

Narrative/Film/Music

A key date in the history of the cinema is 28 December 1895, when a pianist apparently provided for the first time musical accompaniment for a film, in this case a series of shorts presented by the Lumière brothers at the Grand Café in Paris. At least from that moment on, music and the movies have been all but inseparable. As the cinema has evolved, numerous writers have theorized as to why the medium voraciously attached itself to music once it had left the kinetoscopes and the penny arcades. Two principal reasons for the initial phenomenon seem to emerge: 1) music was needed to cover up the noise from both the audience and the projectors, the latter of which had not yet found their way into soundproofed booths; and 2) music was needed, psychologically, to smooth over natural human fears of darkness and silence. As Irwin Bazon has written,

The early film-makers had no desire to allow external annoyances to compete for attention with their visual product: music was their panacea for encouraging audience empathy. In their anxiety to bring about this rapport and lessen the fear of silence, they often selected musical material bordering on the ridiculous: note, for example, the countless silent films accompanied by marches, anthems, patriotic tunes, operatic melodies, and whole segments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century symphonic repertoire, inserted without dramatic motivation to fill any and all situations.¹

Even today, one finds numerous silent films that have been reissued with tracks in which the music simply moves from one set piece to the next with no consideration for the action. Scott Joplin rags accompany Charlie Chaplin and Sergei Eisenstein indiscriminately, evoking little else than the period in

which the films were made. Some of the scores Charlie Chaplin composed and added to some of his two-reelers such as *The Easy Life* likewise have little apparent relationship to what is going on in the dramatic action. And if one looks in strange enough areas such as porno films one can find music such as Alden Shuman's often dreamy and paradoxically climaxless strains for the 1973 *The Devil in Miss Jones* that generally functions as a kind of nonstop, wallpaper soporific (to soothe what fears one can only guess).

But the kind of film music to be dealt with principally in this book is in fact dramatically motivated, and it is music composed more often than not by practitioners specializing in the art to interact specifically with the diverse facets of the filmic medium, particularly the narrative. Exactly when someone came up with the idea of coordinating the music with the action and images of movies cannot be pinpointed, but it does not seem to have taken long. The need to coordinate music with the affective content of the visuals, as opposed to simply providing a kind of "cine-muzak," extends in fact well back into the silent era. In an article immodestly entitled "The Origin of Film Music," Max Winkler describes how he was led to found a "cue-sheet" enterprise that became a substantial spoke in the wheel of the Hollywood film industry and that lasted on through the early days of the talkies:

One day in the spring of 1912 I went to one of the small movie houses that had so quickly sprung up all over town, to see one of the superb spectacles of the day. It was called WAR BRIDES and featured the exotic Nazimova in the role of a pregnant peasant woman. The king of a mythical country where Nazimova was living passed through her village. Nazimova threw herself in front of him, her hands raised to heaven. She said—no, she didn't say anything but the title on the screen announced: "If you will not give us women the right to vote for or against war I shall not bear a child for such a country."

The king just moved on. Nazimova drew a dagger and killed herself.

The pianist so far had done all right. But I scarcely believed my ears when, just as Nazimova exhaled her last breath, to the heart-breaking sobs of her family, he began to play the old, frivolous favorite, "You Made Me What I Am Today."

The pianist was one of my customers and I just could not resist going backstage afterwards and asking him why he had chosen this particular tune at that particular moment. "Why," he said, "I thought that was perfectly clear. Wasn't it the king's fault that she killed herself?"²

The concept that Winkler ultimately came up with was to supply the film studios with cue sheets of suitable music, complete with timings, for each new release, which Winkler and soon many others would screen in advance. Initially taken from the immense catalog of the Carl Fischer Company, for which Winkler worked, these cue sheets would immediately be sent to provide theater managers, pianists, organists, and/or orchestra conductors around

the country with dramatically motivated musical backing. Movie theaters thereby had the potential for “coherent” cine-musical spectacles, with music tailored to the affect of each cinematic situation; Winkler had himself the beginning of a profitable business; the Carl Fischer Company suddenly had a huge outlet for its musical materials; and the film industry had the makings of considerably expanded spectacles, about which more will be said in the next chapter. Around the same time, the Edison Company was sending out “Suggestions for Music” with its pictures. By 1924, Ernö Rapée was able to publish a huge volume entitled *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists*, in which short pieces such as Mendelssohn’s “Song Without Words,” op. 102, no. 3, or Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King,” were numerically categorized for their suitability to such situations as “funeral,” “happiness,” “railroad,” “sea storm,” and so forth. Certain pieces such as Otto Langey’s “Agitato No. 3” which, although bearing a 1916 copyright from G. Schirmer shamelessly rips off the accompaniment from Schubert’s “Der Erlkönig,” bear indications such as “suitable for gruesome or infernal scenes, witches, etc.”³

Why, then, did the practitioners of the cinema decide early on that film music, at least in many instances, needed to be dramatically motivated? For starters, there were certainly ample precedents for such practice outside of the cinema. Not only did Greek tragedies have passages that were sung, music also played an important role in highlighting some of the most emotionally charged moments. As one scholar has noted,

The great dramatists were therefore composers as well as poets, actors, playwrights, and producers. . . . When we read a play such as the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus, it is as if we were seeing only the libretto of an opera to which all the music, dances, and stage directions are missing. It is so clearly a lyric drama that the music itself must have been the principal means by which the poet conveyed his meaning. Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, on the other hand, has far greater intrinsic dramatic substance, but even here the emotional intensity of the individual scenes often rises to such a pitch that music had to take over where the words left off; just as when a person is so overcome with feeling that words fail, and he resorts to inarticulate sounds and gestures.⁴

More recently, there is the entire tradition of melodrama (literally drama with music), not only in the broadly based hero/villain theatrics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but even in more subtle works such as Goethe’s *Egmont*, for which Beethoven wrote quite an elaborate score of “incidental” music. Hans-Christian Schmidt, in his book on film music, cites an excellent example appropriately entitled “Melodrama,” during which the spoken words of *Egmont* are punctuated and sometimes underscored by brief phrases or sostenuto chords from a string orchestra.⁵ It has also been said that opera likewise offers an important precedent for film music. But early opera depends

too strongly on the use of various set pieces to offer a valid precedent for “narrative” film music. Wagnerian opera, however, has quite a bit in common with film music, for in Wagner full themes and tiny, quasi-thematic fragments—motifs—are more important both in their immediate emotional impact and in their relationship to the dramatic structure of the opera than they are to its underlying musical structure. The same can be said to a degree of Wagner’s harmonic language. American composer Roger Sessions has summed up the Wagnerian phenomenon as follows:

The “dissonances” in Bach or Mozart have a significance, both “musical” and “emotional,” far different from that often lent them by hearers nurtured on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, in which dissonances are rather individual features than organic portions of a musical line. Here the influence of the Wagnerian leit-motif—more often than not extremely short and characterized by a single harmonic or rhythmic trait—is paramount. Its introduction is often motivated by dramatic, not musical necessities and once introduced it intentionally dominates the scene, to the obliteration of what surrounds it. The musical coherence is there, to be sure—but in a passive sense; the detail is more significant than the line, and the “theme” more important than its development. It is all too seldom noted to what an overwhelming extent the reverse is the case in earlier music.⁶

