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Leitmotif

Persuasive Musical Narration

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Introduction

In its broadest usage, leitmotif (and leitmotiv) connotes a concise, recurring musical statement associated with a non-musical object or idea. The reappearance of a leitmotif within an extended musical context in turn acknowledges the presence – implicit or explicit – of its meaning under evolving circumstances. Appearing in orchestral and music-dramatic genres from the nineteenth and even eighteenth centuries, the leitmotif informed the later emergence, traditions, and practices of cinema music. While commonly associated with symphonic and operatic genres, the leitmotif's transduction of the extra-musical into musical thematic analogues makes it eminently adaptable to the visual and narrative elements of film, and the technique remains the bedrock upon which traditional film scores in many musical styles continue to be built. Highly familiar examples include the rhythmically insistent 'shark' music in John Williams's score for *Jaws* (1975), Ennio Morricone's anguished, out-of-tune harmonica melody in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, (Ital. *C'era una Volta il West* 1968) and Bernard Herrmann's blood curdling shower-stabbing cue in *Psycho* (1960). The primary thematic musical cue for each of these examples is both compact and conspicuous, returning at significant moments to reintroduce its associations in new dramatic situations. The leitmotif in film is typically a non-diegetic instrumental or orchestral cue, but other possibilities abound. Uses of the leitmotif

can be found in other musical styles such as pop, jazz, rap and so on, and even in terms of diegetic placement within the film world itself.

As directly as the aforementioned examples seem to communicate, the expressive potential of the leitmotif transcends a simple mapping of music onto narrative components. While in *Jaws*, a leitmotif refers in a seemingly straightforward way to the shark, sounding with each appearance, the harmonica tune in *Once Upon a Time in the West* is more complex in a narrative sense. The leitmotif is linked with Charles Bronson's character (also called 'Harmonica' in the film) from the first scene in which he performs the tune himself. The full significance of the motive relative to his brother's murder, however, is not disclosed until later. As much as the conflicts that typify a Western, the long range uncovering of the trauma associated with Harmonica's music drives the film. The impact of *Psycho*'s shower cue, on the other hand, is mostly instantaneous. Rather than the slow exorcism of Morricone's haunted harmonica, Bernard Herrmann's stabbing leitmotif becomes a way of visiting terror directly on the spectator, linking the shower murder with the film's denouement through the recurrence of the motive. Countless further examples would unearth this same wellspring of the leitmotif technique's enduring viability: although a simple matter for composers and filmmakers to link music to narrative, and for spectators to relate motives to dramatic elements, the ways in which motives construct, amplify and communicate their meanings can be complex and subtle.

Historical Background

In that the leitmotif finds work from concert halls to cinema multiplexes, from silent film through the sound era, and from art-house period piece to sci-fi blockbuster, it would be a mistake to define it too narrowly. Historically, aesthetically and technically the leitmotif is a family of ideas and techniques rather than a single method. The term leitmotif ('leading motif') was first used by F. W. Jähns in 1871 to describe Carl Maria von Weber's fragmentary reintroduction of thematic material in his operas. But prior to the appearance of the terminology, the practice of associating narrative elements such as characters and situations with recurring music traces its roots into opera of the eighteenth century. Both the term and the practice gain musical and aesthetic momentum in nineteenth-century German romantic music in which quasi-literary narratives or 'programs' combined with a desire to create evocative mental imagery. The leitmotif and related thematic practices became staples of symphonic and music-dramatic composition. Though musically quite different, the dramatic reappearance in each movement of

Hector Berlioz's programmatic *Symphonie Fantastique* of a musical and psychological *idée fixe* signifying a sexual or romantic obsession is close cousin, for example, to the way Richard Wagner's 'curse' motive returns to narrate misfortune in his music drama, *Das Rheingold*. And while the idea of the leitmotif is indeed most famously associated with Wagner's cycle of music dramas, *Der Ring des Nibelung*, his own use of the technique developed over the course of his works, and he preferred other terminology and nuances. So, while contemporary applications of the term may feel a bit loose, the technique and its description have undergone constant aesthetic exploration, development and reconsideration. During the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, the leitmotif spread from being the signature compositional device of Wagnerian romanticism to become adapted by composers working outside the Germanic aesthetic such as Debussy. Richard Strauss kept the leitmotif vital into the twentieth century, when it would sustain the work of expressionist composers such as Alban Berg.[1]

