

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Hearing Music in Dreams: Towards the Semiotic Role of Music in Nolan's Inception

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Introduction

The music in Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (2010) has often been described as powerful and meaning-making for the interpretation of the film. In particular, its function for the understanding of the various levels of dream and reality and the transition between these levels has been underlined in cinematic reviews and theoretical approaches to this film (see Eisenberg 2011; Schmid 2012). Interestingly, and besides all scientific discussion, Nolan has made some statements on the film's music which we want to take into consideration in this essay and for which we provide the following quotation as a starting point: 'Before I'd finished the script I warned Hans [Zimmer] about the demands *Inception* would put on its score – the music as a guide for the audience, pulling them through a potentially confusing tale by orienting them emotionally, geographically, temporally' (Nolan quoted in Zimmer 2010).

We want to particularly focus on the different functions Nolan describes in this comment as requirements for the film music composed by Hans Zimmer. In general, film music has often been defined as functional music, i.e., music which is produced or reproduced for certain ends in the reception of the film (see Kloppenburg 2012: 141). These functions are then defined in terms of their use for narrative purposes (see Wingstedt *et al.* 2010) and listed in classification schemes or according to their specific characteristics (see Gorbman 1987; Carroll 1988; Smith 1999, 2009; Cohen 2001; Wingstedt 2005). In these contexts, it becomes evident that music is mostly seen as a single resource, often separated from other patterns of the auditory level and that a scientific discussion should particularly focus on questions of the music's relation to the visual level, for example.

In our approach, therefore, we want to combine the perspective of the detailed description of the music's characteristics with the analysis of how meaning in general is constructed by the various semiotic resources in Nolan's film. We still want to ask which function the music plays in various scenes, but we will thereby focus on the

intersemiosis, i.e., the concrete interplay of the modalities in the filmic text (see Wildfeuer 2014). We take as our basis a multimodal and semiotic perspective of analysing how the recipient constructs meaning out of the combinations of various resources such as sound, images, gesture, camera movement, etc. Our analysis will be examined with the help of a recently developed tool for the linguistic and formal analysis of filmic text, the *logic of film discourse interpretation*, which helps to outline how filmic meaning can be interpreted on the basis of the recipient's inference processes in terms of abduction and active semiosis (see Peirce 1979).¹

We think that the semiotic role of the music for inferring the film's meaning can be described as different tasks which are, on the one hand, already claimed in the quotation by Nolan above and, on the other, are mentioned again in Zimmer's response to this quotation and its accompanying requirements in several interviews and comments on the music (see Itzkoff 2010; Martens 2010). We summarise these tasks as follows: Firstly, Zimmer describes his music as a leading path through the complicated narrative structure of various dream levels. Therefore, he focuses particularly on the Édith Piaf song 'Non, je ne regrette rien', which is used both as a diegetic source and an important key element in the storyline as well as non-diegetically in the film's score:² 'The musical cue, Mr. Zimmer said, "was our big signpost" in the film of its characters' moving from one level of dreaming (or reality) into another. "It was like a drawing of a huge finger", he said, "saying, OK, different time" (quoted in Itzkoff 2010).

According to the requirements given by Nolan, we call this task of the music and particularly the use of the song, the *temporal and geographical, or spatial, orientation* for the recipient during his/her interpretation process. In our following analysis, we will therefore examine how this function can be manifested within the intersemiotic interplay of the various resources and how it can be worked out as a significant textual cue (see Bordwell 1985, 1989) that helps to guide the recipient through the narrative. We will ask whether the music fulfils this function and clarifies the meaning of certain sequences of the film in terms of their discursive level of the storyline, i.e., the question whether they are representing a dreaming or wakening state.