If film music became dramatically motivated, then, it did so to fulfill another need, and that was to heighten the emotional impact of the significant moments of a given show, thereby distancing audiences even further from their own thoughts and fears (of silence or whatever) by involving them more deeply in the movie. Since these types of “significant moments” often reveal themselves within a narrative structure, the music to be dealt with in this book could and will often be referred to as “narrative film music,” as Claudia Gorbman has done in her recent work on the subject.⁷ Yet, one of the more interesting ways in which the cinematic and video media have shown their voracious appetite for music can be seen and heard in the appearance of music, sometimes very dramatic music, behind the images of documentaries, which one does not ordinarily tend to consider as “narrative” in the traditional sense. The Disney Studios’ *The Living Desert* (1953), for instance, features extensive musical backing by Paul Smith in a score that includes a sadly lyrical title theme, some droll “choo-choo train” music to accompany the mil-lipede, and a grim *valse triste* for the scorpion battle. Lesser-known nature documentaries from various eras likewise have their music tracks crammed with dramatic cues for every conceivable type of situation. One such documentary, which I came across while channel surfing on my television set, is devoted to snakes, and it offers such doom-and-gloom bombast on the music track every time one of the film’s subjects such as a python makes a kill that the viewer can have little doubt as to how the filmmakers want him

or her to feel, even though the film purports to be—and pretty much is on the purely visual level and in its voice-over narration—an objective portrayal of the reptiles in question.⁸ Anyone who has ever “listened” to traditional narrative film will immediately recognize in these documentaries and countless others many of the gimmicks of narrative film music, including “mickey-mousing,” the split-second synchronizing of musical and visual action, so called because of its prevalent use in animated cartoons. Thus a loud, dissonant, brass-heavy chord bursts out as the snake strikes, whereas *The Living Desert*’s millipede moves more broadly to the strains of his (or her?) railroad-train tune.

The film-music phenomenon—and it is nothing less than a phenomenon—does not, then, relate simply to the dramatic needs of narrative cinema. It relates just as much, if not more, to a need to “narrativize,” as I will call it for the moment, the cinema. What, then, creates this need? Certainly, the cinema shares with photography, the basic medium of the cinematic art, the quality of being the most iconic of the various artistic languages. In other words, there appears to be a one-to-one correspondence between the photographic signifier—the forms, shades of light, and gradations of color or black and white that make us “read” a photograph of an apple as an apple—and the photographic signified—the concept (such as what an apple “is”) that the signifier leads us to. This sets photography apart from natural languages, such as verbal language, in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is by and large arbitrary. *Tree*, *arbre*, and *baum* are all combinations of phonemes (the signifier) that evoke the concept of a tree (the signified) in a way that depends on linguistic accord and not on any relationship that can be figured out between the succession of phonemes and the concept they evoke. Even though a photograph of a tree *is* not a tree, it produces in the observer of that photograph the impulse to say, “That’s a tree” (or “C’est un arbre,” or “Das ist ein Baum”), since the forms, shades of light, and gradations of color or black and white in the image are remarkably similar to what we see in real life. One might also argue that any knowledge of the photographic medium allows the observer to presume that there *is* a real tree or apple or what have you that the photograph captured or, to use Bazin’s perception, “mummified.”⁹ It goes without saying that an iconic language is universal.

To the visually iconic the cinema adds, first of all, what might be considered an iconic sense of time. The object, no longer frozen in the, say, 1/60th of a second it took to expose the film for a still photograph, appears in the cinema to have an existence within “real” time. And, in fact, the object, no longer manipulable by the observer as a photograph, imposes *its* time on the spectator and thus becomes what I will call an “object–event.” The acquisition of sound further enhanced the iconic status of the cinematic image. Not only did an object look like a “real” object, and not only did the cinema appear to create an event in “real” time, that object–event now sounded like a

“real” object–event surrounded by a “real” sonic ambience. Of course, as has frequently been noted, the reality of an iconic image lies in the physical properties of that image, not in what is represented by that image. At least one filmmaker, French director Robert Bresson, finds that “sound, because of its greater realism, is infinitely more evocative than an image, which is essentially only a stylization of visual reality.”¹⁰ There is no question, however, that the visual, iconic image creates an often-exploited proclivity in the observer to equate the image with what it represents and even, as has been the case in painting, to revolt against various attempts to force the public to rise against representational prejudices. In 1911–12, Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold, one of the great theoreticians of modern theater, denied the aesthetic potential of the cinema when he wrote,

The cinematograph, that dream-come-true of those who strive for the photographic representation of life, is a shining example of the obsessions of quasi-verisimilitude.

The cinematograph is of undoubted importance to science, but when it is put to the service of art, it senses its own inadequacy and tries in vain to justify the label of “art!” Hence its attempts to free itself from the basic principle of photography: it realizes the need to vindicate the first half of its dual appellation “the theatre-cinematograph!” But the theatre is art and photography is non-art. So the cinematograph, in its hasty efforts to incorporate colours, music, declamation and singing, is pursuing elements which are totally alien to its mechanical nature.¹¹

By suggesting that the cinema could be of “undoubted importance to science,” Meyerhold put his finger on the existence of the crossroads situation that the cinema found itself in, at least to some extent, at the beginning of the century: would it exploit the “mechanical,” iconic nature of its images and become principally a tool for science and history, or would it circumvent the prejudices instilled by the iconic and become an art form (and an entertainment medium)? In one of history’s great paradoxes, the cinema managed to become principally an art form–entertainment medium while actually encouraging the “prejudice of the iconic,” and music was one of the principal means via which it pulled off this major piece of sorcery. By reinforcing significant moments in a cinematic succession of images, whether held together by an apparent narrative or not, music has, via its tendency to narrativize, helped lead “readers” of the cinema’s iconic language(s) away from history and towards story. Yet these same readers’ desires and proclivities to perceive as real anything in the cinematic experience *but* the music, which is generally maintained on a totally separate plane, opens the doors to the possibilities of numerous manipulations by and from the culture producing a given film, and it is precisely such manipulations that will be the subject of a number of the analyses offered in this book. Things did not have to turn out this way, of

course. Music, both as complement and as analogy, offers options that go far beyond narrative support and narrativizing. Before further examining the narrative/narrativizing implications of film music, then, I would like to probe more deeply into some of the aesthetic and philosophical problems raised by the art of music and examine some of the directions that the film/music amalgam might have but rarely has followed.

If there exists a "prejudice of the iconic" for the cinema, one might say that there exists a "prejudice of the noniconic" for music. The same Meyerhold who refused artistic status to the "cinematograph" was inspired by Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* to describe the opera's music in the following terms: "Music, which determines the tempo of every occurrence on the stage, dictates a rhythm which has nothing in common with everyday existence. The life of music is not the life of everyday reality. 'Neither life as it is, nor life as it ought to be, but life as we see it in our dreams.' (Chekhov)"¹² Indeed, if we consider Meyerhold's appraisal of music, among other things, as alien to the nature of cinema, we must in one sense admit that he was right. If the cine-photographic image is iconic and, in nonexperimental cinema, representational, and if the verbal image is natural (noniconic) and representational, the musical "image" is neither iconic nor representational. Only purely abstract painting and sculpture share with music the quality of being wholly nonrepresentational art forms. Music in fact has the advantage of a system of signifiers that by and large serve that art exclusively: musical notation has no function other than to indicate certain sounds and rhythms to be executed; musical tones, while occasionally serving certain purposes, such as paging someone in a department store, warning of the approach of a vehicle, or making telephone connections, play an extremely limited role in nonmusical information; and, most importantly perhaps, musical timbres are generally produced by instruments the sole purpose of which is to create music. The human voice, of course, is used in ordinary parlance as well as in singing. But the way in which the voice is used for singing ordinarily differs substantially from the talking mode. In a different area, the twentieth century has produced *musique concrète*, in which sound-producing objects such as a barn door¹³ become musical instruments because their sounds are "composed" into an artistic structure.