The leitmotif's entry into cinema was thus historically and musically well paved, and its application to film must be understood as part of an expanding range intersecting with cinema's own advent and development. The most immediate avenue for the leitmotif into cinema music was in silent film accompaniment. 'Original scores' were neither an immediate nor widespread development in silent film. Musical decisions fell primarily under the purview of musicians performing the accompaniments. Nevertheless, leitmotif practices gained several footholds. First, there was the general sense in which Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century music-dramatic concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or 'total artwork' still provided orientation for cinema's own melding of music, image and drama. In a more practical sense, accompanists would rely extensively on selections from pre-existing music. Professional accompaniment manuals, encyclopaedias and guides suggested musical themes and also detailed the types of emotions, characters and images for which they were best suited. Finally, the leitmotif practice also inhabits the later development of the 'cue sheet', in which specific musical cues, both original music and classical excerpts, were offered for some films. Thus even leading into its own implementation of fully specified scores, which may still have contained borrowings from other music, silent film had already grounded itself in the narrative-thematic dynamic of the leitmotif.

With the exception of animated cartoons, the musical strategies of the synchronized sound era quickly distanced themselves from silent cinema's desire for non-stop musical accompaniment. And still, the sound era's

strategies in which music would now appear intermittently only heightens the leitmotif's practicality and effectiveness. A more rarefied musical fabric entails making specific dramatic and artistic decisions about where music should appear and where it will not. As such, it intensifies linkages between narrative elements and music by making them more emphatic and less a simply nominal part of the entire cinematic experience. Further, synchronized sound allowed music production for a film to be centralized, with music and performances becoming essentially identical for all screenings. Not only was the weight of musical decision shifted from performers to composers and producers, the performing resources themselves could more easily involve larger forces. Requiring more than an organ or piano was less practical for the silent era, as the performing resources in screening locations would vary. Beyond urban centres, available instrumentation could not be reliably known. Among the practical results of synchronized sound, then, were the possibilities of longer-range compositional planning and execution, the expressive possibilities of varying instrumentations, and a context more hospitable to creating original musical cues. Although these developments do not necessarily point inevitably to the leitmotif technique, the technological environment of synchronized sound provided a levelling effect. Cinema music could be composed on terms approaching those available to concert music. The sound era thus provided a context for fully professionalizing film composers. The traditions of European art music, particularly of the nineteenth century, were naturally central to the education and experience of the many European composers laying the cornerstone of Hollywood's 'classical tradition' in the 1930s: Erich Korngold, Dimitri Tiomkin, Miklós Rózsa. Again, therefore, the leitmotif technique prefigured the 'classic' film score even during its relative infancy. And while its centrality has indeed been challenged and weakened by other developments such as the use of jazz, rock and pop styles, the electronic synthesizer and the compilation score, the leitmotif-driven score can still be understood both as the centre from which deviation or innovation must be measured, and as a technique which continues to be absorbed into those same later developments. The effect, for example, of linking the Radio Raheem character with Public Enemy's rap tune, 'Fight the Power', in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) clearly relies on the leitmotif idea regardless of the tune's mostly diegetic appearance and the vast stylistic gulf between rap and orchestral film music. Today, John Williams's scores continue to orient themselves directly to the romantic leitmotif tradition, while other contemporary film composers such as Danny Elfman and Thomas Newman have adapted the technique to musical styles both extending and emphatically outside that

stylistic tradition. While it may be an exaggeration to claim that cinema has been particularly innovative in applying the leitmotif technique, we must acknowledge that the leitmotif was, conversely, essential to the invention of cinema.[2]

