cinema and media they are supposedly interrogating. Robin Wood sums up this skeptical position well in the opening paragraphs of his aforementioned essay on *The Piano Teacher*, "Do I Disgust You?" Or, tirez pas sur *La Pianiste*," originally published in the progressive film journal *CineAction* in 2002:

The Seventh Continent and *Benny's Video* both gained passionate defenders, but many thought the films went too far, were too concerned with “extreme” cases (did Haneke really endorse family suicide, did he really believe teenagers would commit casual murder because they watched violent videos?) And *Funny Games*, it must be admitted, with its apparently gratuitous sadism, gave the attackers the ammunition they wanted: the film’s undeniable power to disturb was not justified by any comparable depth of significance or balanced by any sense of how its horrors might be remedied. (55)

The telling turn in these sentences is that Wood begins by only characterizing a common moral criticism but then ends up endorsing it – “it must be admitted” – in the case of *Funny Games*. Indeed, rather than addressing the criticism that Haneke’s earlier films went “too far,” Wood immediately modulates to “a more intelligent doubt” expressed to him by the Swedish film critic Michael Tappet. Paraphrasing Tappet, Wood writes, “Haneke’s analysis of contemporary western civilization is devastatingly accurate, but he offers no way forward, so that the films can be read as strongly conservative and reactionary, by demanding a return to the values of the past” (55). Here Wood does offer a counterpoint to Tappet’s suggestion that Haneke’s films might be read as reactionary and conservative given their lack of a progressive political program. Wood responds, “My own feeling is that Haneke is certainly intelligent enough to be aware that it is precisely the past that has produced our present and that in any case returning to it is impossible” (55). For Wood, *The Piano Teacher* is a confirmation of his view that Haneke is against any conservative reclaiming of the past: “Erica’s behavior... can in fact only be understood within the context of our sexual history over the past hundred years, our ‘progress’ from neurosis-breeding repression to what some have hopefully regarded as sexual liberation, which has proven, in

practice, to be simply another form of imprisonment” (55). The film also shows that Haneke can transcend his own tendency towards a censorious tone.

One can furthermore supplement Wood here with an analysis of the different levels of violence in Haneke’s films. In other words, one type of violence has been over-emphasized in the response to Haneke’s films: their direct representations of what Slavoj Žižek would call “subjective” violence, which often takes the form of either socially marginalized characters or sociopathic ones “acting out” within an alienating social order. This is a conspicuous aspect of almost every one of Haneke’s films, but especially of his “Glaciation Trilogy” and *Funny Games*, which feature a veritable cornucopia of sensational, headline grabbing violence: family suicide in *The Seventh Continent*; child murder –by another child no less – in *Benny’s Video*; a massacre of random citizens in *71 Fragments*; and sadistic serial killing in *Funny Games*. For Žižek, directly representing such violence is “inherently mystifying.” “The overpowering horror of violent acts and our empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure which prevents us from thinking” (*Violence* 3-4). Such direct violence is too immediate to be comprehended judiciously in this view, which puts it at odds with the spirit of the critique that Haneke is attempting to carry out. Thus a film like *Funny Games*, as was already mentioned, becomes a self-defeating exercise.

But the criticism of Haneke’s subjective violence overlooks what Kant would call the “true contest of assertions” over the concept of violence in Haneke’s work. It overlooks the fact that there are less visible modes of violence that define Haneke’s films at a more foundational level: not momentary but ongoing and structural modes of violence. Such “objective violence” takes place at two interrelated levels in Haneke’s films: both in the historical milieus of their backgrounds and in the ways his films draw attention to their own form. In terms of the violence

of the historical milieus implied by Haneke's films: this is violence of the "normal" functioning of class society, what Žižek has called "systemic" violence, the violence inherent in the system. Haneke's films refer to this economic, "invisible" violence in a variety of ways and to varying degrees: e.g., *Code Unknown* follows the often perilous lives of legal and illegal immigrants in Paris; *71 Fragments* excerpts news footage of the struggle for survival in the third world's "failed states" and also features a child refugee as a character. Secondly, the other form of objective violence in Haneke's films is their symbolic violence, and is of greater interest for those interested in Haneke's films' aesthetics. Symbolic violence occurs in the very way Haneke attempts to make the viewer conscious of the structure of film, which should be distinguished from the violence of artistic form as such, from the way art "imposes order" on phenomena in the first place, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot. Haneke's films escalate this given violence of artistic form more generally in precise and fairly consistent ways: e.g., abrupt cuts, disorienting framing (often in close-ups), and dramaturgical and rhetorical techniques like parataxis and anacoluthon.

The existence, the centrality, and the interdependence of these two modes of objective violence in Haneke's films – structural and symbolic violence – create a counterargument to the criticism that his films end up caught in their own trap of condemning violence by further representing it and thus perpetuating its allure. Thus, one might say that Haneke's films are attempting to cultivate a sensibility for the symbolic and (economically) structural modes of violence that are, from a common sense perspective, basically invisible: "Objective violence is precisely the violence inherent in the 'normal,' peaceful state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent" (Žižek, *Violence 2*). This counterargument has its limitations, however, insofar as the subjective violence can essentially "steal the show" from invisible objective

violence, as in the case of *Funny Games*. But in his most interesting films, the subjective violence points towards the films' objective violence. Indeed, Haneke's ultimate wager seems to be that if you want to depict objective violence, you have to dirty your hands – you have to use sensational violence. This is a risky and perhaps fundamentally misguided notion, but *The Piano Teacher* is nonetheless a product of this extreme and practically self-defeating approach to representing objective violence. As Wood put it, when Haneke is at his best and has found a balance in his representations of violence, he films “throw an extraordinarily vivid and searching light on certain major aspects of western culture's progressive deterioration, and...in a way that demands response” (55).

To be more precise, however, *The Piano Teacher's* predominant modes of objective violence pertain not so much to the representation of the deteriorations of both art and sexuality in social life as to the degree of alienation that seems fundamental to them at this stage in history insofar as an outlier like Erika could be said to represent a significant temporal juncture. The daily sacrifices and strict discipline needed to create music on the part of the artist are a consistent theme in Erika's lessons with her students, and she is living proof of the danger in taking these measures too seriously. Meanwhile, the violent processes through which one first learns to desire are similarly taken to an extreme in Erika's case, so that they become the driving forces behind the film's harrowing narrative. What is unique about Haneke's presentation of both these modes of “objective” violence in this film particularly is that they are not overwhelmed by representations of symbolic violence. Instead, the objective modes of artistic and sexual violence effectively find expression in sensational modes of violence. The effect is – to reiterate – an ambiguous one, with the strangest scenes in the film seeming to frustrate interpretation. And my interpretation does not explain these scenes so much as it further

estranges them by viewing them from the point of view of the complex perspective of their music.

The Piano Teacher would seem to be the only film of Haneke's to make systematic reference to the domain of music in depicting the symbolic mode of objective violence. Upon closer examination, however, the discussion of music can begin as soon as one attends to the place of objective violence generally and symbolic violence particularly in Haneke's films. Indeed, given the prominence of sound design in his films – often as a result of their characteristically abrupt cuts – music seems to be present even in its absence in Haneke's films. The interdependence of framing and sound in *The Seventh Continent* is a case in point, as it creates a veritable *musique concrète* out of the film's sound design. As was already mentioned, *The Seventh Continent* is meant in part as a critique of commercial advertising. This critique takes the form of the film's heavy use of close-ups, one of the essential visual elements in television and print advertisements. But rather than rapidly cutting between close-ups, as is customary in television ads, Haneke draws attention to the fragmentary nature of close-ups through long, static, and off-kilter shots of objects and phenomena that are not usually viewed from this perspective. The effect of these long-take close-ups is that they do not feel "human" and "warm," as in advertising and Hollywood, but estranged and claustrophobic. The typical strategy of this film is thus to frame an ordinary situation with an uninterrupted close-up that renders it almost unrecognizable: e.g., a family breakfast from a close-up shot on a section of the kitchen table where none of the action takes place; a school gymnasium with children doing gymnastics from a close-up on a fragment of the pommel horse where each child touches it as they jump over.

A crucial by-product of this approach to framing is that in the absence of visual information the sound design of the film comes to the fore. The sound design is also highlighted by the fact that there is very little dialogue in the film. Indeed, most of the language heard occurs in the mother's voiceover as she reads letters to her husband's parents at the beginning of each of the film's three acts. The pummel horse close-up in particular features the regular rhythm of the impact of each child hitting the vault as perhaps the most obvious example of the film's *musique concrète*. But unlike a film like Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark*, where the "rhythms of life" in an ordinary situations like factory work lead "organically" into songs that are a form of escape from the pressures closing in on Bjork's character, in *The Seventh Continent* there is nothing liberating about the "musical" quality of the "rhythms of life." Not only do they not lead into musical fantasy sequences, in a depressing way they seem to underscore and emphasize the meaninglessness of the scenes they are drawn from, as if language and other higher forms of communication and social cohesion were disintegrating into fragments bereft of meaning.