It is no wonder, then, that music has been held in awe by those who would escape the "trap" of naturalist representationalism. The French and Russian (including Meyerhold) symbolists, whose movement took shape around the same time as the invention of the cinema, continually held music as an artistic ideal. The description of Wagner by Meyerhold, who ultimately paid dearly for his decidedly non-Marxist aesthetics, reflects just such an attitude, as does Mallarmé's famous aphorism that poetry should "reclaim from music what rightfully belongs to poetry." More recently, Susanne K. Langer has written that "music is preëminently nonrepresentational even in its classic

productions, its highest attainments. It exhibits pure form not as an embellishment, but as its very essence.”¹⁴ The late conductor/composer Leonard Bernstein has described his art in the following terms:

You see, [verbal] language leads a double life; it has a communicative function and an aesthetic function. Music has an aesthetic function only. For that reason, musical surface structure is not equatable with linguistic surface structure. In other words, a prose sentence may or may not be part of a work of art. But with music there is no such either-or; a phrase of music is a phrase of art. . . . Language must therefore reach even higher than its linguistic surface structure, the prose sentence, to find the true equivalent of musical surface structure.¹⁵

Claude Lévi-Strauss goes even further by stating that “theoretically, if not in fact, any adequately educated man could write poems, good or bad; whereas musical invention depends on special gifts, which can be developed only where they are innate.”¹⁶

Bernstein’s oversimplification and Lévi-Strauss’s naïveté need not concern us greatly here. Suffice it to say that just as almost anyone can be taught verbal language, almost anyone can be taught enough music to enable him or her to string together a given number of tones in a musically logical sequence. But the special and perhaps “innate” gifts necessary for the creation of musical art are likewise essential for the invention of poetry—or any other art, for that matter. One could also construct, although it is beyond the scope of this book to do so, a theory around the way in which such a key musical element as harmony has been so engulfed, in Western music, by diatonicism that this particular harmonic system has come to be perceived as a kind of “reality,” departures from which are often reacted to with just as much panic by the ordinary listener, whether confronted by Stravinsky or by bebop, as are departures from accepted representationalism in both the verbal and pictorial arts. The bottom line here is that, just as there exists a prejudice towards representation for the cinematic (iconic, representational) and verbal (noniconic, representational) arts, there exists a prejudice towards nonrepresentation for the musical (noniconic, nonrepresentational) art. And so it might be said that one of the main bases for the success of the cine-musical amalgam stems from the exploitation of two popular and by-and-large learned attitudes towards the two arts: the cinematic image relates to everyday reality, the musical image does not. If, then, the cinema attached itself voraciously to music, another reason would seem to lie in the principle that opposites attract, with the most iconic of all art forms attaching itself to the most noniconic.

The degree to which there is a tendency to deny aesthetic status to the styles of the “everyday” is the degree to which the cinema also needed something to deiconify its temporal and spatial images in order to justify its very existence as an art form. Music is one, but not the only, way in which this was accomplished. Just as the cinema faced a crossroads that could have led

either to its exploitation as an instrument of science and history or to its exploitation as an art form (never mind that both paths could have been equally chosen), it also, as an art form, faced several options as to how it would escape from the trap of referentiality in order to impose perception of its artistic structure and content as such. One excellent article on the subject describes as follows the attitudes of French director Abel Gance as manifested in his silent film *La Dixième symphonie*, which he wrote and directed in 1917:

La dixième symphonie illustrates . . . the extent to which cinema in its aspiration to be recognised as a popular *art* form was looking towards music as model and guarantee. They seemed to have a similar project, using rhythm, harmony and tonal contrast as the basis of an appeal to feeling. Lyric poetry could also provide a parallel since it, too, played on the intuitive, but music seemed more appropriate and was more distanced from the literary. For Gance and many of his contemporaries in France, it opened out the possibility of a radically new theory of what cinema might become.¹⁷

The same article goes on to show how musical considerations dominated Gance's cine-aesthetics. The article notes, for instance, that the montage for the rapid montage sequences of Gance's 1921 *La Roue* "was based on musical notation," which was then used by Arthur Honegger to create music that "matched the rhythm of the images." The composer later incorporated this music into his famous *mouvement symphonique*, *Pacific 231*. Another such option, particularly evident before the advent of sound, lay in the area of cutting and editing, or montage. It is easy to see how the photographic image could escape from being embedded in the "iconic," representational image of time potential to the cinema by being juxtaposed through montage with other images in a discontinuous rather than an illusorily continuous manner. Certainly, this is precisely what Russian director/theoretician Sergei Eisenstein (see also chapter 5, Interlude III) attempted both before and after the sound era. Not surprisingly, Eisenstein even applied the musical analogy to his art:

This interest in the relationships between the different senses converged with Eisenstein's growing proneness to use musical analogies and terminology to explain what he was trying to achieve in the cinema. Thus, while pondering over the editing of *The General Line* he came to the conclusion that his montage should concentrate not on the dominant in each shot (tonal montage) but on the overtones. At the same time he put increased stress on finding the correct rhythm. And, when he discussed the relationships between the different senses and different lines of development, he introduced the idea of counterpoint and later of polyphony.¹⁸

Once sound arrived, certain artists even envisaged a direct influence of music on the rhythms created through montage:

In the early 1930s there were some interesting experiments attempted in "sound montage." Sound montage is, essentially, constructing films according to the rules of music. The investigation was carried out by the German Film Research Institute in Berlin. Edmund Meisel, the composer of the music for both *Potemkin* and *October*, was actively involved in the earlier experiments of the Institute.

While the experiments were started before the advent of sound, the researchers admitted that the idea of sound montage could only be totally successful if the music could be perfectly synchronized so that the time of the cutting and time of music would correspond exactly. The sound film made this possible.¹⁹

Henri Colpi cites the singular example of the Austrian-born Friedrich Feher, who had worked in silent film and later scripted, directed and scored a film, *Il suo bambino*, in Italy in 1931. In London in 1936, Feher directed and scored *The Robber Symphony*, which Colpi describes as follows: "The tone of the film recalls the avant-garde, with fantasy and comedy intermingling. The film's style makes dialogue all but non-existent, with the score covering almost the entire music track. In the end run, what we have is images edited to music."²⁰ In France in 1945, Jean Painlevé edited his *Vampire* to the rhythms of Duke Ellington's "Black and Tan Fantasy"; two more Ellington songs, "White Heat" and "Stomp Jones," provided the rhythms for *Assassins d'eau douce* in 1947. More recently, one can see in the films of the French novelist, director, and theoretician Alain Robbe-Grillet an attempt to organize the filmic images along the lines of the musical analogy. For the structure of *L'Eden et après* (1971), in fact, Robbe-Grillet turned to musical serialism for his model.²¹ Robbe-Grillet and long-time associates, Michel Fano (composer) and Bob Wade (editor/continuity), have also consistently organized the sound and music tracks into what might be called ongoing pieces of *musique concrète*.