Secondly, Zimmer describes his music as elucidating the emotional states of characters, especially that of the main protagonist, Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio). He identifies the emotional core of the film as 'romance', referring to the film's second plotline (or B-plot), which shows the relationship between Cobb and his wife Mal, who apparently committed suicide: 'What I was writing was nostalgia and sadness. This character carries this sadness all the time that he cannot express. He's been telling us about it all along, but no one knows how to listen. I think the job that Johnny and I had to do was write *the heart* of this thing' (Martens 2010; emphasis in original).³ We describe this function of the music as the *emotional orientation* for the recipient and we will ask for its concrete potential of transmitting emotional states of the protagonists or highlighting the emotional significance of the narrative events we can infer from the film. Our examination will firstly be based on the analysis of the intersemiotic meaning construction and a particular view on the music in this interplay. In a second step, we will then combine this analysis with an interpretive perspective on the music in

particular, which will help us to gain more information about its involvement with the mediation of emotions. Our aim here is to question the music's ability to influence the cognitive processes of understanding Nolan's film in general and, more specifically, the interpretation of the protagonist's mental states.

Our examination will combine both bottom-up as well as top-down approaches to the analysis of the music in *Inception* in order to provide a comprehensive account for the understanding of how music works as a guiding path through the film, orienting the audience spatio-temporally as well as emotionally. In the following, we will therefore give a few more comments on our theoretical background, the tools we apply for our analysis, and the use of the Piaf song in this film (see section two). In section three, we will then analyse in detail two different scenes from the film with regard to their meaning-making strategies and the patterns of music that have been used. Section four, finally, will especially be concerned with the emotional dimension attributed to the song's central motive. This will go beyond the textual analysis in section three and will refer to what David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson call 'implicit meaning' (2008: 61), the proper object of interpretation.

Theoretical Background

The ability to perform a coherent story depends upon the viewer's understanding of crossmodal structural congruence that affects our perceptual groupings in visual and auditory domains in short-term memory. That is, film music works through the viewer's cognitive processing of perceived correspondences between musical and visual information. (Smith 2009: 192)

For the analysis of how the viewer operates the above-mentioned cognitive processing of a film, we work with the framework that has been developed for the systematic examination of film interpretation from a linguistic perspective (see Wildfeuer 2014). On the basis of recent advances in discourse semantics and text linguistics, this framework aims at a detailed description of the textual qualities of coherence and structure in film and how they guide the recipient's meaning-making process during reception. The framework allows a redrawing of the recipient's active process of relational meaning-making and inferring the film's propositional content in terms of assumptions and hypotheses, which the recipient makes according to concrete cues within the text. The analysis is essentially defeasible and hypothetical and goes back to the notion of abduction introduced by Peirce as a basic logical form that seeks for a possible cause of an assumption that still remains questionable (see Peirce 1979). However, because of world and context knowledge and the knowledge about how films are constructed, it is in most cases possible to ask for the discourse's plausibility, its property of making sense. This then bridges a first gap between the still-missing description of how technical devices of the filmic text, which can be determined very easily, and their interpretation, which cannot be entirely controlled, interact.

The framework operates on two levels of filmic comprehension that have also been described for a theory of multimodal comprehension by Hans-Jürgen Bucher

(2011), for example. The first level of identification and arrangement of the meaning-making entities helps to construct so-called logical forms of the discourse in order to describe the semantic content of the modalities' intersemiosis. These logical forms display the events of the film's diegesis in terms of discourse representation structures. The second level of coherence and structure combines the logical forms into narrative discourse structures by interpreting discourse relations between the events. For the following analysis, we mainly focus on the first level of examination, the description of the intersemiotic interplay and its meaning construction.⁴ According to Smith (1999: 159–60), a specific view of the music then allows a reconstruction of how it 'encourages spectators to make inferences about a film's events, characters, and setting to facilitate the ongoing comprehension of the narrative'. Consequently, in the following, we will particularly consider the music in *Inception* with regard to its respective meaning-making facilities and in terms of its contribution to the recipient's inference process.

For this, we will focus on the specific use of a key musical element in the film, which we have already mentioned above. The song 'Non, je ne regrette rien' is, on the one hand, taken as a diegetic song within the storyline that lets the protagonists know that they will soon wake up from a dream level. It is both explicitly shown as a direct cue for waking up the protagonists (as for example in one of the first scenes in which the transition between various dream levels is shown and explained (see figure 1)), as well as discussed by the characters as a specifically chosen element to be recognised by them during their dreaming (00:51:01).⁵



Figure 1: Shots from the first scene in *Inception* (2010) in which Édith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien' is used for waking up the dreaming characters.