This nihilistic *musique concrète* reaches its apogee in the suicide sequence that is also the climax of the film's story. The family's self-destructive downward spiral is of course depicted mostly in the off-kilter close-ups, but each of these shots is almost an afterthought compared to the shattering impact of the sounds of them destroying all their worldly possessions. Thus unlike earlier scenes, here the texture of the found music is practically orchestral: e.g., while one person is hammering the TV to pieces, another is shattering dishes and glasses in a polyphonic cacophony. This diegetic music reaches an initial climax when the father shatters the family's aquarium – which not only houses their only pets, but is also probably the most expensive commodity in the house. By association with this high value item, the "music" begins again with

an infamous close-up on someone tearing up money and flushing it down the toilet. Or more precisely, the torn-up money is seen being thrown into the toilet. This is always the choice: to remove any sense of human agency from an activity and highlight its mechanistic aspect. A case in point of this emphasis on impassive acts is the nightmarish yet banal conclusion of *The Seventh Continent*. The destruction is over, and so is the music that was its side effect. There seems to be nothing left to destroy but themselves, which the family quickly does with the same mechanistic detachment that characterized their rampage against their various household items and life savings. In an unbelievably depressing touch, they make poison cocktails in the bathroom and take turns ingesting them while Celine Dion and Meatloaf sing live on television. The key sound design issue here is that the diegetic *musique concrète* seems to have been converted into kitsch pop music at the last moment, prefiguring by distortion the roar of *The Piano Teacher*'s Schubert on the other side of the silences of the films that preceded it.

Schubert Roars on the Other Side of Haneke's Silences

In *The Seventh Continent* and in subsequent films leading up to *The Piano Teacher*, abrupt cuts between scenes rather than “rhythms of life” *musique concrète* become the predominant way the film's sound design is emphasized. Within this aspect of abrupt scene transitions, or parataxis to borrow a term from rhetoric, one can easily detect two trends. First, there is an inclination towards more jarring stops, silences really, before the next scene and shot appear – which is the corollary of an increased interest in representations of silence in the films *71 Fragments*, *The Castle*, and *Code Unknown*. The second trend is that as Haneke's abrupt scene transitions become more and more prominent, other violent features of film form in Haneke's cinematic vocabulary occur less frequently – particularly close-ups and de-centered framing for shots. *Code Unknown*, the film just prior to *The Piano Teacher*, reinforces the

importance of the abrupt cutting procedure more than previous films by having each scene occur in a single take followed by a sudden cut and by lending this formal feature a social and even political significance. The abrupt cuts are symbolic of the fragmentary nature of social life in the film – like the lives of its characters, the film is disconnected. Thus, although events in the film happen in strict chronological order, this is not readily apparent in the film. The effect of this is an apparent paradox: although life in the film is proceeding linearly, linear time is made to seem nonlinear.

As if the motif of silence was not obvious enough given the jarring editing of the film, the film also features a group of deaf children both in its opening sequence and at its end. In the opening shot we see a seemingly frightened young girl cowering against a wall, her body and face filled with expression while she remains silent. Then, quite suddenly, her initial state ceases and the viewer realizes there is nothing to worry about; she was merely acting. Indeed, the reverse shot shows other children eagerly raising their hands. They are playing charades, and hers proves to be a particularly difficult riddle. Many children hazard but each one fails to guess the significance of her act. Before the right answer can be given, Haneke converts the riddle into its own solution when the title of the film appears and simultaneously names her charade as the “Code Unknown.” Furthermore, this scene is a kind of microcosmic parable for the film as a whole and for how the viewer experiences it. The deaf children are given a signifier and then asked to guess its significance. The same is true for the audience in each subsequent scene. Haneke’s scenes, each one an interrupted take that is only loosely related to what happened in the last, are puzzling signifiers, and the viewer’s task resides in figuring out what each sequence means and then how they fit together. And just when basic information is becoming clear and

one is perhaps becoming interested in how the event depicted in the scene might play out, as a rule, a cut interrupts the progression and hurls the viewer into the next disorienting scenario.

Unsurprisingly, the film thus defies standard plot tropes like climax and denouement; still, its ending is arguably the culmination of Haneke's experiments with sound design. It features one of the most contradictory figures in all his films: the image of deaf children playing music. This "impossible" scenario is not quite as magical or curious as all that, however: as the children are part of a drum ensemble, presumably the volume of the music and its emphasis on regular rhythmic patterns allows them to feel the music through their bodies. Their drum practice is part of a rare crosscut montage in the film that then cuts to the male lead George trying to get back into his lover's or perhaps ex-lover's apartment. The door is locked and the lock seems to have been changed, or at least that is what one can surmise given that the shot of this action is from a considerable distance. The drum ensemble's music is heard throughout this anticlimactic ending that shares the surveillance shot tropes of the *Benny's Video* and *Cache*. But the real significance of the drum ensemble's conspicuous presence emerges when it is read in contrast to the game of charades that opens the film. If in the opening sequence the puzzle cannot be solved and the solidarity of the community invested in its meaning is a negative one at best – i.e. they are united in the inability to answer the question – then the ensemble's activity provides a happy contrast to the frustrating experience of their initial game at the film's beginning. Indeed, however briefly and with as little sentimentality as possible, music improbably unites the children in a joyous dance. But this wouldn't be Haneke if someone wasn't losing out on something at the same time: thus the relationship between Georges and his lover is breaking apart in a pitiless way, though Haneke's representation of it is as understated as it could be next to not showing or implying it at all.

It is important to perceive *The Piano Teacher* in juxtaposition to the auditory tropes of *Code Unknown*, in particular, the latter's repeated attendance to interruptive cuts and its final paradoxical choice of what is in a precise way "silent music," i.e. music that is played by people who cannot, to varying degrees, hear it, but who are nevertheless bound together in playing it. From this prospective, the music at the end of *Code Unknown* is the answer to the riddle at the beginning. Music is a code of unknown or of indeterminate significance, one whose very indefiniteness of communicative meaning is connected to its profound emotional resonances, which at the end of this film manifest themselves in the social cohesion of making music together. The end of *Code Unknown* is thus rather hopeful by Haneke's standards: it implies that music is a potential antidote – as a space of common experience and as a "universal language" – to the unhappy side-effects of globalization.

From the perspective of the optimistically musical ending of *Code Unknown*, *The Piano Teacher* is rather like an incisive counterargument: a counterargument that takes the nature and potential of music – both within cinema and within social reality as Haneke's films portray it – to be less communal and hopeful and more isolating and pathological. Yet the film does more than just dismantle the "universal language" hypothesis that ends *Code Unknown*. Indeed, because it centers on the lives of musicians, the film has a rather obvious motivation for including and further examining music as part of Haneke's ongoing critique of cinematic reason. On the face of it, Haneke's verdict on music's role in cinema is a decidedly negative one for a few reasons. Above all, as many perceptive viewers of the film have no doubt observed, one hears less and less music as *The Piano Teacher* progresses. This is all the more remarkable given that the film's most important subplot has the piano teacher Erika helping a student prepare for a concert. The concert does not occur in the film, a fact made necessary in the way the film's story plays

out. First, Erika brutally disfigures her student's hand in a fit of irrational jealousy. When Erika is then scheduled to replace her in the concert, Erika stabs herself in the shoulder in foyer of the auditorium just before the show and walks out. At the level of the allegorical critique of film music, the lesson of this scene is ambiguous. On the one hand, Haneke seems to have built the overcoming of music into the very plot of his film. On the other hand, the paradox of the film's ending is that while Erika and the film leave music behind, both are also suddenly closer to the psychological experience of the singer in *Winterreise* than ever before. But before this occurs, Haneke engages in a deft rewriting of two of Schubert's most well-known works: the "Andante con Moto" from the Trio in E flat (previously discussed in relation to Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*) and the *Winterreise* song cycle. The latter is particularly important and it could be argued that the seventeenth song in the cycle, "In the Village" (the one that predominates in the film), is a musical emblem for the end point in Erika's psycho-sexual evolution.

Misquoting Adorno on a Date

Here is an excerpt from Erika and Walter's first conversation, which becomes unusually personal thanks to Erika's awkward seriousness and Walter's intrusive outgoingness. It is intermission at a house concert. Erika has played Bach for the first half of the show. Walter was planning to play Schoenberg after the break, but substitutes Schubert after his conversation with Erika. Their conversation turns to Schumann and then to Erika's own father when Walter asks somewhat rhetorically about the benefits of mental illness. Looking around the room at the other concertgoers, he remarks, "Look at them. Do they give a fig about the benefits of illness?" Erika interprets Walter's remark as a statement in the form of question – i.e. the other, ordinary concert-goers don't care about the benefits of illness – and replies with another question of her own:

Erika: Have you read Adorno on Schumann's C major Fantasy?

Walter: No.

Erika: He talks of his twilight. It's not Schumann bereft of reason but just before. A fraction before. He knows he's losing his mind. It torments him but he clings on, one last time. It's being aware of what it means to lose oneself before being completely abandoned.

Walter: I'd say you are a good teacher.

Erika: Thank you.

Walter: You talk about things as if they were yours. It's rare. And I think you know it.

Erika: Schubert and Schumann are my favorites; that's all. Since my father died completely mad in Steinhof asylum, I can talk easily about the twilight of the mind, can't I?

Walter: If you'd really prefer not to eat, perhaps you'd care for a drink of something?

(17:00)

The most apparent interpretation of this dialogue is that it foreshadows the sad outcome of Erika and Walter's affair while explicitly linking classical music to patriarchy in Erika's mind.