In other words, music (and sound as a kind of *musique concrète*) could have served as both an analogy for and structural complement to montage, thereby helping liberate the cinema from what Robbe-Grillet has referred to as the "ideology of realism."²² But the Eisensteins, the Meisels, the Robbe-Grilletts, and a few others remain the decided exceptions in commercial cinema. Continuity, or "invisible," editing has come to dominate, even overwhelm, the visual structure of the cinema at least to the same degree as tonality has dominated the harmonic structure of Western music. In fact, both tonality and continuity editing have crossed the borders into national cinemas such as Japan's: one hears, for instance, a quasi-Western score on the music tracks of Kurosawa's 1951 *Rashomon*, with music by Fumio Hayazaka, as one major example. Music, then, rather than serving as an analogy for and/or complement to the cinema's visual structures, has instead, for the most part,

been pitted against visual structure in a kind of dialectic that plays representational prejudices against nonrepresentational ones. So strongly have the practitioners of the cinema worked at maintaining this dialectical situation that film music in the usual sense of the term has been banned altogether from the narrative universe, or the diegesis.²³ In considering the various ramifications—psychological, aesthetic, political, and others—of the film-music phenomenon, we have first and foremost to deal with the fact that film music, in its “pure” state, is nondiegetic: it does not form, nor is it intended to form, part of the universe of objects and object-events that the characters we see are supposed to be able to see, touch, smell, feel . . . and/or hear. As long as music came from the pianos, organs, chamber groups, or even full orchestras in the pits of the silent theaters, this separation had a certain inevitability to it, even though, as we shall see, some attempts were occasionally made to create “diegetic” musical effects from the orchestra pit. The advent of sound did nothing to change this segregation other than to take music from the live performers and put it on the music track of the film. This does not mean that music cannot function diegetically in films: music from “sources” such as jukeboxes, radios, televisions, phonographs, live orchestras, and the like constantly turns up in the talkies. In fact, it was not until sound arrived that the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic film music acquired a great deal of meaning, although, as we shall also see, it is quite possible for diegetic, or source, music to create the same effect and affect in the viewer that nondiegetic music does. But the musical score either composed especially for a given film or taken from previously existing compositions and then laid in on a given film’s music track, to which the characters within the diegesis almost always remain totally deaf, has become a permanent fixture of commercial cinema, and it is this type of music that will serve as the principal object of discussion. Song scores for film musicals such as *Singin’ in the Rain*, on the other hand, fall outside the scope of this study.

Even with the major segregation of visual and musical aesthetics, and even with the tenaciously held visual-diegetic/musical-nondiegetic distinction, it is possible to imagine a cinematic art in which the visuals and the music each go their more-or-less separate ways, with music, rather than merely forever remaining “invisible,” standing on an equal level with the visual languages and the narrative. Out of this thesis/antithesis structure would, of course, emerge a synthesis different from the individual characters of each separate art. Music often tends to function this way in the films of Sergei Eisenstein and Jean-Luc Godard, as we shall see. One might also cite the example of Godfrey Reggio’s two arguably nonnarrative documentaries, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988), which eliminate the diegetic soundtrack almost entirely in favor of a music track containing nonstop, “minimalist” music by Philip Glass. Before shooting *No Man’s Land* in 1985, Swiss director Alain Tanner had heard music by Terry Riley in a concert. After the con-

cert, Tanner went to Riley and told him, "You've just composed the music for my next film." When Riley asked Tanner what the film was about, he was informed that it had not even begun to take shape.²⁴ After inspiring *No Man's Land*, Riley's music then became that film's nondiegetic score. But once again, such phenomena remain few and far between. Instead, visuals and music, rather than working within the domain of separate but equal stature, and rather than mutually inspiring each other's artistic structure, have been brought together by an element that has interposed itself between the two. This brings us back to narrative.

In a way, the creators of narrative in the cinema faced the same problem encountered by the creators of narrative in the novel: a) how does one elicit emotional involvement in a medium that, more strongly than all the other literary forms for the novel and more strongly than all the other arts for the cinema, carries with it the trap of the representational, the referential, and, b) having elicited those emotions, how does one then bring the reader or viewer back around to believing in the "reality" of what he or she is reading or viewing? Both the novel and the cinema have used various devices to get the reader or viewer to accept the "historicity" of their narratives. Both, for instance, tend to use linear narrative structures that create the illusion of a single, historically extant event rather than of a repeatable, mythic event. The novel, throughout its existence, has continually used such devices as the epistolary structure and/or various statements by the author claiming that he or she merely gathered the materials (from the hero or heroine's own words, out of an old trunk, or wherever) and is presenting them for the "education" of the reader. Both the novel and the cinema, furthermore, have a strong predilection for narrativizing historical events. The novel encodes historicity into its consistent use of the past tense. The cinema, on the other hand, has continuity editing, whose rigidly predictable shot sequences have over the generations become encoded with the illusion of chronological time progression. As for involving the reader or viewer in the narrative, both the novel and the cinema use such devices as causally motivated plot situation and characterization to create the kind of emotional identification that leads to catharsis. But the practitioners of the cinema, perhaps realizing that they had to "try harder" because of their medium's additional strata of the representational, discovered a means, forbidden to the novel, of further pulling their audiences into the story, and that area, of course, was music.

Consider the case of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 masterpiece, *Psycho*. And consider *Psycho*'s brief but justifiably renowned shower sequence, which took a week to shoot. (Often exaggerated accountings are frequently given for the length and number of shots in this sequence. If we take as the first shot the leg shot with Marion [Janet Leigh] dropping her robe—approximately 46'32" into the film, if the Universal logo constitutes the beginning—and as the last the long take that leaves Marion's body, explores the room, and then

stops on a long shot of the Bates house, with Norman screaming “Mother! Oh, God, Mother! Blood!” the sequence lasts around 3’14”, with fifty-four separate shots, many of them lasting under a second, forming the montage. Bernard Herrmann’s music—and the actual murder—starts fifty seconds into the sequence and ends fifty-five seconds later.) Considering the narrative situation, which evokes deep terror, considering the character development—Marion Crane has by this point become a very sympathetic personage, and on various levels—and considering the artistic brilliance of the montage, one might find it difficult to discern anything lacking in this sequence. Yet Hitchcock himself was initially displeased with it, and it took the insistence of the composer to get him to add music. The rest, as they say, is history. With the addition of Herrmann’s screeching violins and his slash-and-chop string chords, the shower murder acquires an impact that most moviegoers will admit is one of the most devastating in all of cinema.

It is not hard to see why Hitchcock felt he needed Herrmann’s music. The editing of the shower sequence, with its jump cuts, its moments of rhythmic movement between shot and reverse shot, its internal “rhymes” and its rhymes with other shots in *Psycho*, not to mention the fact that the knife is never shown entering Marion’s flesh, makes it one of the most unrealistic pieces of cinema one can imagine, both on an absolute level and within the framework of traditional montage codes. From this perspective, the relationship between the director’s art and its subject matter bears a strong but perhaps not unexpected resemblance to Greek tragedy:

For it is in the myths, even the cruellest myths, that Sophocles sees the permanent human battleground, accepting their horrors with his dramatic (if not altogether with his moral) sense, and more than Aeschylus adhering to their traditional framework. Yet these stories would be nothing without the poetry, for there comes a point, and this is reached by Sophocles, where form is so nearly perfect as to achieve the autonomous originality of a new concept.²⁵

A discussion of Euripides’s *The Bacchae* provides another enlightening parallel with Hitchcock: “Its excitement is enhanced by the tension between the strange, savage myth and the classical severity of its presentation—by the contrast of a more than usual state of emotion, as Coleridge put it, with more than usual order.”²⁶ Certainly, one of the keys to Hitchcock’s art lies in the tension between the deliberate rigor, the “poetry” of the style, and the savagery of its content. Yet, when *Psycho* first came out, the reviews did not concentrate on the brilliance of the montage, nor did they show much awareness of the film’s complex interweaving of text and subtext. Appreciations of those finer elements were to come later. Instead, the “graphic” violence of the shower scene and, later, of the detective Arbogast’s murder was what knocked the reviewers off their feet. The description of the shower scene in the *Time* magazine review typifies reactions at the time of *Psycho*’s pre-

miere: "What is offered . . . is merely gruesome. The trail leads to a sagging, swamp-view motel and to one of the messiest, most nauseating murders ever filmed. At close range, the camera watches every twitch, gurgle, convulsion, and hemorrhage in the process by which a living human being becomes a corpse."²⁷