On the other hand, parts of this song have been transferred by Zimmer into a modified version which is used both as a diegetic and non-diegetic element in the film. This modification has been recognised by spectators who discuss the creative use as a 'slowed down version' of the chanson intensively in online forums like YouTube.⁶ Furthermore, the modification has been analysed from a musicological perspective and described as an abstract and extremely slow version (Schmid 2012: 68; see figure 2, opposite). Hans Zimmer himself finally comments on these discoveries as 'not only intentional but also the one element of an enigmatic film that wasn't supposed to be a secret' and sets right that it is a musical construction from a single manipulated beat (see Itzkoff 2010).⁷

In our analysis, we focus particularly on the use of this song both as a diegetic as well as a non-diegetic source. Both versions clearly work as textual cues for the film, which not only influence the understanding process of the protagonists within the



Figure 2: Musical analysis of the modified version of 'Non, je ne regrette rien' in *Inception*.

film, but also guide the recipient's interpretation and reception of the various levels of diegesis. We work out and illustrate this use in further detail in the analytical part in section three. Our analysis will show that various instances work differently in various sequences.

This then corresponds to the general assumption that music in film fulfils various functions and has to be interpreted according to the specific context. In particular, there is a specific focus in the already mentioned context of film music analysis on the potential of music not only to intensify, but also to influence the emotional content of a film. These functions can be realised by various musical techniques, e.g. 'Mood-technique' or 'leitmotif technique' (see Kloppenburg 2012: 202–38). In our interpretational work in section four, we will come back to these descriptions in further detail.

Analysis

In the following, we analyse two sequences from the film in order to demonstrate the use of the Piaf song as a textual cue for the recipient's inference process. We undertake this analysis by, firstly, examining the logical forms of the filmic discourse in terms of the filmic events. Within the description of these logical forms, we will take a closer look at the music and its role for the interpretation of the events and their semantic content.

As a first example, we take a short sequence from the film's beginning (starting in minute eleven), in which both elements, the original song and the modified version, are used for the first time. Two shots of this scene have already been depicted (see figure 1, opposite); a further sequence of three shots is given in figure 3, overleaf. The scene is situated in a dream level where the main protagonists are trying to get information from the Japanese businessman, Saito (Ken Watanabe). He, however, recognises the projection as a dream, which then is being dissolved by the waking up process shown in figure 2. A further character (Tai-Li Lee) on the level beyond is using a music player and headset to signal the coming end of the dream. The headset plays the song 'Non, je ne regrette rien', which can be perceived by the recipient as a diegetic source in its original version. The shot of the protagonist who is first shown sleeping is then cut to another shot of the same protagonist back at the second setting, which has already been shown before. The protagonist on this level is looking up and listening to noises and sounds in the background, and is thus in a waking state. The sounds from a brass section can be recognised as the modified version of the song or parts of the song in a very slow replay. We illustrate this transition from one level of diegesis to the other level in figure 3.

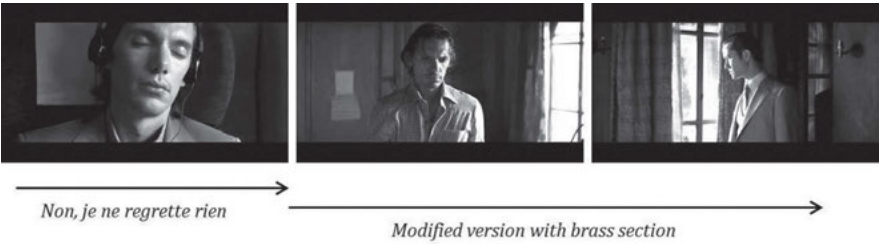


Figure 3: Transition between two levels of diegesis and change of music in *Inception*.