Schumann scholar Laura Tunbridge, among others, has noted that Erika's paraphrase of Adorno on Schumann seems to prefigure the course Erika and Walter's relationship will follow. "The piano teacher's revelation of her liking for Schumann presages her affair with the student – 'it's being aware of what it means to lose oneself before being completely abandoned,' she says, before embarking on their doomed sadomasochistic relationship" ("Schumann as Manfred" 563). As for the paternal aspect of classical music for Erika: when she explicitly compares Schumann's descent into madness with her father's similar decline, she does so to authenticate her own

affinity for Schumann's music. Indeed, her comparison of Schumann to her father becomes even more salient when one notes the fact that Adorno never made such argument about Schumann's C major Fantasy. She has invented a reference to Adorno to solidify the link between Schumann and her father and by extension her own connection to Schumann.

But these interpretive commonplaces – i.e., that Erika and Walter's relationship is a sadomasochistic affair that is doomed from the start and that music is really a metaphor for her absent father – are only one side of the story. Indeed, to look more closely at how this conversation relates to other significant facts about the film is to see the counterarguments against this prevailing interpretation as ultimately more persuasive. In other words, it is all too easy to diagnose Erika as a sadomasochist and to link classical music to paternal authority in her psychic economy. To return to Walter and Erika: while their conversation here could be said to foreshadow their doomed relationship – especially in the way Walter uncomfortably responds when she reveals too much about herself – what is even more clear from this exchange is that Erika doesn't know how to respond to Walter. While, on the other hand, Walter has the opposite problem of being too certain of Erika and what she wants: in this case, he thinks she wants to hear Schubert. Both these things, that she doesn't know how to interpret his words and deeds and that he is all too sure of how to understand hers, remain true throughout the film, with increasingly tragic consequences. In this early sequence, she is obviously interested in him, but she also sees through what she politely calls his precociousness. This ambivalence toward Walter is related to what one might call the negative quality of Erika's desire more generally. It's not that she doesn't know what she wants, but that she is still learning how to desire in the first place.

One should also express some skepticism about the idea that Schumann is metaphorically her father. Or rather, one should be more precise here. She only mentions Schumann in this way, not other composers. And while she does then associate Schubert with Schumann as one of her favorite composers, there is less of a parallel between her father's and Schubert's lives – for although Schubert's life ended at a tragically early age, it was not as a result of madness. Furthermore, it is Schubert whose music predominates in the film rather than Schumann's. Indeed, when we look closely at how the Schubert pieces are mainly used in the film work, it quickly emerges that their role is much more complicated and cannot be reduced to a paternal metaphor. Indeed, Schubert and Walter seem to have this much in common: they pave the way to Erika's liberation, but they do so in such a way that they both have to be left behind for the process to unfold.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

This similarity between Schubert and Walter makes Robin Wood all the more perspicacious for drawing one's attention to the way Erika's attraction to Walter first sinks in to her when she hears him play the *Scherzo* from Schubert's A minor Piano Sonata.

First, Walter watches Erika perform in a Bach duet; between comes a conversation between them, after which, for his contribution to the performance, he substitutes Schubert for Schoenberg (being already aware of her emotional commitment to the former). In the first sequence Haneke cuts between her performance and close-ups of his reactions; the second gives us *his* performance, intercut with close-ups of *her* reactions.

(60)

While I agree with Wood's description of this scene, I have a different reading of it. Wood sees something like a reciprocal version of love developing – “It is through the medium of music

(specifically Schubert) that Erika and Walter fall in love, and the film is absolutely clear on this in the twinning of the two crucial sequences in the piano recital in the private apartment” (60). On the contrary, I view these sequences as less reciprocal and more imbalanced, both in their effects and their formal realizations. First of all, the sequence in which Walter falls for Erika while she plays Bach occurs prior to their tête-a-tête. Thus Erika’s position of listening after their conversation is that of someone with more knowledge of the performer she is listening and becoming attracted to. More importantly, in a closer comparison of the sequences, several formal features also distinguish the second sequence from the first. In the second sequence’s first intercut to Erika, she is desperately trying not to look at Walter while he plays. This is a pointed detail beyond its the connotations of a stammering school-girl infatuation. Two meanings suggest themselves: (1) she is looking away only until her mother stops watching her, which the film clearly shows; (2) she is looking away in order to fantasize about him. The first motive is perhaps more obvious, but the second is both possible and probable.

But there is a third meaning here that cancels and preserves the other two: what if when she looks away she not only imagines some idealized version of him, but also rather simply, what if insofar as she is listening to Schubert she is also imagining Schubert’s music beyond this piece? The second intercut to her is crucial here. The shot of her is much closer now, and she is looking directly at him while he plays. At first this would seem to indicate that she is concentrating more on him than before, but at the level of sound design another meaning becomes apparent. While she stares at Walter, her own voice as a voiceover is heard saying (not singing) words from the *Winterreise* song, “In the Village,” that are the central inter-text of the film. The obvious reading of this bit of voiceover is that it functions as a sound bridge to the next scene, where indeed Erica is at the piano explaining the relationship between the poem and

Schubert's piano accompaniment to her ill-fated student Anna (Anna Sigalevitch). But a more psychologically attentive and speculative reading is I think backed up by what happens in the next sequence in the film. That is to say, what if rather than indicating her attentiveness, her looking at Walter signals paradoxically that she is even further removed from him than when she was pointedly looking away? From this possible perspective, Walter's rendition of Schubert's *Scherzo* has enabled her to form an associative connection to her own "favorite" Schubert song from *Winterreise*, which she subsequently begins thinking about instead of him while he continues to play.

To put it succinctly, in this moment when Erika seems focused on Walter, she is already, at least according to the film's form, surpassing him in her psychological journey. The very lines from the Müller poem that serve as both a window into her mind as she listens to the *Scherzo* and as a sound bridge to the next scene in her teaching studio confirm her inner distance from her place in the audience: "...Dreaming of what they do not have, replenished of good and bad: and next morning, all flown away." (Träumen sich manches, was sie nicht haben, / Tun sich im Guten and Argen erlaben; / Und morgen früh ist alles zerflossen.") These lines describe the distraught speaker of the poem's characterization of the ordinary villagers asleep in their beds, from whom the speaker's condition can be distinguished through a series of dichotomies: they sleep – he is awake; they are at home – he wanders; the dogs protect them – they drive him away; the people dream – he is finished with dreaming. The last of these differences is the most salient for the film and the most ambiguous to interpret. But the crucial detail of the lines heard while Walter plays and Erika listens is that she is associating the dreaming villagers with Walter; conversely, by implication, she is on the side of the wandering speaker of the poem. So, far from bringing them closer together as he had intended, Walter's spontaneous substitution of a

Schubert piece for Schoenberg only highlights the difference between Erika and him. There is thus something misleading about Erika's commentary on the piano score for "In the Village" in the next scene. As the film cuts to the piano studio, Erika's suspends her recitation of the Müller poem in order to introduce an interpretation: "And here," she says, referring to the piano score more than the poetry it would seem, "the mood switches to irony." But at the level where formal features of the film offer insights into character psychology, where, in short, the internal and the external overlap, the mood already switched to irony when Walter began playing the Schubert *Scherzo* for Erika in the previous scene.

As the lesson continues in her studio, Erika recites the rest of the first stanza of the poem while her student tries to play the accompaniment with the requisite artistic and musical sensitivities needed to indicate the shifting tones of meaning of the singer's words and melody. "So what? So what? They've had their pleasure," she recites as she asks her student to emphasize the repeated high D-natural in the accompaniment. On the significance of the note's repetition and prominence Erika comments, "That's the obstinacy of the complacent middle class," before she finishes the reading the stanza, "and the hope that what they left behind might be waiting for them on their pillows." Her identification of the musical language in the accompaniment with the sleeping villagers is much to the point: the speaker of the poem is not one of the bourgeois dreamers and neither is Erika.

Midway in Her Life's Journey She Found Herself at a Schubertiad in a Sex Shop

"In the Village" ("Im Dorfe") is partially heard three separate times in the first thirty minutes of the film, and each time a new ingredient is added until gradually the excerpt includes both singer and pianist. One hears only the accompaniment at first, along with Erica's directions for her student as to its realization. Next one hears the example just described, where the poetry

is recited to the piano part with a running interpretive commentary. Finally, and as another sound bridge from a previous scene, the last third of the song is heard and features the singer for the first time. The gradual appearance of the piece coincides with the gradual introduction to different aspects of Erika. More precisely, “In the Village” seems to punctuate scenes in which a new development concerning Erika occurs:

- The film establishes her practically incestuous relationship with her mother in the film’s first sequence, which is punctuated by the credits sequence intercut with shots from her piano studio with “In the Village” heard prominently.
- The film presents her attraction to Walter at the aforementioned scene at her recital where she meets him for the first time, which is punctuated by her drifting off into the poetic lines which describe the lives of people like Walter.
- The film introduces the first of her perversions when it follows her to a sex shop, which is punctuated by the beginning of the song, including the vocal part for the first time. As in the previous scenario where Walter plays the Scherzo, in this case the song occurs as a sound bridge and seems to signal a withdrawal from her surroundings on Erika’s part. The violence of the withdrawal is increased in this case, however, to the point of a paradox: she is with Schubert “In the Village” at the level of her unconscious associations at the very moment when her sensory experience is also heightened by new phenomena, by the tissue before her nose.