One wonders what led *Time's* anonymous reviewer to see and hear "twitches, gurgles, convulsions, and hemorrhages" nowhere to be found in either the sequence's visuals or on its soundtrack. There can be little doubt that the prejudice towards the iconic/representational nature of the cinematic image helped lead the reviewer to fill in the gaps with imagined pieces of visual and aural realism. One also wonders, however, whether the reviewer would have seen and heard all those twitches, gurgles, convulsions, and hemorrhages had the sequence run by without Bernard Herrmann's music to accompany the murder and death, as Hitchcock had intended. Without the score, would the reviewer have become more aware of the artistic quality of the montage? Would he have been made more aware of the subtextual implications of the scene that would allow the viewer to see Marion Crane as a victim of the tie-in between the male's sexual image and capitalist economics? The way in which the camera, having left Marion's corpse, tracks in to the newspaper containing the money she had stolen and then continues tracking to show the Bates house through the door certainly encourages a sexual-politics reading of the shower scene. Or would the reviewer, ignorant (as was most probably the case) of the possibilities of montage, and/or reluctant to be intellectually challenged by the complexities of sexual politics, have simply backed away from the scene altogether and found it unsatisfying had he not had Herrmann's music both to involve him emotionally in the scene and thereby to purge these emotions while ignoring the presence of the cinematic signifiers in favor of the signifieds? Hitchcock, who, for all his artistic and extra-artistic brilliance, forever had his finger on the pulse of what the public and the critics wanted of him, no doubt instinctively realized that his brief scene was paradoxically too strong, both artistically and politically, to be accepted without some form of mitigation into the popular culture. That mitigation came from Herrmann's music, or, more precisely, from the dialectical interaction between the musical and visual (both the individual shots and their montage) texts. Interestingly, just as Hitchcock's visuals sans music would probably have attracted a smaller audience—or, for that matter, just as the shots of the snakes eating their prey in a natural sonic environment would have turned off a larger number of viewers—Herrmann's extremely dissonant music without Hitchcock's visuals would not be apt to find its way into too many concert halls. By forming an interactive whole in which the spectator can become totally immersed, the separate components become more palatable. Even though the *Time* critic was apparently nauseated by *Psycho's* shower scene, one must consider his realistic "reading" of the action as a

paradoxically comforting rationalization of the bold visual and musical styles, rendered at least partially “invisible” through their merger.

One can look at the affect generated by the musical–visual–narrative interaction within the same perspective. On the most general level, it can be said that music provides a foundation in affect for narrative cinema’s visual images, with plot, situation, and character prompting the particular directions this affective foundation takes. But this foundation is nowhere nearly as specific as one might suspect. One need only consider the title theme by Erich Wolfgang Korngold for Sam Wood’s 1945 *Kings Row*. Korngold, misled by the film’s title, composed some gloriously scintillating music filled with fanfare-like flourishes à la his well-known scores for films such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Sea Hawk* (see chapter 5). But King’s Row turned out to be the name of a fictional town wherein a kind of 1940s *Peyton Place* unfurls, complete with a sadistic doctor and the possibility of some father–daughter incest. Did Korngold have to rewrite his overture? No. Does the music work for the film anyway? Absolutely. Bernard Herrmann insisted throughout his career that film music needed to be tailored to the specific needs of the particular film. Yet an entire cue from *Psycho* (“The Swamp”) was lifted almost note for note from the “Interlude” of a nonfilm-music composition (almost never performed!) Herrmann had composed nearly twenty-five years before *Psycho*, a *Sinfonietta* (1936) which, like the *Psycho* score, is for strings only. That Interlude, in fact, contains a three-note motif associated with Norman Bates’s “madness” heard throughout the film. Parts of the *Psycho* score are taken from other of the *Sinfonietta*’s five movements as well.²⁸ My colleague William Everson has written me that Korngold’s “*Sea Hawk*” score was used constantly in Warner Brothers shorts—including a sports reel, *Head Over Heels*, about ski jumping, and *Some of the Best*, a condensation of the 1926 *Don Juan*, which was set in a totally different locale and period. The music worked perfectly in each case—and other similar ones.”²⁹

As Susanne K. Langer has noted,

what music can actually reflect is only the morphology of feeling; and it is quite plausible that some sad and some happy conditions may have a very similar morphology. That insight has led some philosophical musicologists to suppose that music conveys *general forms of feeling*, related to specific ones as algebraic expressions are related to arithmetic.³⁰

In other words,

music is not self-expression, but *formulation and representation* of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions—a “logical picture” of sentient, responsive life, a source of insight, not a plea for sympathy. Feelings revealed in music are essentially not “the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an in-

dividual,” inviting us to put ourselves in that individual’s place, but are presented directly to our understanding, that we may grasp, realize, comprehend these feelings, without pretending to have them or imputing them to anyone else.³¹

This type of perspective has led some theorists to posit, rather farfetchedly, that music “is an iconic sign of psychological process. It ‘articulates’ or ‘elucidates’ the mental life of man, and it does so by presenting auditory equivalents of some structural or kinetic aspects of that life.”³²

It is, then, the merging of the cinematic object–event and the musical score into the surface narrative that transforms the morphological affect of music into specific emotions and allows us to “have them” while also imputing them to someone and/or something else, namely the cinematic character and/or situation. As Langer also notes, “music at its highest, though clearly a symbolic form, is an unconsummated symbol.”³³ In this sense, most music can also be considered to be unconsummated affect, and as such it is ripe as an art form for the consummation provided by the representational nature of the moving picture and/or of the specific, narrative situation. Whereas the cinema’s visuals, whether stressed as stills or presented in relational contexts developed by montage, can likewise have the quality of unconsummated symbols when presented outside of a narrative context, their representational qualities provide at least the illusory quality of being consummated in history—in physical space and chronological time—that music does not have. Because it is unseen, nonrepresentational, music aligns itself more naturally with the visceral, even when it takes on many of the forms and structures of classical music. It is not surprising, then, that film-music composers have generally exploited to the hilt the affective potential of music. The strong, affective profile of film music in particular has aroused violent reactions from modern Western rationalists. Italian psychologist Roberto Assagioli, who comes across like an inquisitor seeking out every possible manifestation of witchcraft, actually singles out film music as one of the more dangerous forms of music as a possible “cause of disease”:

Often such accompanying music is sensual in character or overtly emotional and its effect upon the listener-spectator is enervating. Indeed, often through such music feelings of oppression and terror, created by film scenes, are reinforced so that their exciting effect is thereby greatly increased.³⁴

Earlier in this chapter I referred to the cinema’s need to “narrativize” its situations, even those of apparently nonnarrative documentaries, with music, which accomplishes this task by providing a dose of unconsummated affect to important situations. The doom-and-gloom music accompanying the snake making its kill turns the cinematic image–event into what might be referred to, then, as an “affect image–event.”³⁵ (Other elements of the filmmaking pro-

cess contribute to this as well: the makers of *The Living Desert*, for instance, were discovered to have staged certain scenes in order to give this “documentary” greater narrative punch.) Music, in helping transform the cinematic image–event into an affect image–event, skews our reading of the image–event from an observation of the life–death cycles inherent in the natural order towards a participation in a dramatic narrative in which the kill becomes the climactic, catharsis-inducing event. The object–event thereby rises or sinks, according to one’s point of view, to the level of cultural myth (one writer on the subject uses the term “bourgeois myth”³⁶), the very domain of which is the consummated symbol: whereas the technology of the cinema and the prejudice of the iconic/representational appear to guarantee the object–event’s historicity, the music dehistoricizes the image–event by skewing it towards a culturally determined narrative that, in another sleight of hand in which music aids and abets, imposes its particular paradigms as universal. At the very least, the heavy musical backing ties our emotional reaction to the snake in with Judeo-Christian mythology; on a broader level, the villainizing of the snake via the doom-and-gloom music reflects a prejudice inherent in patriarchal, Western civilization against the natural order. This give and take between the film’s apparent historicity, which feeds our desire to believe in the imaged reality we are observing, and the musical (and extramusical) enhancing of a culturally determined “narrative,” which feeds our desire to escape from the historical, is at the very base of bourgeois myth.