Making Meaning

The leitmotif becomes most directly linked to its subject through some explicit visual or narrative concurrence. So, for example, the music accompanying the first appearance of the Elmira Gulch character riding her bicycle in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) becomes unforgettably associated with her. But to be effective, the motive reaches beyond mere concurrence to become a metaphoric evocation of its subject as well. Elmira's sour, mean-spirited disposition resonates in the motive's oddly contorted melodic line, while the image of her joyless bicycle riding appears in its rhythm and tempo. Likewise, the repetitive, inexorable rhythm of the *Jaws* motive compares the beast to an 'eating machine'. Volume, dissonance and high pitch in the *Psycho* cue at once suggest the violent arm motion, a scream, a sharp weapon and psychological distress. Baleful dissonances in *Once Upon a Time in the West*'s harmonica parallel unresolved tensions at once dramatic and psychological. The leitmotif becomes more than merely a symbol of its object, embodying it as well.[3]

Further, the musical and narrative exchange in the leitmotif is a two-way transaction. It isn't simply that Elmira Gulch's motive takes on the qualities of her disposition: her musical analogue instantly feeds back into the perception of her character. Her leitmotif is the way it is because it *reflects* her, but at the same time she is who she is because of her leitmotif – because of the way it *inflects* the spectator's reaction. Our shark is more threatening, our psycho more angry and our gunfighter all the more fraught because of their respective 'motives', in both senses of that word. In *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the character of Cheyenne is significantly softened in spite of his talent for violence by the ambling banjo theme associated with him. The leitmotif must be understood not only as drawing significance from its narrative situation but also re-circulating back into it such that any final sense of either's priority would be difficult to isolate.

At the same time that a leitmotif relates directly to images and characters it may deliver associations from *outside* the film. In Elmira Gulch's music, we hear contours of the repetitive 'nyeah-nyeah' taunting of a child's sing-song scorn. In this way, the meaning of a leitmotif may draw on the spectator's own associations, both musical and non-musical, and not just

those constructed within the film. Such associations can also be quite specific. *Run Lola Run* (dir. *Rennt*, 1998) uses a snippet of Charles Ives's orchestral work, *The Unanswered Question*, to link the parallel deaths of its main characters. Spectators may then associate the musical work's title and program surrounding 'the meaning of life' with the deaths on screen. In *Vertigo* (1958) a Habañera rhythm threading its way through the entire film appears briefly underscoring some of Madeleine's dialogue about a Spanish mission. Less literally, Bernard Herrmann's late romantic chromatic idiom underscoring moments of intense passion in *Vertigo* may evoke the similarly fatal romance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.[4] Even an original leitmotif may therefore have rich associations in advance of those established within the film. To that extent, the significance of the leitmotif in film cannot be considered on purely structural terms. The spectator participates in the meaning of the music through association with individual experience and cultural memory.[5]

Musical Parameters

Further extending the leitmotif is its flexibility of conception. We may be inclined to think of the motive primarily in melodic terms; but while often true, such is not always the case. In Jerry Goldsmith's score for *Poltergeist* (1982), we indeed hear a theme the composer refers to as 'Carol Anne's Lullaby', associated with the little girl who becomes lost to paranormal phenomena. Likewise, John Williams's 'Imperial March' from *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) constitutes a musical whole from which the many fragmentary statements associated with Darth Vader are drawn. In contrast to these, however, neither the shark's motive from *Jaws* nor *Psycho's* stabbing cue constitutes a 'melody' in the same sense. The difference is not simply one of length but also one of structure and character. Neither in the music-theoretical sense of a line-as-a-whole with small-scale structural closures nor in the more colloquial 'tunefulness' or 'singability' can we find in the signature cues from *Jaws* and *Psycho* the idea of a melody exhibited by the lullaby and the march. The shark and the stabbing appear simply as 'motives' in steadfastly remaining concise, proto-melodic 'building blocks' – neither drawn from nor building up to a larger musical structure.

The leitmotif's flexibility also lies in the fact that *any* musical parameter might become its identifying feature. In *Vertigo* we hear an obsessively repeated Habañera motive.[6] Recurring at various points, the rhythm remains identifiable through changes in pitch, melodic contour and instrumentation such that only the rhythm itself is the indispensable element. In Michael

Kamen's score for *X-Men* (2000) the Mystique character is, on her appearance, accompanied by a sinewy, eerie melody in a low-string timbre. Later, the character's hidden presence at an ambush is signalled by the appearance of the motive's timbre and vibrato rather than its pitch contour. In *Psycho*, Norman Bates runs down to the motel to 'discover' the body accompanied by the cascading harmony of the stabbing chord without its puncturing articulation. As a thematic marker, very often one musical parameter suffices, and that marker is not necessarily melodic. In all, the emergence of a leitmotif depends less on the type of material than on its use to create and then recreate recurring and recognizable points of narrative contact and commentary. As with the human face, any feature in the leitmotif may be its most distinguishing and, in subsequent 'descendants', may appear as its dominant trait.