The sequence leading up to this third excerpt from “In the Village” is so exceptional in Haneke’s films, however, that it deserves a detailed analysis in its own right. Thus a slight detour away from “In the Village” and *Winterreise* more generally is necessary here because this detour will lead us back to *Winterreise* in a way that distills the film’s transfiguration of the

cycle. This scene leading up to the third instance of *Winterreise* is also worth discussing because it contains the most prominent example in Haneke's films of something resembling typical non-diegetic background music, or rather his critique of such an essential and historically primordial element of cinematic experience.

It is hardly surprising that such a common feature of cinema would be missing from Haneke's films in general. He is a director, like Kubrick, who is known for the coldness of his films, an affect which is difficult to convey with one of the lush neo-romantic film scores customary in Hollywood-style melodramas. Indeed, although he uses Schubert in the background in this scene, what results is far from the typical effect of background music. Instead, it is Haneke's critique of film scoring, which resembles his unorthodox use of a typical shot like the close-up in his early films. He uses background music in this scene but only while at the same time drawing the viewer's attention to it in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable setting. The music in question is Schubert's Trio in E-flat (already analyzed in some detail in my discussion of *Barry Lyndon*). The first way that Haneke succeeds in emphasizing the trio in the sequence in which it occurs as the non-diegetic soundtrack is by featuring it in the film's diegesis, as part of Erika's rehearsal, just prior to its appearance on the soundtrack. Indeed, another Schubertian sound bridge occurs here, in an obvious pattern not without some significance. Schubert is creating continuity in the film's transitions between scenes, just as "In the Village" and other *Winterreise* lieder stand for Erika's transition out of what remains of her middle class dreams.

After an uncomfortable phone call in which her mother demands to know when Erika will be home, the film cuts to the midst of the rehearsal, with the cellist finishing off the first statement of the principle theme. Next it is Erika's turn with the melody as the strings create the somber, pulsing, accompanying harmonic sonority. As this is a rehearsal, the cellist stops them

to discuss a point about the initial attack and execution of the melody's prominent trill. When the players begin again, this time at the proper beginning of the movement, the scene changes but the music continues and moves to the non-diegetic soundtrack space one might expect film music to occupy. To a great extent thus the music here does modify the ensuing images in something like a conventional manner. Indeed pointed details in this sequence are carefully reflected in the music. First, as Erika exits the elevator and walks through the shopping mall in anonymity, the piano, her instrument, similarly remains in the background of the trio, accompanying the somber cello melody. Second, the way a random passerby rudely bumps into her as she makes her way through the crowd is reflected in the accented dotted-rhythm of the accompaniment figure in the piano, the one moment of intrusion by the accompaniment below the melody. Indeed, the very fact that she is walking rather briskly and purposefully throughout most of this sequence is matched by the tempo marking of the music, *Andante con Moto*.

Not only in small details but also in the larger cuts between shots there is a parallel with the music. Thus, when Erica's enters into the sex shop (the first shock of the sequence), the new shot of her coincides with the restatement of the principal theme by the piano. The fact that she would be or rather is playing the melody is a perfect if somewhat unexpected musical analogue for her conspicuous presence in the sex shop. Erica moves assuredly but quickly from the register, where she has purchased viewing tokens, to the nearest "viewing booth." She seems to know this place, a little like she knows the melody she is simultaneously playing or recalling having just played. And just as when she was asked to start again by the cellist because she had executed her trill in the wrong way, here too she meets with a problem: all the "viewing booths" are currently occupied.

As she waits among the intrigued male customers, Schubert's *Andante* leaves its somber principle theme for a relative major key and a new melodic idea derived from a simple motif of octave Gs in the principal theme. Although the situation may appear awkward for her, in truth it is the male customers who seem ambivalent about her presence, doing double takes and whispering amongst themselves. Erika, on the other hand, appears unflappable, staring blankly about her and even at her cheeky onlookers, as if she were waiting for the metro or some other unremarkable daily occurrence not at all of a sexual or pornographic nature. And of course, her lack of outward shame is reflected in the music as well. As the piano plays a nondescript ostinato figure, it is the strings that play the lead together, just as the only pianist in the shop waits her turn for a booth, while the male customers exchange uncomfortable glances over her presence in what they had probably imagined to be their exclusive consumerist habitat.

When she finally enters a booth, the music continues up until the moment she puts her coins into the machine and begins to select a film. It is a startling effect, almost as if the Schubert were playing on the viewer's headphones and then switched off here because something more "interesting" is about to commence. Here one encounters a first substitution on the film's part of a sexual encounter for music. And in a homologous way the substitution involves both music and sex as they are encountered in an everyday form of mediation and alienation, respectively: on the film's soundtrack in the case of the music, and as a pornographic film in the case of sexuality. The scene Erika selects is unusual, even by the standards of hardcore pornography. A woman is performing fellatio, which isn't ordinarily so strange, except that she is lying on her back with her head hanging upside down off the end of the table. Because the distinguishing features of her face are obscured by the male actor's penis, she looks almost inhuman, not in the sense of a Deleuzian "body without organs," but like a series of

organs that do not add up to a body: just a partial torso, flailing arms, a chin, a mouth. The sounds of muted moaning and rapid breathing coming from the film are no less strange than the images, in part because of the “deafening silence” that has taken the Schubert trio’s place on the soundtrack.

But anyone who thinks this scene couldn’t get any stranger or harder to forget clearly hasn’t seen enough films by Michael Haneke. Indeed, in the reverse-shot of the porn film we see Erika, in her usual expression-less somehow innocent way, staring at the film. Then in the next reverse-shot she reaches into the wastebasket and picks out a tissue, brings it to her nose, and begins smelling it. Initially she seems merely curious about it, smelling it briefly and at a middle distance. But as if to satisfy something beyond her curiosity, she then begins to relax and breathe deeply into the tissue. As a kind of punch-line to a joke that perhaps only Haneke finds funny, at this point “In the Village” returns as a soundtrack. It is the end of the song, the last stanza of the poem:

Bellt mich nur fort, ihr wachen Hunde,
 Lacht mich nicht ruh’n in der Schlummerstunde!
 Ich bin zu Ende mit allen Träumen,
 Was will ich unter den Schläfern säumen?
 [Bark me on my way you wakeful dogs,
 Let me not rest in these hours of slumber!
 All my dreaming is at an end,
 Why would I linger among the sleeping?]

One seemingly cannot overstate the irony of these lines in their relation to the image of Erika in a pornography viewing booth, nose deep in a used tissue. This image is veritably transfigured by

Schubert's music and Müller's lines. Rather than being an escape from reality into dreams, by association these lyrics reconceive pornography as a reengagement with reality apart from the illusionary dreams of the sleepers. Far from being a consumerist dead-end, here pornography is like the dogs barking the singer/speaker awake. But the real accomplishment conceptually in this scene is that Erika is not waking up to a more substantial reality; she is waking up from reality's boring dreams into a fantasy. In the documentary film *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, Slavoj Žižek has suggested she is attempting to teach herself how to desire in this scene, so that she can begin to desire in the first place.²⁵ That music would figure so prominently in a scene of such primordial individual psychosexual experience is surely more than a coincidence, and that the music would be two pieces by Schubert about death completes the possibilities of meaning. Erika's sexuality is coming to life against the dual background of an elegy for Beethoven and a song-cycle about the most proverbial romantic character: the sensitive young man dying of a broken heart. And yet irony per se is not outside of a certain functioning of conventional film scoring. It is rather one of the most sophisticated ways in which a film score can modify a shot, scene, or sequence.

But insofar as the music, as described, is so related to and reflective of the details of the narrative and the film form in this sequence, it is already surpassing the customary role of film music. To put it simply, the music is too related to the film to function with the usual transparency of a film score. Indeed, beyond the excess of relations and reflections between the sequence and the Schubert Trio, in a number of ways the music here departs from customary and contemporary film scoring, both in-itself and in relation to the film:

²⁵ "The way she watches it, it's not to get aroused. She watches it as a pupil in a school. She simply watches it to get the coordinates of desiring, to learn how to do it, how to get excited" (1:24-1:25).

- It is not orchestral in its instrumentation. But less is more in this case. The musical ideas are more apparent in that they are conveyed by only three instruments rather than a late-Romantic army of musicians. The effects of orchestration that “color” a scene in a Wagnerian way are not possible to the same degree with only a piano trio. This is music as music, more so than as atmosphere.
- In something of a nod to Kubrick, the Schubert Trio excerpt is quite long, not the short phrases or leitmotifs one would expect.
- When one listens closely to the trio as it plays throughout the sequence, it is apparent that it is not a “flawless” studio recording. There are intonation, phrasing, and balance problems. It is a recording of a less than professional quality performance.
- In another nod to Kubrick, in particular *Clockwork Orange*, Haneke has introduced the by now cliché juxtaposition of European art music and pornography.