The situation in *Psycho* is somewhat reversed, but with the same end results. Ostensibly a work of fiction based on another work of fiction in another medium—Robert Bloch’s novel *Psycho*—the film and the novel have in their main character, Norman Bates, a figure inspired by a murderer, grave robber, and transvestite from Wisconsin named Ed Gein.³⁷ Hitchcock’s visual structuring of *Psycho* affords the possibility of experiencing the narrative other than as a horror story depicting a ghoulish killer on the loose who can be captured and whose behavior can be rationalized away via pseudo-Freud. The similarity of appearance between Norman Bates and Marion’s boyfriend, Sam Loomis (John Gavin), the use of money as the film’s generating image, the character of the “ugly American” who wants to “buy” happiness for his “little girl,” the menacing state trooper: all of this and much more invite the viewer/listener to become aware of paradigms that put Norman Bates’s murderous rage towards women squarely in the context of both the American mythos and the American ethos. Similarly, Herrmann’s music, as we will see in chapter 6, offers the listener very little of the tonal grounding and very few of the resolutions that help rationalize Western tonality—the Sinfonietta that inspired the *Psycho* score, in fact, is decidedly nontonal if not atonal. But when the music and the visuals merge into the narrative situation, *Psycho* becomes on the surface more of a horror film which, in playing on our fears of the irrational, fuels the patriarchal mythology of a would-be rationalized society. It is

interesting, furthermore, to note that similarly climactic sequences in Hitchcock's previous film, *North by Northwest* (1959), and in his later *Torn Curtain* (1966), lack music. But Roger Thornhill's escape from the evildoers in the crop duster in *North by Northwest* supports the mythology of the male hero against the forces of the irrational, whereas the murder of the secret police agent Gromek in *Torn Curtain* is likewise mytho-politically "correct" (in his score for *Torn Curtain*, rejected by Hitchcock, Bernard Herrmann had written music for this sequence). On the other hand, the 1958 *Vertigo*, with its subtextual portrayal of a ferocious misogyny, is all but drowned in Bernard Herrmann's nonetheless stunning score.

Fortunately, both Hitchcock's and Herrmann's styles are so strong in their own right that they encourage a deconstructive reading of the film, as we shall see shortly. Even the most casual, story-oriented viewer is not apt to walk away from *Psycho* without some sense of subtexts that subvert the bourgeois myth of its surface structures. A movie, of course, does not have to be signed by Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann to have at least a few moments where the visual and musical languages do not wholly merge into the surface narrative. In Robert Wise's 1947 *Born to Kill*, for instance, there is a wonderful piece of footage, lasting around a minute and fifteen seconds, where dialogue vanishes from an otherwise rather talky film and allows Paul Sawtell's music to maintain its affect on more of an unconsummated level. The sequence to which I am referring is set up by a deliciously perverse scene in which a divorcée (Claire Trevor) and a brutish but megalomaniacal murderer (Lawrence Tierney), who are brother- and sister-in-law in the narrative, work towards a passionate kiss by recalling the scene in Tierney's last work as a murderer: "The blood on her hair," reminisces Trevor. "Blood all over the place, and you didn't yell," replies Tierney. "No, I didn't," confirms Trevor. "Helen!" says Tierney, ecstatically. They embrace as the score swells on the music track. Shortly after this ghoulish moment, Trevor is shown leaving the room of her foster sister (Tierney's wife). She pauses as the camera catches her in a medium shot, during which her face registers various emotions, none of them apparently positive but none of them wholly readable either. On the music track, Sawtell's score starts off with quiet, sparsely orchestrated, minor-mode figures that include a disturbing, three-note motif in the harp and vibraphone. Like Trevor's facial expressions, the music suggests a negative orientation without being fully readable. Is Trevor upset that she has betrayed her foster sister? Is she frightened or turned on by the murderous rage beneath Tierney's tough exterior? ("You're strength, excitement, and depravity," Trevor tells Tierney shortly before the kiss. "There's a kind of corruptness inside of you, Sam.") Does she regret having let Tierney slip through her fingers? Later on in the sequence, Trevor gets up and walks to a wedding photograph showing her with Tierney and her foster sister. The music here becomes more dramatic, with an intense, minor-mode theme in the midrange,

unison strings receiving a full orchestral backing. But even as the camera isolates Tierney and Trevor, and then just Tierney, in the photo, the specifics of the drama, heavy as it is, never become clear. It is as if director Wise had taken the morphology of the character's emotions and shown it directly in two simultaneously presented variations, one visual (including Trevor's gestures and facial expressions), one musical, without ever having offered a theme. The music hangs about Trevor like an accompanying aura that makes diegetic/nondiegetic distinctions meaningless, while Trevor's solo, wordless, visual presence does nothing to lead the score towards consummation. The musical and visual texts never merge, allowing ambiguity and ambivalence to reign. And so, one begins to understand in listening to and viewing a piece of film such as this that the reading of the cinema's visuals as consummated has more to do with their engulfment in the prejudice of the iconic than with any inherent qualities they might have.

But the general tendency of the film/music interaction is to enfold the morphological qualities of its various arts into a string of consummated symbols meant to be read in a single way. And so, instead of the term *narrativize* to describe what music tends to do to the cinematic object-event, the term *mythify* seems at this point more appropriate. This is not to say that the only function film music has beyond the aesthetic anchor it provides is to mythify the visual/narrative amalgam. Nor does this imply that music is the only contributor to the mythification of the visual/narrative amalgam. But music, of all the many separate components that make up any given commercial film, plays one of the strongest roles in what has been and continues to be a worldwide tendency in commercial cinema to encode the visual/narrative amalgam with the mythologies, both political and extrapolitical, embedded in a particular culture. One of the earliest political critiques of film music can be found in *Composing for the Films*, written in 1947 by Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno.³⁸ According to Eisler and Adorno, standard film-music practices join with other elements of the cinematic art to hide the mechanistic, mediated nature of the medium and its remoteness. "Music aids and abets the standard film's illusion of reality, of immediate life—the illusion that we are not mechanized."³⁹ Eisler's nonstop music for Alain Resnais's 1955 *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) offers a perfect example of a nonnarrativizing, nonmythifying film score. While the tragedy of the German concentration camps, both past and present, depicted in Resnais's thirty-minute documentary goes infinitely beyond anything imagined in the documentary on snakes referred to earlier, Eisler's score does not even attempt to join with the visuals and the voice-over narration to create a closed off universe of consummated affect. Instead, the composer wrote a score of chamber-like proportions—a solo flute and clarinet back the post-title sequence, for instance—that moves parallel to the filmic and verbal texts. Occasionally dramatic, occasionally sad, once or

twice ironic (as in a brief reworking of “Deutschland über Alles” or the backing of shots of the German war machine with only a pizzicato violin and a snare drum), Eisler’s often rather pastorate music communicates on a musical level what *Nuit et brouillard* often communicates in its visuals—in particular in the color sequences showing a grass-surrounded Auschwitz as it was in 1955—and Jean Cayrol’s voice-over narration: the brutal irony of the indifferent ordinariness that can mask unspeakable horrors.⁴⁰