$e_{\pi_1} = \textit{sleep}$	$e_{\pi_2} = \textit{listen}$
$[v]$ male character, eyes closed (m)	$[v]$ male character, eyes open (p)
$[v]$ setting: train (n)	$[v]$ setting: house (q)
$[a]$ “Non, je ne regrette rien” (o)	$[a]$ slowed down version (r)
$m \vdash \textit{sleep} (e_{\pi_1})$	$p, r \vdash \textit{listen} (e_{\pi_2})$

Figure 4: Logical forms of the two shots of Nash (Lukas Haas) used in figure 3.

For this scene, we can infer the two logical forms given in figure 4, which represent the semantic content of the events given in this short part of the story and which make visible the contrast between the two levels of diegesis.

The event in the first logical form on the left enlists as a discourse referent the protagonists with closed eyes and can therefore be interpreted as the eventuality ‘sleep’, thus as an event that would normally be inferred by the recipient because of the narrative processes shown in the image (see Wildfeuer 2014: 53–9). The second logical form, in contrast, describes a completely different setting in a house with the protagonists being awake and listening to the sounds in the background. The inference process, which is marked in the last line of the boxes with the logical operator \vdash indicating a defeasible consequence relation, then leads to the interpretation of the semantic content of ‘listen’. Although the song is used as a diegetic source in the first event, it is not explicitly shown that the protagonist on this level of the diegesis actually listens to the song. The discourse referent (o) and the referent (n) in the first logical form are therefore not a decisive part of the inference process depicted in the last line of the box (as is the case for the discourse referent (m)). The eventuality ‘sleep’ is here the preferred interpretation of the semantic content of this event, because it cannot be interpreted that the protagonist is hearing the music. In the second event, in contrast, it is shown by the movements of his eyes and head that he is directly reacting to the music in the background; he is, consequently, listening to it. This then leads to the fact that (r) as the label for the discourse referent of the music is part of the inference process, which then leads to the eventuality ‘listen’. Interpreting a discourse relation between these two events as the second step of the examination with our analytical tool would then allow the inference of a typical *Contrast*-relation which, according to the framework (see Wildfeuer 2014: 59–75), can be inferred when there is semantic dissimilarity between two events. Although the film creates a temporal sequence of the two narrative proc-

esses of sleeping and listening, the meaning postulates for the inference of a simple *Narration*-relation are not fulfilled in this context. Especially, spatial coherence is not given by the two levels of diegesis that are situated at two different settings. It is the specific arrangement of the various levels that leads to the inference of a text-structuring relation such as *Contrast* in order to display these various discourse levels.

Consequently, this clear contrast cannot only be manifested by the different narrative processes that are visible in the images and that can be described on the basis of the various discourse referents listed in the logical forms, but also in terms of the two different versions of the music. Both of them are diegetically-used elements, which, in the first instance, signal the forthcoming waking up and, second, orientate the recipient in interpreting the various levels of narration. However, it is mainly the combination of both versions and their interplay with other semiotic resources that fulfil the function of contrasting the two settings and time levels and orienting the recipient both geographically as well as temporally. Nevertheless, the music operates as a textual cue for the construction of coherence between the originally divergent events.

With regard to the further unfolding of the filmic discourse structure, this is at least the case in a few other sequences in the first half of the film in which the song is used similarly. But throughout the rest of the film, especially in its second half, other parts of the soundtrack become more dominant and apparently more important for the construction of the narrative.

For our second analysis, we therefore take a scene from the end of the film, in particular from the final episode of the so-called 'kick' which is supposed to awaken the team members from various levels of dreaming that have been constructed to follow the inception idea of planting thoughts into Robert Fischer's (Cillian Murphy) subconscious. This 'kick' scene ends with the image of the transporter diving into the water after having fallen from the bridge, which is the last process of awakening the protagonists sitting in the back of the transporter. We illustrate the scene by focusing on the various shots of Ariadne (Ellen Page), the female protagonist, and her awakening (see figure 5, overleaf). Similar shots are given for the other members of the team and their awakening by the various dimensions of the 'kick'.

In contrast to the sequence we analysed before, the characters in this scene are not in the same way confronted with the specific key element used in the first half of the film. The logical forms of the events of sleeping or waking up are thus different to those we analysed before, in particular with regard to the role of the music for the inference process. We give two examples of these logical forms in figure 6, representing shot 1 and 3 in figure 5.