These points of departure from the customary practice of film scoring begin to look consistent from the perspective of Haneke’s critique of cinematic reason as applied to the category of film music. First, as to the choice of chamber music, here Haneke seems to be implicitly attempting a kind of rewriting of film music history. He seeks a new beginning not beyond but before Wagnerism. The choice of Schubert is particularly revealing in this regard, in that his influence on Wagner is often under-appreciated. According to Schubert scholar Christopher Gibbs, in his late music, Schubert “masterfully refined” the declamatory style of his earliest compositions “to an economy that presages late Romanticism...Schubert’s declamation achieves what Wagner would later formulate as the ideal of musical art: ‘endless melody’ in which each note is expressive, eloquent, and meaningful.” Thus Haneke’s contradiction of customary orchestral works with chamber music is only apparently so. The very chamber music

Haneke has selected is a direct ancestor of the orchestral style that for the popular imagination is epitomized by film music's Wagnerism.

This goes right to the second point: the very excerpt from Schubert's trio features one of those economical yet endless melodies that Wagner inherited from Schubert. Indeed, if there is a contradiction here, it is that Haneke chooses to emphasize this aspect of Wagner's musical program over and against the maligned category of the leitmotif: those musical atoms that were already considered a "bad habit" in composing for films sixty years ago by Adorno and Eisler. Even insofar as its repetition makes "In the Village" a motif in the film, it is not a Wagnerian one. For one thing, the production of the music in each example at some point occurs before the viewer's eyes, not in the opera pit or its modern-day equivalent: the non-diegetic space of the soundtrack.

The amateur quality of the recording, which is not unlike the early cinema-going experience of hearing live background music provided by pianos and mixed ensembles, is a nice if only partial realization of the tragicomic dignity of live background music that, in something of a surprise, Theodor Adorno (an intellectual influence on Haneke) once emphasized. "The fiddler does not make the noble melody ordinary with his soloistic intrusiveness; it has already lost its noble character and therefore abandons itself to the fiddler." For the state of such music that has outlived its epoch but not its usefulness in promoting the informal solidarities of city life, Adorno employed a charming metaphor decades before The Rolling Stones used it: background music as a "bouquet of dead flowers." It occurs in one of the most beautiful passages in Adorno's sociological writings on music and is worth quoting at length:

The café arranges bouquets of dead flowers. The joints between the brittle sounds into which they are layered are not firmly bonded. Through them shimmers the mysterious

allegorical appearance that arises whenever fragments of the past come together in an uncertain surface. What is true for the vertical sound is no less true horizontally, for the passage of time. The cafés are the site of potpourris. The latter are constructed out of the fragments of the work, its best-loved melodies. But they awaken the ruins to new, ghostly life. If our art music lingers in the comforting realm of Orpheus – here its echo sounds from Eurydice’s mournful region. Its glow is netherworldly. It can remain unnoticed because it is unreal. But it is not a black shadow, rather a bright one, like milk glass. One can, as it were, hear vaguely through the music, through to the next room.

This is why it shines. (“Music in the Background” 508-509)

One might expect Adorno to dismiss the whole idea of arranging and performing the classics in cafés as a corruption of art music. Instead he acknowledges that the new context awakens the ruins to “new, ghostly life.” But these ghosts are not uncanny specters, rather they beneficently “shine,” casting “bright shadows.” From the perspective of Haneke’s critique of film music, this type of background music, insofar as it lacks the ostentation of the culture industry’s gilded products, is worth revisiting. The very flaws in the execution of the performance are a sign of the authenticity of its message. Furthermore, in the choice of Schubert, Haneke is willing to go further than Adorno. For Adorno, some classics are ideal for the background: “One could think that *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, *Tosca* were created with the thought of imaginary potpourri.” On the other hand, Adorno singles out Schubert as the antithesis of this idea: “Faced with Schubert, café music becomes blasphemous.”

This brings one to the essence of Schubert’s contribution to Romantic music and also the question of the contradictory juxtaposition of his Piano Trio with the contemporary proliferation of pornography in *The Piano Teacher*. Schubert’s contribution has two main elements: (1) he

elevated the lied from a minor musical genre to a major one; and (2) he accomplished this in part by creating musical ideas of the greatest economy, i.e. that could simultaneously signify contradictory meanings. In *The Romantic Generation*, his major study of Romantic musicians after Beethoven and before Wagner, musicologist and pianist Charles Rosen tries to give his readers a sense of what Schubert accomplished in his lieder by comparing his song cycles to the new ways in which natural landscapes were being perceived in late eighteenth century Europe and Britain. For Rosen, what was new in this literary and artistic phenomenon was not the landscape per se, but the way in which poets and writers attempted to grasp them both in their immediacy and in their prehistoric aspect. This is what Rosen calls “the double time scale” of Romantic landscapes:

Not only the recent past is integrated with the immediate sensation, but even the millennial past, the geological history of the landscape; time is experienced at the macrocosmic level. This double scale – long-range time and the fleeting sensation of the moment – becomes an essential part of the new mode of representation in the late eighteenth century, and it gives the description of landscape in this age its peculiarly original power. (RG 139)

The profound shift in sensibility from the classicist “historical” landscape to the Romantic one is best captured by an anecdotal disagreement Goethe had with his tour guide in a valley near Palermo. While Goethe reproached the guide for detailing how Hannibal had waged war in the area, the guide was puzzled by Goethe’s desire to collect small and seemingly worthless stones from the roadside.²⁶

²⁶ Here is the full anecdote in Goethe’s own words:

The most beautiful spring weather and a fruitfulness that streamed forth broadened the sense of an invigorating peace over the whole valley, which was spoiled by the pedantry of the tactless guide, who recounted in detail how Hannibal had waged a battle here and what monstrous actions of war had taken

Even within this context of the new double-time scale of the landscape of literary and artistic Romanticism, Schubert's contribution stands out. As Rosen puts it: "it was Schubert's genius to find a way to represent both past and present with the same motif." Rosen's example is from the lieder: the opening song of *Winterreise*, "Gute Nacht."

The opening song of *Winter's Journey* is a walking song, as are many of the successive ones. From the first bars of 'Good Night,' the sense of walking combines with the anguish of memory...The opening of the vocal line is at once painful and casual: the first note is an awkwardly difficult high F, but it is there unaccented, almost in passing. The steady walking rhythm takes precedence. The sense of grief and regret is in the harmonies, in the way the melody opens by expressively outlining a ninth, and above all in the accents that break up the even surface, disturbing the regular movement without impeding it. (RG 123-124)

While this is not the piece that Haneke uses in the background, it is the piece, the introductory song of the cycle, for which Haneke effectively substitutes the Trio in E flat in his rewriting of both it and *Winterreise* as an ad-hoc musical score. In this sense, I see a kind of composite score of Schubert works that Haneke is rewriting as a not altogether seamless but nevertheless coherent whole. Indeed, the *Andante* second movement of the Trio is a good choice to replace "Gute Nacht" and perhaps even more so to demonstrate Rosen's theory about Schubert's encapsulation

place on this site. I reproached him disagreeably for his fatal raising of such departed spirits. It was bad enough that the soil from time to time had to be stamped upon by horses and men if not always by elephants. At least one should not rudely awaken the power of imagination from its peaceful dreams with such noises from the past. He was very surprised that I was irritated by classical reminiscences in such a place and I was indeed unable to explain clearly how such a picture of past and present felt unwelcome to me.

Even more astonishing did I appear to this guide when I looked for little stones on all the low banks (of which the river left many dry), and took away with me the different kinds. I could not, however, explain to him that there is no faster way to arrive at an idea of a mountainous region than by investigating the kinds of stone that have been pushed into the streams, and that right here the task was to create by means of these scraps a representation of those eternally classical heights of the antiquity of the earth. (quoted in Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* 156-157)

of the Romantic “double time scale” in a single musical motif. Like “Gute Nacht,” the trio’s *Andante* is in a walking tempo; furthermore, that walking tempo combines even more jarring rhythmic accents to produce the sense of a particularly “anguished” memory. This is because the *Andante* is widely recognized to be an elegy for Beethoven, one that both literally remembers Beethoven’s music in its borrowings from his own funeral march from the *Eroica* symphony and that expresses the immediacy of Schubert’s sadness over his hero’s death. Here is Schubert scholar Christopher Gibbs on the way Schubert combines the musical past and its present in his trio’s remembrance of Beethoven:

The trio’s second movement not only imitates Beethoven, but also honors him. Schubert used the *Marcia Funebre* of the *Eroica* as a hidden reference. Beethoven had written that symphony “in memory of a great man” and Schubert here mourns the loss of his own musical hero [Beethoven]. The beautiful C-minor cello melody atop of processional piano accompaniment in the first measures projects a similar melodic gesture to the beginning of the second movement of the *Eroica*. The openings also share the same tonality and the distinctive dotted sixteenth, thirty-second note rhythm. (*Life of Schubert* 157-158)

But despite these and other larger structural similarities between the two works, Gibbs is right to point out that Schubert’s trio is far from being an imitation of Beethoven: “Schubert composed an homage inspired by Beethoven, but one that does not slavishly copy him. Even when Schubert drew upon Beethoven in his late works, he did so in his own distinctive voice” (159). Thus the same not just musical motif but melodic line represents both past and present in the *Andante*: the heroic past of the *Eroica* and the musical present of Schubert’s own distinctive voice that was flourishing and finally emerging from Beethoven’s shadow.