Repetition, Variation, and Narrative

The question of recognition also raises that of a leitmotif's 'malleability' – the extent to which it might be altered and still retain a core identity. Beyond the musical, affective and symbolic features of the original motive, we might naturally look for a deepening of its expression through change. But even before that, it is worth remembering that the simple fact of its return can have expressive implications. There are, naturally, many examples in which characteristic motives return again and again with little or no significant modification. This may be less characteristic of film than television, where shorter running times, tighter production schedules and budgetary constraints might impact musical strategies relative to feature-length film. This is not to disparage television's musical material, but rather to distinguish its *use*. Indeed, even the lightest television comedies such as *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Addams Family* and *Gilligan's Island* had cues as memorable as many films; but this was in part because they might reappear unaltered from one week to another and from one season to the next.

As such, it might be tempting to question whether television's frequent reliance on a set of fixed cues constitutes a leitmotif strategy in any but the formal sense. But in its most vivid musical examples we can find that the television leitmotif constructs expressive values that are not necessarily just paler versions of its film counterparts. Television's static motivic framework can become a powerful force in creating a stable tone or identity of perhaps more importance to the continuing nature of television than to the ostensible single-event film. In television's episodic context, its application of the leitmotif technique develops its own relationships between

characterization, affect and narrative. Episodically reappearing motives become closely associated with general situations and emotions which may themselves be episodic and repetitive. While the film leitmotif might be understood to characterize, say, '*this* character at *this* time', the television leitmotif may often be taken to signify things like 'this character in this *type* of situation or mood again' or 'this *type* of character in this situation.' Television music comes to imbue even its lightest fare with a kind of 'ritual' in narrative moments that are cyclically recurring and archetypal rather than linearly integrated and individual. Unaltered statements might serve to strengthen many aspects of television's values while the same strategy, if applied widely within film, might only weaken cinema's often more individualized expressive needs.[7]

Still, in the right context even literal restatements might be interpreted as specifically expressive. In Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The unwavering certitude of Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in conjunction with unaltered presentation on its return forms a convincing testimony to the durability and stark geometry of the monolith. Kubrick's use of Strauss's prelude reminds us that, far from being confined to a formal impact, even reiteration can yield detail. The climactic replay of a heroic theme may speak of triumph, while the reappearance of a monster's cue spells undiminished menace. At this point, we see that the narrative implications of bringing a leitmotif back, varied or not, is a rich spectrum in itself. At one end we might consider objective inflections such as repetition and reiteration, as in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. At the other, we find more complex associations. Restoration perhaps best characterizes the return of the Carol Anne theme with the child's safe return in *Poltergeist*. Indeed, given the reappearance of the chromatically winding cues in *Vertigo* as Judy fully transforms herself back into the dead Madeleine, even the tint of a 'resurrection' could be added to the leitmotif's palette of returns.

Perhaps far more easily than in a purely musical context, even the most literal reuse of a motive in film and television can avoid crossing the thin lines between coherence and predictability, persuasion and domination. Ultimately, however, the significance of change in a leitmotif is not simply a matter of avoiding tediousness but rests on the nature of narrative itself. Literal repetition defies dramatic development while musical change acknowledges, reflects and intensifies it. In *Vertigo*'s *Habañera* rhythm we find great efficiency in this regard. The motive appears as Scotty observes Judy/Madeleine in the museum. In this incarnation, so to speak, the rhythm is a monotone, paralleling Scotty's demeanour of quiet concentration and interest. When Scotty becomes unhinged after believing himself complicit