In both logical forms, the music influences the interpretation of the event, but is not part of the concrete inference process of inferring the eventualities, depicted again in the last line of the boxes. This is the case for all logical forms within this scene. In one of the last shots, which shows Ariadne finally waking up in the second dream level (shot 4 in figure 5), however, a very slow version of 'Non, je ne regrette rien' as well as some single parts of the slowed down version can be heard. But it's not clear whether they are diegetically used and can thus be recognised by the protagonists as signals for the awakening or whether they are further elements of the already very complex musical



Figure 5: Shots of Ariadne (Ellen Page) on various dream levels in the final ‘Kick’ scene, *Inception*.

$e_{\pi_3} = \textit{hold on}$	$e_{\pi_4} = \textit{awake}$
$[v]$ female character, eyes open (s)	$[v]$ female character, eyes open (w)
$[v]$ beam (t)	$[v]$ setting: fortress (x)
$[v]$ setting: Limbo (u)	
$[a]$ musical context (v)	$[a]$ musical context (y)
$s, t \models \textit{hold on} (e_{\pi_3})$	$w \models \textit{awake} (e_{\pi_4})$

Figure 6: Logical forms of shot 1 and 3 in figure 5.

context. Since they are combined with other non-diegetic musical elements, which seem to be more dominant here, the use of these elements is ambiguous. However, the logical form in figure 6 makes clear that they are by no means a distinctive part of the inference process and, rather, accompany the unfolding of the narrative.

Whereas the different usages of the song and its modified version in the first part of the film explicitly help to guide the recipient in his/her understanding of the various levels, the music in the second part and in particular in the final ‘kick’ sequence cannot be described similarly. It is no longer possible to work out concrete textual cues on the level of the music that still indicate the specific contrast between the dream levels and thereby orientate the recipient temporally or spatially. Instead, it is mainly the visual level of the logical forms that maintain this contrast. Inferring discourse relations

between the events we have analysed above would again lead to the interpretation of a number of *Contrast*-relations whose semantic dissimilarities now refer completely to visible differences in the character's activity (sleeping vs. awaking). The music, on the other hand, creates a coherent and dynamic sequence of these events, without making the visible contrast further explicit, as it is the case in the first scene analysed above.

Interpretations

So far, we have undertaken a bottom-up analysis of the textual qualities of the two film sequences. In the following, we will combine this approach with further top-down perspectives concerning interpretational questions raised within discussions on Nolan's film. In particular, we want to focus more on the emotional function of the instances we have analysed.

As said above, the first analysed instance of 'Non, je ne regrette rien' functions as a textual cue for the interpretation of the sequence. It indicates a transition from one level to the other both for the recipient as well as for the characters within the diegesis. However, only the slowed down version orientates the audience in the ontological realm(s) of *Inception* more specifically. Moreover, the use of the deceleration technique by Zimmer seems to be diegetically motivated. One of *Inception*'s premises about time implies that it is experienced more slowly in dreams than in waking states.⁸ This means that if someone hears a melody in a dream, it is not heard at the same pace as in the waking state. In this way, the slowed down version orientates the audience temporally and contributes to the meaning of the sequence by signalling that the characters are in a dream (and, respectively, are sleeping on the level beyond the dream).

While this is true to the fictional world of *Inception*, the converse statement is still in question: hearing a slowed down version does not necessarily mean that the characters are dreaming. Furthermore, the musical theme doesn't provide a clear indication for the pressing interpretive problem of the ontological status of the first level, i.e., the question whether it is a dream or not. Zimmer's 'huge finger' (see the discussion in section one) points to dreams, but not to reality. If we ask for an emotive function of the first instance, it is clearly not dominant. We hypothesise therefore that even if the motive in our first instance intensifies or modifies the emotional content in a direct manner, it will presumably be unacknowledged by the recipient. However, there is another dimension of emotional meaning that comes into focus when the motive is considered as a musical quotation. If we take Zimmer's suggestion that the film's emotional core is Cobb's sadness, partially aroused by his sense of guilt, a possible interpretation might be that the *chanson* echoes this core by pointing to the inner conflict of the protagonist. Piaf's song is about someone who doesn't regret what she did (or what was done to her). Putting the first instance of the song in context to the main character and referring to the contextual knowledge about the *chanson*, we draw the following assumptions. Firstly, the song can be seen as expressing the needs of the character, anticipating the resolution of his inner conflict, i.e., the wish of forgiving himself for what he feels responsible for. Secondly, it can be seen as an ironic comment in terms of the fact that a character full of regret uses a song that states that there is