Background Schubert and the Ironic Lack of Irony

It becomes clear in light of Schubert's genius for representing past and present simultaneously that Haneke's selection of his Trio in E-flat as a background for Erika's trip to the mall is actually, improbably appropriate. The ultimate irony of this sequence then is that there is no irony at a deeper level. What Haneke does to Schubert is effectively what Schubert did to Beethoven: he remembers him and his music but in his own distinctive medium and voice. In other words, beyond the surface contradictions there is a fundamental congruity between Schubert's aesthetic and Haneke's. Like Schubert, Haneke's represents the past in a double sense – both the deep historical musical past and the recent past of Erika's rehearsal – by playing the *Andante* on the soundtrack. But he also of course represents the present – both in Erika's life – as she seeks her libidinal education in the sex shop – and in the “McWorld” of global consumer society in its contemporary emblems: the mall, the sex shop, etc. (Schubert wins the battle of economy of representation, however, as Haneke uses music for the past and visual depiction for the present.)

This is also the time to correct Adorno's singling out of Schubert as a sacred cow that cannot be heard in the background. For as insightful as Adorno is in the rest of his essay on background music, he is surprisingly insensitive here to the way in which of all major composers Schubert is the first great “minor” one, in the sense that he elevated “the song from a minor genre to the vehicle of the sublime” (Rosen, *RG* 124). Indeed, if Schubert in the background is “blasphemy” (as Adorno claims), then the only consistent conclusion to draw is that Schubert's music more generally is blasphemy. This is because the concept of background defines him as both a musician and artist:

- He is perhaps *the* background music composer, above all in the fact that he is unsurpassed in the art of musical representation, of illustrating the real, imagined, and remembered landscape backgrounds of lyric poetry. *Winterreise* is unsurpassed in this regard.
- But also crucially, and this no doubt can be seen as a contributing economic and artistic force that led him to renovate *the Lied*, Schubert lived much of his life in the musical background of Vienna, not so much because of Beethoven's presence, but more because of the fashion for Italian operas during his life, which contributed much more to his greatest career frustration, his inability to stage a financially successful opera, than any work of Beethoven's ever did. In this context, the *Lied* was both in demand from publishers and proved easier to organize performances of than a grand opera or symphony.
- At the broader level of the history of music, Schubert remains in the background, but powerfully so. He was not part of the classical generation that ended with Beethoven and yet he was too old to be considered part of "The Romantic Generation" (born around 1810), who were profoundly influenced by him and helped create his place in music history with their critical writings and performances devoted to his music. Neither exclusively Classical nor entirely Romantic, Schubert nevertheless is the key transition figure between the two aesthetic epochs, the background music that holds the montage together, if you will.
- Given the contingencies of his life, especially its brevity and the failure to perform let alone publish many of his greatest pieces before his death, Schubert himself was in a sense forced to wait in the background of music history throughout the first century after

his death, as many of his masterworks were discovered and performed for the first time long after his demise. Eduard Hanslick, the great anti-Wagnerian music critic and friend of Brahms, described the gradual reception of Schubert in terms that made it seem supernatural: “If Schubert’s contemporaries justly gazed in astonishment at his creative power, what indeed must we, who come after him, say, as we incessantly discover new works of his? For thirty years the master has been dead, and in spite of this it seems as if he goes on composing invisibly – it is impossible to keep up with him” (quoted in Gibbs 170).

- Finally, and with this we can move back to *The Piano Teacher*, he moved the *Lied*, as a genre, from the background of music history to the foreground, and in the process helped spark a revolt against the eighteenth century’s hierarchies of tonality.

So, in short, Haneke is either consciously representing or unconsciously intuiting something both surprising and true about Schubert by putting his music in the background.

Schubert Always Returns to Its Place

After this brief excursus on Schubert scholarship, the skeptical reader is likely to claim, “Are you really telling me this has something to do with that crazy scene where Isabelle Huppert smells semen on a tissue in a pornographic video store?” Indeed, it should be argued that the central interest of the film is the theme of sexual violence rather than the critique of film music. One has to keep in mind, however, the very fact that the Schubert pieces are precisely in the background in this sequence. And one has to conceive of background here in a dialectical sense, as something that is structural in its importance rather than a mere after-thought or epiphenomenon. The Schubert is not in contradiction with her private life, it is rather a transitional object linking her private life of fantasies and her public life as a professional

musician. More precisely, it symbolizes the gap between the two milieus. The transitional status of Schubert's music is reflected by the film's form, in the use of Schubert pieces as sound bridges between scenes that oscillate between both of Erika's worlds.

This brings one to perhaps the crucial parallel between the film's form and its story. As was already mentioned, following Robin Wood, my main interpretation of Erika's behavior in the film differs somewhat from the tendency to diagnose her particular pathology in some criticism. I see her as someone trying to break away from her life as she has hitherto known it, and as someone attempting to get to the point of loss, isolation, and abandon felt by the speaker in the *Winterreise* song cycle. Two seemingly contradictory facts about the role of music in the second half of the film confirm this idea. On the one hand, in an indirect but nevertheless significant way, *Winterreise* figures prominently in the sequence that ends in Erika and Walter's first sexual encounter. On the other hand, after this encounter, music of any kind is scarcely heard for the rest of the film, even though the film is only half over. In the first half of the film, Schubert brings Erika and Walter together; in the last half, she moves to embody *Winterreise's* speaker's subjective position by experiencing a similarly doomed love affair and their relationship enters a downward spiral. The film in this way remains musical, even specifically invested in *Winterreise* in nearly inverse proportion to the appearance of music in it. The farther away it moves from *Winterreise*, the closer it is to delivering Erika into the psychological state of the song cycle's speaker.

It is thus worth emphasizing that the song-cycle and especially the pivotal song "In the Village" are never performed in full in the film. Strictly speaking, in terms of the film's story and form then, the song and the song-cycle do not fully exist for the film. One is even tempted to hypothesize that the music is a little bit like the Real in Lacanian psychoanalysis in the context

of the film. For Lacan, the Real is a mysterious but absolutely fundamental idea with a number of definitions, some of which are in conflict with one another, but all of which bear witness to the fundamental difficulty of representing the Real:

- The Real is that which resists representation, what cannot be properly symbolized. Schubert's *Winterreise* is Real in this sense in *The Piano Teacher* in that it only appears in the film in partial and distorted forms. Lacan even went so far as to say that the Real is impossible. Indeed, as the film's story progresses this impossibility of representing *Winterreise* becomes integral to it. Erika first destroys her pupil Anna's hand just as she is set to perform part of the cycle. In the final scene, when she is about to replace Anna in the concert, Erika stabs herself in the right shoulder and walks hurriedly out of the recital hall.
- The Real, on the other hand, is also the excess of meaning that results from the processes of signification. This sense of the Real bears on Schubert here in that Erika is excessively invested in his music. Recall that she pointedly bans Walter from playing it at his first lesson, which he later describes as something deeply unfair. Schubert is what brought them together, he pleads. Above all, however, Erika's attempts to prohibit Walter and Anna from playing Schubert generate their own excesses – in the forms of a desperate sexual attraction to Walter and a violent acting out towards Anna. These two excesses coincide in that Walter interprets her attack on Anna as the first sure sign of Erika's desire for him.
- The Real is that which “always returns to its place.” In this sense, apart from the movie, *Winterreise* itself could be described as Real because in it time does not pass in a normal

way. It is as if wherever the speaker journeys he remains trapped by his own memories of indefinite and unrequited love.

In... *Winterreise*, all events take place before the cycle begins, and we are not even sure what they were. There are only allusions to a girl who spoke of love, and a mother who had schemes of marriage. Twenty-four landscapes awaken memories and lead the poet to an acceptance of death. In this cycle [unlike *Die schöne Müllerin*] not even death is an event. It is an image in the last song, the organ-grinder who mechanically and monotonously turns the handle of his instrument in the frozen winter landscape. (Rosen, *Romantic Generation* 194)

Pace Rosen here, psychoanalysis would hasten to add that the organ-grinder is not so much an image of death as he is a figure for the undead excess of life, for an abject zombie-like immortality. Furthermore, this “reduction of narrative to almost zero” is correlative to the greater expressivity of the poetry and the music in the cycle. What is crucial to keep in mind in the cycle is that the songs do not so much follow one another as they return to the same place, the speaker’s failure to overcome and escape the memories that haunt him, memories that seem to be embodied in each of the various landscapes he finds himself in.

- From the point of view of the film, Schubert is similarly seemingly outside of the flow of time. His music is something that Erika is both trying to escape *from* as a demanding obligation in her professional life and attempting to escape *to* as a model for a free subjectivity unencumbered by the obstinacy and dull dreams of the bourgeoisie. It is something that occurs in both her most personal fantasies as a kind of background on which they are staged, and it is part of how she defines herself publicly as a pianist.

- Thus, ultimately, this conception of the Schubert as Real should probably be rendered in the context most connected to Erika's own life and the film's milieu: that of the strange business of performing classical music. The unique challenges of the performance of classical music are similar to those of the actor, in that both musician and thespian are caught between the work as conception and the attempt to realize it. "The almost absolute separation between composer and performer...has placed the work of music beyond realization but within the range of everyone's imagining" (Rosen, "Aesthetics of Stage Fright" 10). From this perspective, Erika's actions in this film are wholly paradoxical. On the one hand, her attempt to embody the song cycle, to reach its expressive and subjective level in "real life," is a violent radicalization of the attempt by a normal performer to realize the music at hand. On the other hand, her attempted embodiment amounts to a refusal of musical performance altogether, and its replacement by seemingly base and violent acts.