in Madeleine's death, the same rhythm recurs in the nightmare sequence. Now threatening to tear itself apart in wild leaps, the motive reflects the threat to Scotty's psychological stability. Along with re-orchestration, higher–lower, faster–slower, shorter–longer, and softer–louder constitutes the core set of musical values with which to effect change. But even slight twists of such a constrained set of dials, so to speak, can amplify narrative change in very evocative ways. The shark in *Jaws* moves closer not only through the leitmotif's increased volume, as might be expected, but through the acceleration in tempo as well. In *Stand by Me* (1986), an unadulterated version of the title tune doesn't appear until the end. Framing the film are instrumental statements in which both the decrease in tempo and the orchestration itself align us with the narrating character's nostalgic reflection. In *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), reiterated fragments of the main theme at various pitch levels provides a general barometer of dramatic pressure, as in the *mano a mano* around the German airplane. And in *Psycho*, the sense of a lingering 'aftermath' as Norman runs back to the motel is succinctly conveyed by the blurred condensation of the stabbing cue that suppresses its rhythm.

The Leitmotif and Temporality

Change to recurring musical themes points to a subtext of the leitmotif technique: time. Functioning as kind of memory for the film, and engaging the spectator's memory as well, the leitmotif has an innate relationship to the past. At each recurrence, we are not simply hearing commentary on what *is* but on how the present moment has been informed diachronically by what once was. Each iteration of the motive carries the associations of previous statements such that its narrative past accumulates and resounds through it. This effect is especially poignant in the showdown between 'Harmonica' and the villain, Frank, in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The mournful harmonica tune came from the torture Frank devised to make 'Harmonica' complicit in his own brother's murder. Years earlier, with his brother standing on his shoulders, neck in a noose, Frank had thrust a harmonica in the younger man's mouth. As he struggles to keep his brother aloft, the harmonica transforms his laboured breathing into sound. As the young man eventually loses his footing, his brother falls and hangs, etching the harmonica forever into the protagonist's memory. After being gunned down in revenge, Frank asks, 'Who are you?' In reply, the harmonica is placed in Frank's dying mouth. With sublime recognition, Frank understands its meaning as his last breaths power the instrument's final appearance in

the film. *Once Upon a Time in the West* provides an extreme example of the leitmotif's inherent historicizing, as even the first soundings of the harmonica tune in the film's opening scenes are already laden with a secret history of vengeance. But while this temporal effect may run especially deep, its cumulative temporality is ultimately the same as more lighthearted examples such as the *Indiana Jones* theme. Regardless of its content, the leitmotif is a means of registering the passage of time.

But while the leitmotif serves as memory, it may also evoke the future and related concepts like anticipation, projection and prediction. In the most general terms, of course, the leitmotif's description of, say, a character might inflect the spectator's assessment of future behaviour and outcomes. The appearance of the *Indiana Jones* theme, for example, provides strong evidence in advance of the character's likelihood for 'beating the odds'. In a very literal way, *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000) uses a non-diegetic snippet of 'Hard Time Killing Floor Blues' early in the film to underscore a seer's prophecy, connecting the present to a future diegetic performance of the tune around a campfire. More subtly, along with reinforcing the spirit of Madeleine's ostensible ancestor, Carlotta Valdez, the Hispanic cultural associations of the Habañera rhythm early in *Vertigo* help generate a kind of fate in foretelling the later importance of the old Spanish mission. In this regard, it is worth remembering that, even in its nineteenth-century orchestral and music-dramatic conception, the leitmotif was more than a formal or 'unifying' device. Serving as a musical work's own powers of memory, anticipation, reflection and reaction, it simulates and stimulates these same cognitive powers on a human scale as well.

The leitmotif's orientation towards cumulative interpretation stands in relief against other strategies such as the 'compilation score', in which the soundtrack may consist of popular songs rather than orchestral cues composed originally for the film. Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) has a soundtrack of popular music. However dramatically charged with previous events and conflicts, each situation in *Goodfellas* is musically characterized afresh, without recall and without anticipation of future circumstances. In the absence of a leitmotif strategy, the result is an unmooring that allows the film to navigate its dramatic waters without being anchored by musical interpretations and judgements. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine a score predicated on a progressively recurring leitmotif facilitating the temporal scrambling in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) as readily as his compilation soundtrack. Though an instrumental score might have sounded out of place in any event, the deeper mismatch would have been between the leitmotif's imposition of linear time and the film's attempts to skirt it.