Going beyond Eisler and Adorno, we can see that the nondiegetic musical score (and quite often the diegetic music as well), by helping transform the object–event into an affect–object–event, draws our attention away from the physical properties of the cinematic signifiers and, paradoxically, makes us believe in the reality of the signifieds, whence the *Time* magazine reviewer’s literalization of *Psycho*’s shower scene. But these signifieds are also dehistoricized, which transforms the cinematic sign into a second-degree signifier evoking a mythic signified, very much in the manner suggested by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*:⁴¹

	1. Signifier	↓	2. Signified	
language	3. Sign			
	I. SIGNIFIER	↓	II. SIGNIFIED	
MYTH	III. SIGN (MYTH)			

In our snake documentary, the combinations of light, dark, colors, forms, and so forth that allow the cinematic picture to iconically, representationally suggest a serpent could lead the viewer to the “language” (first-degree) signified, encoded with empirical data concerning snakes. With the help of the music, though, the cinematic sign immediately shifts to the level of a mythic signifier, the signified for which, as we have seen, relates to the symbolic position of snakes within the Judeo-Christian culture and, more broadly, to our fear of the natural order. The doom-and-gloom affect created by the music helps transform the snakes’ killings into irrational murders, the fear of which is very much built into our mistrust of the natural order (it also helps that, for two of the kills shown in the documentary, the snakes leave their dead prey without eating it). In *Psycho*, the interacting forms, shades of dark and light, and so on that make up the iconic signifier leading us to the signified of a nude woman being knifed to death in a shower create a cinematic sign that music likewise helps attain the level of a mythic signifier, which in turn leads us to a mythic signified relating to fears of the irrational. Paradoxically, the music joins with other manipulations to produce an irrational response in the viewer/listener; having experienced this irrational response and having

cathartically purged it, the viewer can then return to the world of the rational, although perhaps not quite as willing to take a shower for a while, particularly if that viewer is a woman.

In summary, then, it can be seen that nondiegetic film music functions on at least three levels: a) as a wallpaper soporific to allay fears of darkness and silence; in the silent era, it also helped mask the sound of the projector; b) as an aesthetic counterbalance to the iconic/representational nature of the cinematic signs which, although they do not require music to validate the language they create as artistic, get that help anyway; c) as a cogenerator of narrative affect that skews the viewer/listener towards a culturally determined reading of the characters and situations. Whereas this type of cultural myth can be perceived, because of its manipulative potential, as negative à la Eisler/Adorno and Barthes, the way in which certain film scores at least, from Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *The Sea Hawk* (see chapter 5) to Herrmann's *Psycho* (see also chapter 6) and beyond, lay bare the *broader* structures—*aesthetic, mythic, or both*—of a given narrative has very positive implications. As I have already suggested, for instance, Hitchcock's visuals and Herrmann's music, though not entirely avoiding merger within the surface narrative of *Psycho*, are so strong in their own right that they acquire a certain amount of independence that will, at the very least, raise the aesthetic consciousness of many viewers. Indeed, the degree to which Hitchcock's and Herrmann's respective arts do not merge within the surface narrative is the degree to which their *dialectical*, nonmerged interaction can actually enhance the aesthetic impact of each separate art while also encouraging a filmic reading that escapes the traps set by cultural or bourgeois myth.

In certain ways, the broader reading of *Psycho* encouraged by the dialectical visual–musical interaction recalls the concept of “tragic myth” set forth by none other than German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in his 1872 *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music), a work that remains quite convincing, in spite of or perhaps because of some youthful exuberance (and uncontaminated insights), and in spite of the subsequent, partial disclaimer. From the outset of his discussion, Nietzsche aligns music with the Dionysian, also invoking Schopenhauer to support his theory that

music incites to the *symbolic intuition* of Dionysian universality, and music allows the symbolic image to emerge *in its highest significance*. From these facts . . . I infer the capacity of music to give birth to *myth* (the most significant example), and particularly the *tragic myth*: the myth which expresses Dionysian knowledge in symbols.⁴²

Using *Psycho* as an example, we can see that if Hitchcock's carefully elaborated montage works in an *Apollonian* (imagistic, according to Nietzsche)

way against Meyerhold's perception of the cinematic medium as "mechanistic," music in its turn not only provides a further antidote to this mechanistic side of the cinema, it helps the drama unfold "itself before us with such inwardly illuminated distinctness in all its movements and figures . . . [that it] attains as a whole an effect that transcends *all Apollonian effects*."⁴³

That this effect posited by Nietzsche is Dionysian myth is singularly appropriate to *Psycho*. With the exploits of an American criminal who indulged in what might best be called "postmodern" (i.e. with no cultural payback) Dionysian ritual as its springboard, *Psycho* concludes as an all but perfect Dionysian tragedy. For if Hitchcock gives the smug psychiatrist (Simon Oakland) a chance to reduce all of the film's eruptions of the irrational to a wholly unconvincing spew of causally (via pseudo-Freud) formulated rationality in a pseudo-dénouement, he promptly undoes this by turning the film back over to a) an image of androgynous dissonance, with the male Norman Bates "thinking" via a voice-over with his mother's voice, a voice, by the way, that was not even that of actor Anthony Perkins; b) a two- or three-frame visual "dissonance" double exposing mother Bates's mummified head with Norman's; c) a grim shot of Marion's car being dredged up from the swamp; d) Bernard Herrmann's music, which reprises the three-note "madness" motif referred to earlier and then concludes on a whoppingly dissonant, bitonal chord that totally denies to the listener the comfort of the harmonic resolution that is one of the most rationalized (and hierarchalized) elements of the Western, tonal system (see also chapter 6). As Nietzsche has put it,

it is precisely the tragic myth that has to convince us that even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game that the will in the eternal amplitude of its pleasure plays with itself. But this primordial phenomenon of Dionysian art is difficult to grasp, and there is only one direct way to make it intelligible and grasp it immediately: through the wonderful significance of *musical dissonance*. Quite generally, only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. The joy aroused by the tragic myth has the same origin as the joyous sensation of dissonance in music. The Dionysian, with its primordial joy experienced even in pain, is the common source of music and tragic myth.⁴⁴

It must be said, of course, that Hitchcock's visual dissonances have every bit the same impact in *Psycho* as Herrmann's musical ones.

Nietzsche also sees (and foresees) the negative potential in all this: "It is the fate of every myth to creep by degrees into the narrow limits of some alleged historical reality, and to be treated by some later generation as a unique fact with historical claims." "Optimistic dialectic"—which continues to be manifested in the proclivities of Western art to mimetically reproduce the causality, physical space, and chronological time held by scientific empiri-

cism as the only “reality”—“drives *music* out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms.”⁴⁵ In defining a type of music that falls within this category, Nietzsche might as well be describing a bad film score:

In this New Dithyramb, music is outrageously manipulated so as to be the imitative counterfeit of a phenomenon, for instance, of a battle or a storm at sea; and thus, of course, it has been utterly robbed of its mythopoeic power. For if it seeks to arouse pleasure only by impelling us to seek external analogies between a vital or natural process and certain rhythmical figures and characteristic sounds of music; if our understanding is to content itself with the perception of these analogies; we are reduced to a frame of mind which makes impossible any reception of the mythical.⁴⁶