The Show Must Not Go On

So far, three sequences in which the *Winterreise* song "In the Village" is partially heard have been mentioned: (1) during the film's titles sequence; (2) as a sound bridge from a scene in which Erika watches Walter play for the first time to a lesson she is giving Anna on the song; and (3) as another sound bridge from the infamous scene of Erika with her borrowed tissue to yet another lesson with Anna, but this time with the singer as well. What remains is to account for the fourth and final time the song is heard. This takes place during the dress rehearsal for the student showcase at which Anna and the unnamed singer will perform. Walter and Erika sit separately in the audience before Anna's run-through, listening casually to a performance of the slow movement from the Brahms Sextet in B-flat major. Due to stage fright, Anna arrives late to

the rehearsal. As the singer berates her for being late and generally unprofessional, Erika does her best impersonation of someone trying to comfort her. “Did I overestimate you?” she asks the tearful Anna, who manages to shake her head in the negative.

Walter comforts Anna in a way Erika cannot when his volunteer work as a stagehand finds him arranging the piano for her rehearsal as Anna sits meekly off to one side. He brings her over to the piano and even makes her laugh; his friendly arm on her shoulder doesn't hurt either. The point of view of this shot long is then revealed when its reverse shot shows Erika observing them. As Walter takes his seat beside Anna as her page turner he glances at Erika. In the reverse shot Erika looks away for a moment before returning her attention to the performance as the music begins. This is the first time in the film that the beginning of the song has been heard. So far, only the last stanza has appeared with the singer, while the middle stanza and its modulation from the tonic key of D major to the subdominant key of G is heard without the singer, but with Erika reading and commenting on the text during Anna's lesson. The lines of the poem, particularly the figures of dogs barking and chains rattling are wonderfully illustrated by Schubert's accompaniment as it oscillates between chromatic neighbor tones in the base voice and half-bar rests. It is a steady oscillation of sound with significant rests, but one whose rhythm is hard to place at first, as if the alternation of sound and silence were by chance, like the periodic barking and rattling in an otherwise sleeping village:

Es bellen die Hunde, es rasseln die Ketten;
 Es schlafen die Menschen in ihren Betten,
 Träumen sich manches, was sie nicht haben,
 Tun sich im Guten und Argen erlaben.
 [The dogs bark, their chains rattle;

People are sleeping in their beds,
 Many dreaming of what they don't have,
 Both good and bad restores them.]

What is crucial about this song for this final sequence in which it is heard is that it catalyzes Erika's jealousy. Until the song begins, she does not seem visibly upset. She is obviously interested in what Walter is doing, but there is not anything particularly foreboding or ominous about her attention. When he catches her observing him with Anna, she looks away in haste not out of jealousy but embarrassment. It is only when the music starts that her expression changes to one of a seething, envious rage. The moral ambivalence of the final line of the stanza is perhaps most pertinent to Erika's altered mood. After this stanza, she quietly exits the hall for the backstage area. At first she paces and frets, trying to calm herself down. But as she sits on a table it becomes clear something besides deep breathing exercises is under consideration. She grabs a glass, wraps it in a handkerchief, steps on it, and delivers the shards into the Anna's coat pocket.

As she walks back into the concert hall unnoticed, *Winterreise* occupies center stage for the last time in the film. But for the first time, one hears a significant portion of a song other than "In the Village." It is the most foreboding of the last eight in the cycle, "Der Wegweiser" ("The Signpost"). The song has just begun as Erika quietly reenters. Its words both describe and diverge from her recent activity:

Was vermeid' ich den die Wege,
 Wo die andern Wanderer gehn,
 Suche mir versteckte Stege
 Durche verschneite Felsenhöhn?

Habe ja doch nichts begangen,
 Dass ich Menschen sollte scheun,
 Welch ein törichtes Verlangen
 Treibt mich in die Wustenein?

[Why then do I shun the roads
 Walked by other travelers,
 Seeking out hidden paths
 Through snowbound rocky heights?

I've done nothing wrong
 That I should avoid mankind,
 What foolish longing
 Drives me into the wilderness?]

One might read the Frostian “road less travelled” on hidden mountain passes as foreshadowing Erika forthcoming affair in that their liaison is at first a secret with only Erika’s mother ever finding out, while the details of Erika’s sexual desires that emerge during their affair certainly belong to roads shunned by other if not most libidinal travelers. But another reading of the first stanza presents itself beyond this one insofar as Erika’s singularly distressed life already resembles the song as much if not more than the song foreshadows her turbulent future. She has only the thinnest veil of normality placed over her desires. It is all she can do to avoid outright conflicts with her mother and students. In this context, having an unpaid sexual encounter with

any adult is not a step away but towards the beaten path from sniffing tissues in the preview booth and urinating while watching people have sex in their cars at the drive-in.

In the second stanza, the parallels with the film are countered by a significant contrast. The poem's speaker has done nothing wrong; yet the viewer knows that Erika has just committed a terrible crime. But this contradiction is cancelled by the way Haneke constructs this brief scene and the way Schubert manipulates the poem's words. In both stanzas, Schubert emphasizes the final line when the singer repeats it as part of the melody. In the second stanza, he further accents the final two lines with a shift in the harmony from G major to an oscillating B-dominant deceptive cadence to C major and a forte-piano dynamic marking. The repetition in the harmony converts the longing for the wilderness into a compulsion. Similarly, Haneke highlights the relevance to Erika's development of the last two lines of the second stanza – "What foolish longing drives me into the wilderness?" – pairing them with a portrait shot of Erika reseated in the audience. The shot previous to this, when the lines about the speaker's innocence are stated, shows the singer on stage, as if to indicate their relevance to him and to juxtapose his innocent musical ambitions with Erika's violent act.

The obvious answer to the question of what desire pushes her into the wilderness is the desire for love with Walter, a younger and by some indications more desirable partner than herself. But as I've already asked, is this longing for Walter in itself really so foolish? Furthermore, if it is a desire for love with Walter, does it not, in principle at least, bring her closer to someone else (and therefore society) rather than alienate her even more? The doubts expressed here point to another reading of the scene that accounts for her actions towards Anna much more. What if the longing for Walter is part of a process of transformation that gives expression to a more foundational longing? That has to do with potentially destroying her career

as a teacher by assaulting her student, risking exposure as a voyeur at the drive-thru, and courting embarrassment as a pornography consumer at a sex shop. What if after risking her professional life, Erika's next project is to upset the tenuous balance of her home life with Walter's help? And finally, when that proves insufficient to change her mother's view of her, Erika resorts to violently wounding herself, not unlike what she did to Anna, and fleeing the concert hall in the film's last scene. At the very least then, the Schubertian longing for the wilderness Haneke associates with Erika points to a desire beyond her desire for Walter. This would be the desire to fail at love, wander in solitude, and reflect on times when future happiness still seemed possible. More radically, one can perceive how the violence of Erika's act in a sense stains Schubert's "Signpost." In this sense, the film's interpretation of the song asks, what if the speaker is guilty of some violent act? What if his lover did not just leave him but was injured, even murdered, by him?

From Schubert to a Failed Sexual Relationship Is But a Step

Haneke slowly develops the sexual relationship between Erika and Walter in a way that closely parallels the way the *Winterreise* song "In the Village" is gradually – although never fully – introduced in the film. In both cases, there is a sense in which both the song and the sexual relationship become fuller and fuller with each partial variation revealed by the film. In the song's case, with each iteration the viewer learns something new about Erika: what her minimal private life entails, how she responds to feelings of jealousy, etc. The significance of Erika and the significance of "In the Village" both in-itself and for the film are revealed in parallel. In the second half of the film, after the final iteration of the song, Erika's affair with Walter is effectively substituted for *Winterreise* in this regard. There is even a parallel between their little meetings in the public restrooms and hockey locker rooms that are more frustrating

than satisfying and the way in which “In the Village” is first introduced in lessons and rehearsals. Their first sexual encounter is effectively a “lesson” in which Erika still plays the role of teacher to Walter’s student. Their next encounter takes place literally at Walter’s lesson in her studio. The scene begins with Walter playing the *Andantino* from Schubert’s Sonata in A major, D. 959. Erika is a nervous wreck, stammering and coughing, looking awkward and uncomfortable with make-up on and her hair down for the first time in the film. Erika has a minor victory when she admonishes Walter for the lack of dynamic range in his interpretation, but she is losing the war, having finally agreed to let him play Schubert.

The true point of interest in this scene, however, resides in the fact that the small portion of Schubert we hear – just prior to the recapitulation in the second movement – is essentially a song without words, or rather a recitative with coloratura for piano alone, a true duo on one instrument in which the dry accompaniment in the base is sharply juxtaposed with the expressive moving line in the upper voice. In this way, and like the Trio in E flat, it too recalls and reinvents Beethoven, who also included deft operatic imitations in his late piano sonatas, as in his Sonata in A flat major, Opus 110. It is as though Haneke is not doing away with music altogether, but gradually reducing the voice and piano parts of *Winterreise* to one instrument. Walter originally expressed his love for Erika by changing his recital program to include the Scherzo from this same sonata for his house concert performance, and now the film has fittingly returned to this piece as the last thing heard from Schubert, as though love too is being left behind and something else is at stake.