On the other hand, the strong cinematic tradition of the leitmotif technique frequently reasserts itself even among other types of soundtracks. While containing some instrumental motives, the music of *O Brother Where Art Thou* consists primarily of country and traditional songs. Nevertheless, it links the recurring diegetic tunes 'Man of Constant Sorrow' and 'You are my Sunshine' thematically to two of its characters. Both the character themes and the aforementioned musical projection into the narrative future are closely related to traditional uses of the leitmotif technique despite differences in the type of material and its placement within the diegetic world.

Musical Affect and the Position of Commentary

As deeply as the leitmotif articulates time, its situation relative to emotion is still more complex. If we apply the simple question, 'How does she feel?' to Elmira Gulch in *The Wizard of Oz*, her bicycle music provides a believable surrogate for her state of mind: sour and joylessly purposive. And if we go on to ask something like, 'How do we feel *about* her?' the music still sounds a convincing reaction closely paralleling Elmira's own emotional condition: she's both 'displeased' and 'unpleasant'. The character and her characterization are essentially interchangeable on both musical and affective terms. However, applying the same questions to Indiana Jones during one of his lucky escapes, we encounter a different effect. While his 'heroic' theme might work well for the spectator's *reaction* to Jones's exploits, it works poorly as a musical characterization of *his* likely emotional state of fear and anxiety. The forthright brassy fanfare of the leitmotif dispels the spectator's doubt about his chances and amplifies the 'bravery' of his exploits. But a musical transcription of the character's emotions while, say, hanging from a vine or avoiding being mulched by a spinning propeller would probably sound quite different. In this case, how the character feels and what is felt *about* him are two distinct ideas: anxiety vs. admiration. Character and characterization have worked independently of each other, with music aligning itself to one over the other.

Naturally we can find a spectrum of variations on this difference. *Once Upon a Time in the West* gives us a different type of 'hero' – but not simply in his actions. Harmonica's musical treatment is the inverse of Indiana Jones. Rather than hiding the reality of his interior world behind musical hubris, Harmonica is characterized by the dark *idée fixe* of his actual feelings – ones whose complete meaning is still partially hidden from the spectator. In *Psycho*'s shower stabbing the murderous feelings themselves are brutally clear while the identity of their host is at least momentarily

ambiguous (in several ways, of course). The leitmotif's mobility in emotional perspective reveals a side to Norman Bates of which even he is not fully aware. In all, the positionality of music vis-à-vis onscreen emotions and events is far from fixed. The leitmotif allows, encourages, and sometimes even forces the spectator to view its subject from different angles.[8]

Emotional or otherwise, the significance of the leitmotif that we might take with such immediacy is informed by a positioning that may otherwise go unnoticed. The *Jaws* motive makes the distinction between character and characterization almost crystalline. The beast, of course, neither 'thinks' nor 'feels' anything of the vivid emotional world attached to it by its leitmotif: 'mortal dread' and 'loss of limb'. But though the shark's description seems 'objective', a further distinction bears remembering. 'Sutured' to onscreen events, it is easy to forget that the characterization is made *to* the audience and not *by* it. However much the music-dramatic description of a shark resonates fear, it has been constructed on the spectator's behalf by other forces that are outside of the narrative world as well. The emotions 'feel' like one's own, but even from its inception in orchestral and operatic music, there has been a kind of partnership between the leitmotif's commentary and the auditor. At times the leitmotif might be understood as speaking *to* a listener and at others perhaps speaking *for* a listener. But while the leitmotif appears to offer 'ownership', the partnership between spectator and musical commentary is better understood as one of 'proxy'. The spectator essentially authorizes the score to participate in a film world that is otherwise automatic or indifferent. The leitmotif holds out the promise of empowerment engendered in information about the past and future and in being able to articulate objective and subjective descriptions for what is happening. The motive serves as the spectator's agent working from within the film.