no reason for being regretful. We could argue here that the use of 'Non, je ne regrette rien' is emotionally clarifying or, dependent on the particularly preferred interpretation, even evaluative.

The second analysed instance of the song does not function in the same way. As our analysis of the intersemiosis of the auditory and visual level works out, it is not indicated that the characters recognise the slowed down version as they do in the first scene we analysed. Here the motive is combined with other non-diegetic musical elements and it is therefore not clearly identifiable as a diegetic source. Nevertheless, it is recognisable as a further modified version of the song 'Non, je ne regrette rien'. Hence, with regard to its established function in the first half of the film, its use in the second instance is somehow ambiguous. As a result, it doesn't actually contribute to clarifying the question of dream or reality, since it doesn't orientate the audience, neither locally nor temporally.

Before examining the question of the second instance's emotive function, we need to consider the film's score as a whole. Notably the score does not have a motive (*leit-motif*) for the protagonist, which means that there is no specific musical sign that characterises the protagonist and his emotional stance in a stable and direct manner throughout the whole film. It is rather the main themes of the score that are linked to events or sequences of events (e.g. the breakdown of dreams), settings (in dreams) or other characters (Mal [Marion Cotillard]). On the other hand, the score is composed of rather simple melodic and rhythmic material that is varied throughout the film. One of the basic parts among others is the slowed down version, which, consequently, occurs at least partly in other musical contexts of the film (not only as the original song). One of these musical contexts underlines the scenes that display Cobb's desire to go back to those whom he had lost (his children and Mal) and what Zimmer called the 'sadness' and 'nostalgia' of the character. The flashback framed by Cobb's confession that he had manipulated Mal (01:58:12) is one example. Here, the first note of the slowed down version is played (and indeed identifiable as such) in the context of Mal's theme. That is, if Mal's theme represents the emotional stance of the character, then the slowed down version is presumably associated with this stance.⁹

According to Claudia Gorbman (1987), who contrasts themes that are motives from themes that are not, it is now possible to describe the emotional significance of the second example we analysed above. For Gorbman, a theme is simply music that occurs more than once in a filmic discourse. After its representational content is determined by and within a specific audio-visual context, this content can be re-found in other contexts. If this music 'remain[s] specifically directed and unchanged in [its] diegetic associations' (1987: 27), it is a motive. In this sense, the original song 'Non, je ne regrette rien' is certainly a motive. It is established as a sign for 'waking up soon' and it generally keeps this meaning, even if it is heard in other situations of the film. However, the diegetic associations of the slowed down version are changing according to their respective contexts. Hence, when it comes to our second example, the music is enriched with different contextually determined associations and therefore is a theme, but not a motive. Consequently, it can function as a sign for 'waking up soon' as well as a sign for the emotional core of the character.

Conclusion

In scrutinising two instances of using 'Non, je ne regrette rien' in *Inception*, we have found that they function differently due to their visual, auditory and, in particular, musical contexts. Unsurprisingly, the dominant function of the first instance is *orienting* the audience *geographically* and *temporally*, to put it in Nolan's terms. However, the second instance is much more ambiguous, since we cannot specify eventualities such as 'listen'. Considering that a recipient already knows *Inception's* narrative architecture when it comes to our second example and, moreover, considering the presence of other visual cues for grasping spatio-temporal relations in the 'kick' sequence, we have argued that the *emotional orientation* becomes the dominant function of the second instance. This shift of dominance becomes possible, since the slowed down theme of the song is heard in other, emotional significant contexts throughout the film. However, even if one is not willing to assert that the recipient will presumably infer the non-diegetic status of the slowed down version, the difference between our first and our second example still remains.