Thus as music recedes, the challenge of representing the sexual act in cinema becomes the central focus of Haneke’s critique, but given the role of music and musicians in this particular sexual relationship, one is also justified in seeing Haneke’s experiments in

representing sexuality as speculative efforts to depict (perhaps consciously) the relationship between music and cinema in sexualized terms. Thus, while the lesson of music's absence in the film's further representations of sex is perhaps that generally film music is a gentrifying presence in relation to the sexual act in cinema, this moral should be supplemented with another lesson: that of the return of the repressed. In other words, certain tableaux that punctuate sequences towards the end of the film are effectively, to paraphrase Wagner, sexual deeds of music and cinema made visible. The irony is that, while music is missing from the end of the film, the film itself becomes a series of allegorical emblems (in the etymological sense of "narrative pictures") for the relationship between cinema and classical music. One knows one is dealing with Haneke's vision of this "relationship" between cinema and classical music because the emblems take superficially scandalous forms.

But first, back to probably the cleverest parallel between musical and sexual culture: the infamous letter of masochistic instructions that Erika gives to Walter is nothing if it is not the sexual analogue of an incredibly difficult musical score – one that even Walter, who is apparently as talented a lover as he is a pianist, sees as too challenging at first. Indeed, probably the most difficult thing about interpreting the letter correctly (aside from its being antithetical to what he had in mind) is that after he reads it, Erika no longer occupies her position of authority in matters of textual interpretation as clearly as she did before. He has to interpret her letter, but he can no longer count on her unequivocally to mark the course of his performance with praise and blame or stipulations about what is right and wrong. After he has read the letter, she asks, "Are you upset with me?" – indicating that her authority has waned with the outing of her secret. For the first time her guard is down. She has exposed one of her most private fantasies to him and his reaction is a mix of confusion and anger:

Erika: Do I disgust you? That isn't necessary. The urge to be beaten has been in me for years. I waited for you. From now on you give the orders. You're not talking to me.

You're angry. Say something.

Walter: You're sick. You need treatment.

Erika: If you want to hit me. Hit me.

Walter: I don't want to soil my hands. No one should touch your sort, even with gloves on. [Throws the letter at her.] I swear I loved you. You don't even know what it is.

Right now, you repulse me. Fuck it. [Leaves the room and the apartment.] (1:32-1:35)

An ambiguity emerges in this exchange that surrounds all their encounters after: is Walter consciously playing a role or reacting more or less “spontaneously” with an anger identical to that called for by the role but motivated instead by resentment at being asked to play the role of a sadistic tormentor? The allegorical point would seem to be that Haneke is calling attention to the shared tension between conception and realization in both musical performance and dramatic performance, but in the guise of sexual performance – where the frustrating experience of not knowing whether one's performance is living up to expectations is a similar but more visceral problem. One has thus not yet arrived at a uniquely cinematic and musical emblem, but at a kind of historical prior relationship between music and drama rather than the cinematic proper.

But the way forward to the cinematic allegory comes, paradoxically, in the guise of a regression in Erika's sexual desire. When Erika finally goes to bed, she takes even more abuse from her mother: “You really are shameless. All those sacrifices for this? You can set up a little Bordello.” To continue a pattern of following through on her desires that began when Walter read her letter as she wished, without much warning she leaps on top her mother and tries to make love to her. Is Erika aroused by abusive language? Whatever the case, after this incident,

it is clear that her sexuality won't be easily diagnosed by the DSM or readily categorized by psychoanalysis. Indeed, words one might apply to her behavior – incestuous, masochistic, perverse, pre-oedipal, acting-out... – don't really capture the instability she exhibits sexually and otherwise in these and the following scenes. Nor do such terms account for the sense of suspense in the face of the unknown that builds to the end of the film. After a further struggle between them that includes Erika's memorable line, "I saw the hairs on your sex," this scene ends with Erika sleeping like a ravaged lover in the crook of her mother's arm. This last shot is arguably *the* allegorical emblem for the relationship between classical music and cinema and is perhaps the film's ultimate insight in this regard. Erika is not music but cinema, younger and less stable, filled with disappointments at this point in its life, but still alive, perhaps living for the first time, rather than merely existing to fulfill the failed ambitions of its mother, music. Her mother is classical music, old and withered but still making impossible demands upon the cinema. Classical music's superego relationship to cinema and its achievements and ecstasies have thus been provocatively reduced to an aged and disenchanted but still controlling maternal figure.

A pattern emerges when the next sequence ends with a similarly surreal tableau. To demonstrate the extent to which Erika doesn't know what she wants, she shows up at Walter's hockey practice the next day after she told him to think it over and get in touch with her only if he felt comfortable with what the letter asked him to do. "Forgive me for the letter," she says, as if it was the wrong musical piece to start with, one that was too difficult. They should've begun with something less ambitious, like kissing on the mouth and making love with their clothes on in a semi-private place. This is, in the event, the action of interest in this scene: some more awkward sodomy that ends with Erika vomiting due to Walter's aggressiveness during fellatio.

Yet, as is often the case, this rehearsal goes better than the performance later that night (not that it goes particularly well, however), perhaps because Walter is not so literally performing the role Erika asks of him in her letter. He is cruel, but only after they're finished. "I must really disgust you," he says. And then when she tries to kiss him passionately, something she has hitherto consciously avoided, he responds, "You know, you really stink. You should leave town until you don't stink so much." With those words, he opens the storage room's door onto the rink and Erika spills out onto the ice. This shot is another allegorical emblem under the rubric of the critique of cinematic reason: it is a first attempt to represent the image of Erika setting out on her winter's journey, of Schubert's cycle translated into a cinema tableau. If this scene were to go on, the music from the first song of *Winterreise*, "Gute Nacht," would undoubtedly commence.

"You Know, Love Isn't Everything."

Walter and Erika's final sexual encounter, in which he essentially rapes her while she looks on in disgust, is not so much a sadomasochistic performance as it is an abject failure of such a performance. It is less symmetrical and more disturbingly ambiguous than your run-of-the-mill master/slave scenarios. On the one hand, while they copulate Walter is no longer the sadist he was when he entered the apartment and began his attack. "Love me, please," he says to her at one point; she begs him to stop instead. Thus, on the other hand, Erika is no masochist at this moment either. It seems as though it was enough for her just to write it down and share. She did not really want to do it; the sexual relationship was not her true aim. She has been preparing for another performance, a radical new interpretation of *Winterreise*. Crucial details in the final sequence at the concert hall confirm this: her hair is back in its old style, pulled back in a bun. Yes, she's wearing lipstick, a trace of her brief attempt at sexual liberation, but her blouse is familiarly conservative. Even her act of self-wounding in the lobby is done in a conservative

and composed way. She dutifully waits for the concert-goers to leave the lobby, and when she finally stabs herself, the knife enters into her chest above the heart. The location of the wound is deeply ambiguous. If she wanted to end her life she chose poorly, and if she wanted to end her playing career, why not stab at her hands?

Indeed, Haneke's ending is much less certain than that of Elfriede Jelinek's novel. In the novel it is clear that the wound is not life-threatening – “The wound is harmless, but dirt and pus must not get in” – and that after leaving the building Erika decides to return home – “Erika knows the direction she has to take. She heads home, gradually quickening her step” (280). Not only is Haneke's version more ambiguous on both counts – there is no indication about where Erika is headed, nor is it clear the wound is so harmless – but also her position in the film as she leaves the recital hall is much more isolated. In the novel, Jelinek draws on the familiar paradox of the crowd: Erika is surrounded by people as she leaves the building but not any less alone. “Many people come toward her, forking around her like water around a dead ship's hull” (280). In the final shot of the film by contrast, the closest things to other human beings are a few passing cars. Indeed, the very lack of humanity is compounded by the long-shot, surveillance-style camera angle of an almost invisible Erika leaving the massive building. Her isolation is further emphasized by the indifferent noise of urban life that surrounds her. And it is this isolation that indicates her performance of *Winterreise* has begun.

It seems only natural thus to conclude with Adorno, the philosopher who believed his treasured German musical culture was – in the figure of Schoenberg's post-expressionist serialism – tragically collapsing on itself in a manner echoed in Erika's self-destructive final sequence. It was already mentioned that Erika's reference to his commentary on Schumann's C major Fantasy is inaccurate. Adorno doesn't refer to Schumann's impending madness in his

comments on the piece. He refers instead to the ending of the piece, the way its resistance to closure prefigures Alban Berg's unique brand of modernism. "The way the end of the C major Fantasy opens into infinity, yet without transfiguring itself to the point of redemption, indeed, even without reference to itself: that anticipates the innermost essence of Berg's tone" (Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* 5). This description of an end that is infinite without transcendence or redemption, that simply ceases not to be but to refer to itself, is perhaps the most succinct formula for the state that Erika has entered at the end of the film. She has reached the end of her life as a piano teacher, a submissive daughter, and a reckless lover. Similarly, here Haneke's cinema of critique leaves off in its inquiry into music and sexuality. *The Piano Teacher* reaches its limit when it becomes an impossible performance of *Winterreise*, with the pianist in place of the singer and the accompaniment played by no one.

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