But in the spectator's absence from the narrative world itself, this musical proxy becomes, naturally, a kind of 'remote control', and the partnership may not be as transparent as it seems even if we fully concur with a score's description. On initial consideration, Bernard Herrmann's scoring of *Vertigo*'s stable scene offers a smouldering description of passion. And yet, the motive also helps perpetrate a deception. To appreciate the leitmotif's real position, we must force ourselves to remember that 'Madeleine' is not really there and that Judy has taken her place. Frequent reinforcement by convincing cues obscures the fact that Judy's passion has been at least in part contrived to lure Scotty further into the plot to murder the real Madeleine. Throughout the film, while the music has indeed evoked romantic intensity it has also toyed with its proxy relationship and helped betray the spectator. Part of the brilliance of Herrmann's score, then, is his subtle musical

seduction of the 'leading motive' to mislead. Far less subtle deceptions, of course, are often exploited in the musical landscapes of horror and thriller genres. The restoration of the 'Carol Anne' theme in *Poltergeist* helps convince us that 'this house is clean' even when it is not.

Social Consideration

The leitmotif thus comes to the spectator *from* a particular position and also 'chooses sides' both in portraying emotions, situations and characters as well as in informing or misinforming the spectator. Recognizing the inherent positionality of its musical themes helps us understand cinema's modes of communication more fully but also raises the deeper issue of film's construction of an 'authority'. The leitmotif carries with it not only the potential for cultural association, as discussed above, but may also be read in terms of its social or political engagement. Considering its privileged position as a commentary, to what extent does the leitmotif 'authorize' a particular view of its subject? In its musical reaction to Judy's forced transformation into Madeleine, for example, does the score voice approval of the power Scotty exercised over her? Does trumpeting the masculine adventurism of Indiana Jones have a real world analogue? Is there any political resonance to a Shostakovich-like musical critique of Darth Vader's imperial military excess? In that it is in the nature of the leitmotif to be inextricably bound up with its narratives, questions of whether it sustains and institutionalises them, or, conversely, becomes a tool of their critique, are inherently worth asking. However we may answer such questions, the abiding impact and conviction of the leitmotif's often persuasive musical narration suggests that it is seldom merely neutral.[9]

Notes

1. For a concise but authoritative account of its historical context, consult the *leitmotif* entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn). New York: Macmillan, 2001. Related entries such as those on Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss will also be useful. For a larger historical context of musical romanticism, see C. Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, J. Bradford Robinson (trans). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

2. Among books on film music, the following remains the most focused on the Leitmotivic-thematic tradition: K. Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

3. C. Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987 places this type of meaning informally within the context of semeiosis, describing it as a 'cinematic musical code'.

4. For a more musically detailed discussion of Bernard Herrmann's music refer to G. Bruce, *Bernard Herrmann: Film Music and Narrative*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1985.

5. While Claudia Gorbman approaches this type of meaning as a 'cultural code', the idea of music that refers to other types of music is also well developed in musicological discourse, where it is referred to by way of *topoi*, or 'musical topics'. The touchstone for topical analysis can be found in L. G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*. New York: Schirmer, 1980. As with the *topoi* of concert music, the 'cultural codes' of film music can in many instances be understood by way of their topical references to other music. Of course, such cultural codes and *topoi* can also be further understood within other frames of reference such as race, gender, class, generation, ethnicity and so on.

6. For those unfamiliar with musical terminology, Kathryn Kalinak's opening discussion of some of the musical details from *Vertigo* is thorough, well paced and technically lucid.

7. For a brief consideration of the differences in music's role in television and film, see C. Gorbman, (2004), 'Aesthetics and rhetoric', *American Music*, 22 (1) (2004), 14–26. For more specific focus on issues in television, see R. Altman, 'Television Sound', in T. Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 39–54.

8. An excellent overview of the emotional and affective mechanisms of film music can be found in Smith, J. 'Movie music as moving music: emotion, cognition, and the film score', in C. Plantinga and G. M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. For a penetrating analysis of a leitmotif's potential 'emotional standpoints', turn to D. B. Green, *Listening to Strauss Operas: The Audience's Multiple Standpoints*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991. While focused on Richard Strauss's opera, *Elektra*, Green's concepts apply usefully to much film music as well.

9. For an account of film music centered on its potential for social and political readings, turn to A. Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Works placing music in general within social or political contexts are quite numerous. Various starting points would include R. Leppert and S. McClary (eds), *Music and Society; The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; S. McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; and T. W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, E. B. Ashton (trans.). New York: Continuum, 1989.