Since there is no activity of the characters that can unequivocally be identified as 'listen', the narrative status of the theme can be questioned. Reliant on the particularly preferred interpretation, it is diegetic or, as part of the musical context, non-diegetic. If it is interpreted as non-diegetic, it can fulfil only the emotional function. Yet if it is interpreted as diegetic, it can fulfil both the spatio-temporal function as well as the emotional function described above. This status of not being ascribed to the diegetic or the non-diegetic realm, the 'in between' (Kassabian 2001: 42), is neither inevitably noticed by recipients familiar with the conventions of Hollywood cinema nor disturbing the ongoing comprehension of *Inception*. On the one hand, it is a common feature of film music in the tradition of Classical Hollywood cinema to mediate between the diegetic and non-diegetic level of narration (see Gorbman 1987: 30). On the other, the conditions for the understanding of *Inception's* ongoing story are already fulfilled by other functions (as it is, for example, the case with the first occurrence of the theme analysed above). Furthermore, the theme is part of the musical context in the background, which helps in creating the mood of the 'kick' sequence. Conventionally, such background music is 'inaudible', i.e., it avoids conscious attention, at least in Hollywood's mainstream films (see, again, Gorbman 1987). Consequently, it seems more likely that this music remains unnoticed during film reception.

Zimmer thus followed Nolan's demands not only by using 'Non, je ne regrette rien' as the original song and by combining it with the slowed down version, but also by employing the latter for other musical themes. This allows him to develop a relatively high complexity of the interplay between the visual and the auditory level from a rather simple melodic and rhythmical basement. By doing this, he seems to follow another of *Inception's* premises: an idea must be simple to be effective.

- 1 According to Peirce, 'abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea' (1979: 5.171). Active semiosis, the process of interpreting signs or semiotic resources and understanding their interplay, always involves (besides the simple decoding of the signs) inferences about the most plausible interpretation, which are essentially defeasible. Interpretation is thus always an abductive, hypothetical meaning construction followed by certain basic, logical principles which do not only aim at formulating new hypotheses, but at the same time also prove and verify those hypotheses (see Wildfeuer 2014: chap. 1.4 for further information).
- 2 We will give a more detailed explanation of the use of this song and its modifications in section two of this essay.
- 3 The quotation is, unfortunately, somehow ambiguous. On the one hand, Zimmer states that the character cannot express his sadness; on the other, 'he's been telling us about it all along'. Consequently, It remains unclear whether the music is able to express this sadness which otherwise cannot be expressed.
- 4 Due to space constraints, we cannot describe the theoretical framework in further detail. A comprehensive overview of the tool is given in Wildfeuer (2014); further analyses are examined in Wildfeuer (2012a, 2012b). The detailed analysis in section three will give more illustrative examples of how the framework operates.
- 5 Following Levinson (1996: 403), we differentiate between composed and appropriated score. Composed score is film music which is composed for the film in question, appropriated score is, by contrast, music which has already existed before writing the soundtrack of the film and which has been chosen by the filmmaker or composer. Hence, we see the song 'Non, je ne regrette rien' as an appropriated score; other musical elements in this film are then the composed score. The time-code refers to the DVD *Inception* (Nolan 2010), Region 2, Warner Bros.
- 6 A direct comparison of the two versions is, for example, given at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVkQ0C4qDvM> (see also Whitehouse 2010).
- 7 Actually, the film itself also works out the relationship between the *chanson* and its modifications by giving only the modified version in the very beginning of the film as a kind of introduction and both versions and their recognisable interconnections in succession at the very end of the film, subsequent to the closing credits.
- 8 This is a rewording of *Inception*'s premise about the experience of time stated by the characters and summarised by Michael J. Sirgist as follows: 'Because your mind functions more quickly in dreams, time feels slower' (2011: 199).
- 9 This passage is based on the detailed analysis by Schmid 2012.

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