One does not need to accept the spiritual implications of Nietzschean aesthetics to appreciate how a film/music amalgam with overtones of Dionysian tragedy—and I would contend that most of Hitchcock’s films, particularly those scored by Bernard Herrmann, fit Nietzsche’s definition—could offer in its own way an alternative to the patriarchal, political system that attempts to impose its codes on those very films. For if, on one level, the cultural mythification via the merger of the music and visuals into the narrative can blind and deafen the viewer/listener to the existence of the filmic images as such within history while creating a pseudohistory with which the viewer/listener is encouraged to identify, the film/music interaction can, if it produces the effect of Nietzschean tragedy, whether labeled as Dionysian or not, aesthetically create the presence of a broader, noncultural mythology that roundly negates the entire patriarchal belief in a scientific empiricism that holds physical space, chronological/linear time, and history/causality as absolute truths. At the other end of the scale, the nonmerger of film and score in a work such as the Resnais/Eisler *Nuit et brouillard*, a documentary that consistently resists narrativization, can liberate the viewer/listener from the pseudohistory of cultural myth in a way that allows history per se to emerge. That history as it applies to *Nuit et brouillard* has perhaps best been defined by Jean-Luc Godard: “Making a film today about the concentration camps is dishonest. It should have been made in 1943. The only person to have succeeded in making such a film recently is Alain Resnais, because he didn’t make his film on the camps themselves, but on the memory of them.”⁴⁷

Using the cine-musical interactions of *Psycho* to summarize the points made above and in my “Introduction,” I would suggest, then, the following:

1. In the area of cultural myth, *Psycho* operates on at least three levels. First of all, it reinforces the male rage towards women characteristic of patriarchal culture by offering images of that rage and by tying them in to Oedipus via Freud, which rather insidiously gives them a kind of universal validation. The rhythmic and harmonic violence of many of the musical “images” works on a parallel level. Interestingly, the visual/musical interactions in both *Psycho*

and the snake documentary fortify a similar paradigm of patriarchal culture. As one author has noted, "Science comes to a worldview in which nature and women, whose destinies have been linked from the beginning of history, are subject to the manipulation and use of the scientific and technological rationality of the new bourgeois man."⁴⁸ Secondly, it offers a narrative that sets a trap within which the woman must inevitably be punished, superficially because she has broken the law by stealing money but more deeply because she has tried to wrest control away from the patriarchy by usurping its prerogative authority over money. To this area, Herrmann's score makes its contribution in particular by surrounding the Janet Leigh character with the music's rhythmic and harmonic violence from the moment she begins her escape with the money. Thirdly, *Psycho* wholly reinforces the patriarchal belief that violence and death can be rationalized. By projecting his fear of death onto the woman, the male can then create the illusion of controlling death by controlling the woman, by killing her, and/or by psychoanalyzing her murderers. It will be remembered that, when *Psycho* was first released, nobody was allowed in the theaters after the film had begun, a gimmick that strongly oriented viewers to rationalize the film's violence by solving its manipulatively hidden mystery. To this, the music contributes by emotionalizing the murder scenes to such an extent that it creates an even stronger desire in the viewer/listener to rationalize what he/she sees (as did *Time* magazine's critic), emotion itself being perceived by patriarchal culture as a manifestation of the irrational. It also contributes by *not* accompanying the John Gavin character, whose macho, money-generated pride has started Marion Crane off on her ill-fated journey to begin with, or the psychiatrist character with the same horror music. To do so would have tied Norman Bates, Sam Loomis (Gavin), and the psychiatrist in with the cultural paradigm that provides the impetus for the type of violence we witness in *Psycho*. It would also have shifted *Psycho*'s plot structure toward the mythic, à la Lotman, by structurally establishing a sense of identity between three linearly differentiated characters. The casting of Anthony Perkins, an all-American boy in most of his earlier films, as Norman Bates, however, *does* evoke the cultural paradigm, albeit intertextually.

2. On the broader mythic level, the level suggested by Nietzsche, *Psycho* in many of its facets subverts all efforts toward the rationalization of violence and death. Even in the area of narrative, Hitchcock and screenwriter Joseph Stefano avoid the kinds of causal rationalizations one finds in the novel by Robert Bloch, who, for instance, makes Norman Bates an alcoholic mesomorph. Hitchcock's montage in such places as the shower scene likewise works against the rationalization of time and space provided by continuity editing, while Herrmann's music, as we shall see in chapter 6, subverts some of the rationalization inherent in the active expectation created by tonality. The manifestations of the "irrational" *as such*, with all its cyclisms, repetitions, and ambiguities are, I feel, at the core of what Nietzsche means by

“Dionysian tragedy.” The degree to which manifestations of the irrational resist and/or subvert efforts to rationalize them is the degree to which the work of art in which this occurs challenges the very mythos of patriarchal culture. Certainly, as I have suggested above, the end of *Psycho*, with its audio/visual dissonance, its double exposure of Norman’s face with Ma Bates’s mummified head, and its dredging up of Marion Crane’s car as the film’s final image, accomplishes precisely this kind of subversion, particularly since it follows directly after the psychiatrist’s self-satisfied spiel. Meanwhile, on the music track, Herrmann gives the last word to madness by offering a dramatic, final appearance of the motif associated with Norman’s derangement. The bitonal chord that follows the madness motif and closes the film totally fortifies the irrational, first of all by refusing to provide the sense of resolution that the score’s tonal center seems to demand. One thinks here of the way in which Shostakovich’s Fourteenth Symphony (1969), a suite of eleven songs in which a soprano and bass, over a string orchestra and percussion, offer various meditations on death, closes on a jarringly dissonant chord which, as it repeats, accelerates and crescendos to close the symphony, steadfastly refuses to let the listener go. Herrmann’s final chord, furthermore, leaves the musical score in an open-ended state that invites a return to the beginning of *Psycho* and its music. Whereas the progression from the final, bitonal chord back to the opening “Hitchcock chord” (see chapter 6) does not fall wholly within the confines of normal (musical) syntax, it certainly does not come close to falling outside the domain of “active expectation.” The same could be said, for that matter, of the final (sans punctuation) and opening (sans capital letter) words of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Thus has Herrmann’s music made a major contribution to the subverting of our reading of *Psycho* as the closed, “hermeneutic tale”⁴⁹ encouraged by the gimmick of keeping viewer/listeners from entering the theater once the film had begun. Further, *Psycho*’s final image of Marion Crane’s body being dredged up out of quicksand inside a car with a license plate bearing Norman Bates’s first and last initial likewise invites the viewer/listener not to walk home satisfied at the unraveling of a horror-story mystery but rather to reparticipate in a ritual of the irrational. The matrix for that ritual becomes the film itself, which can be reprojected at will, particularly since the advent of the video generation. As a structure surrounding death, Marion’s car, “signed” by Hitchcock’s paradigmatic alter ego, Norman Bates, becomes, like Mallarmé’s tomb surrounding the deceased Théophile Gautier, the very emblem of the work of art that, in the case of *Psycho*, is the film. In this sense, the image of Marion’s car at the end of *Psycho* and the image of the film inside the statuette at the end of *North by Northwest* (1959) are paradigmatically identical.

3. Even though *Psycho* and its score work in many areas within the manipulative domain of cultural myth, the presence of this domain is, I feel, necessary in order to set up the viewer/listener’s perception of the broader mythic

elements. Once again we are dealing, aesthetically speaking, with establishing a norm and departing from that norm, even if *Psycho*, like Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony or Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, ultimately leaves us dangling outside that norm. Since the primary goal of this book is to examine what film music does best, rather than the multitude of sins committed in its name, the following chapters will be mainly concerned with three types of film scores: a) those that interact with their films to produce subtexts rich in the broader mythic implications (see in particular chapters 5 and 6); b) those appearing in films that break down at least some of the traditional interactions between music and film and elevate music to at least equal stature with the rest of the film-making process (see in particular the Eisenstein/Prokofiev section of chapter 5 and all of chapter 7); c) those appearing in certain recent films that integrate music into a postmodern, imagistic gestalt to produce a strange kind of inversion that might be called "Apollonian tragedy" (see chapter 8). Before arriving at this point, however, I offer, in the ensuing three chapters, a consideration of the musical properties of the film score and its relation to so-called classical music, the historical evolution of film music, and the nature and significance of diegetic or source music in the cinema.