Game music from a film musicology perspective

Michiel Kamp

Gears of War 4 (2016)

What kind of soundtrack does this game need?
What kind of music <u>matches</u> this game?

Game music 101

- Dynamic music
  - Adaptive and interactive music
    - Safety/danger music
    - Powerup music
    - Boss battle music
  - Horizontal resequencing vs. vertical layering
    - Loops and stems
- Nondynamic music
  - Loops
  - 'Boredom switch'
  - Autonomous musical structures

(Karen Collins, *Game Sound,* 2008)

The Legend of Zelda:
Ocarina of Time (1998)

Red Dead Redemption
(2010)

Some film music theory

Aaron Copland:

'Tip to Moviegoers: Take off Those Ear-Muffs'

(*New York Times*, November 6, 1949)

Julia (2008)

Copland's Five Film Music Functions

1. Creating a more convincing atmosphere of time and place.
2. Underlining psychological refinements--the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of situation.
3. Serving as a kind of neutral background filler.
4. Building a sense of continuity.
5. Underpinning the theatrical build-up of a scene, and rounding it off with a sense of finality.

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1. Identifies films' locales and time periods;

2. Limns the basic personality traits of characters central to filmic plots;

3. Explores those same characters' innermost thoughts and feelings;

4. Illustrates on-screen action;

5. Lends audible structure to filmic narratives.

(James Wierzbicki in *Film Music: A History*, 2009, p. 6)

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1. Music masks extraneous noises
2. Provides continuity between shots
3. Directs attention to important features of the screen
4. Induces mood
5. Communicates meaning and furthers the narrative in ambiguous situations
6. Enables the symbolization of past and future events (through leitmotifs)
7. Heightens the sense of reality of or absorption in film
8. Adds to the aesthetic affect of the film

(Annabel Cohen 1999)

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Far and Away (1992)

Only Lovers Left Alive (2013)

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Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (2009)

Metroid (Nintendo NES 1986)

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Fez (2012)

SimCity 2000 (1993)

2. Underlining psychological refinements--the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of situation.

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Psycho (1960)

Zootropolis (2016)

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The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998)

Resident Evil 4 (2005)

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Final Fantasy VII (1997)

LA Noire (2011)

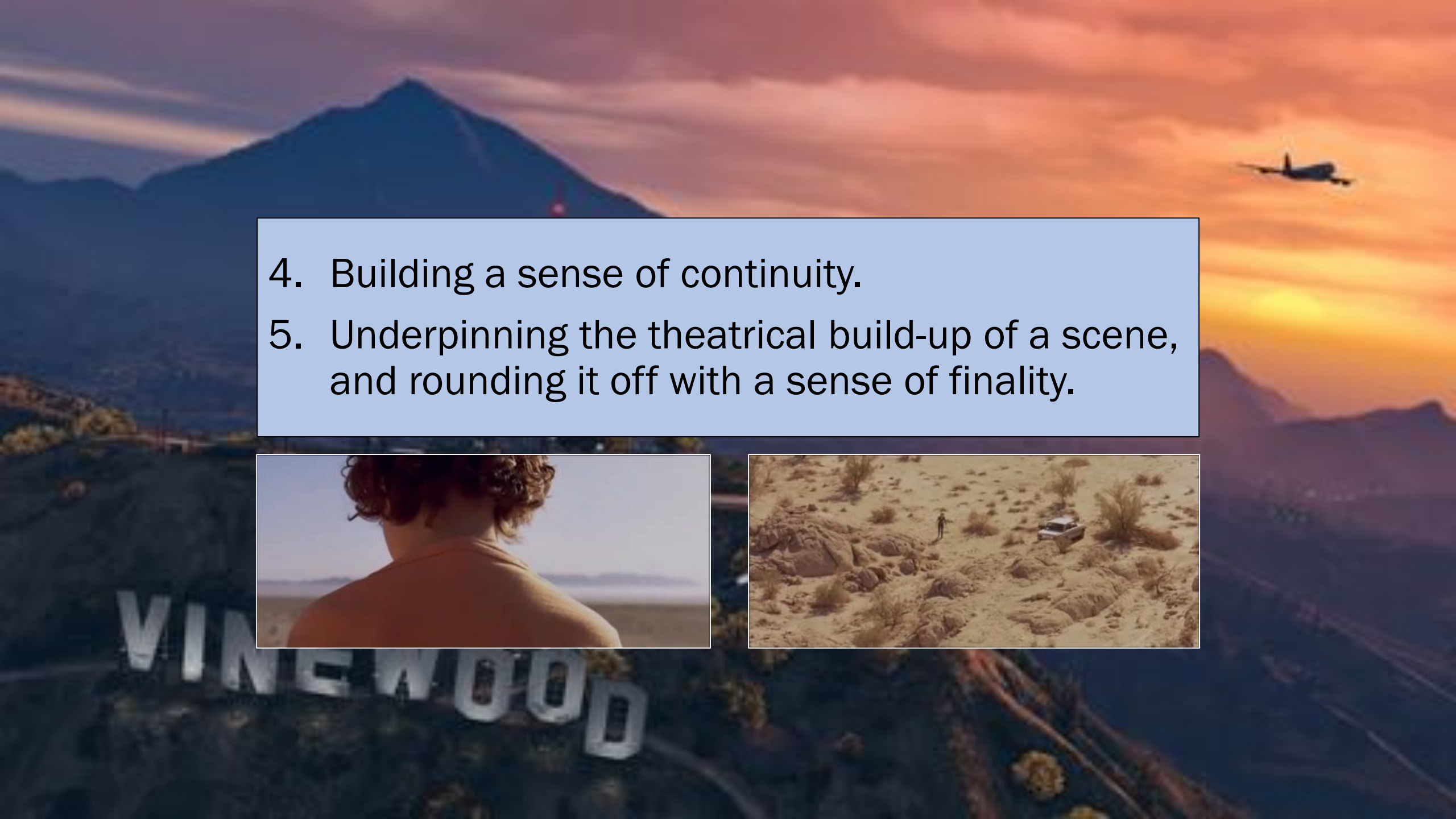2. Underlining psychological refinements--the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of situation.
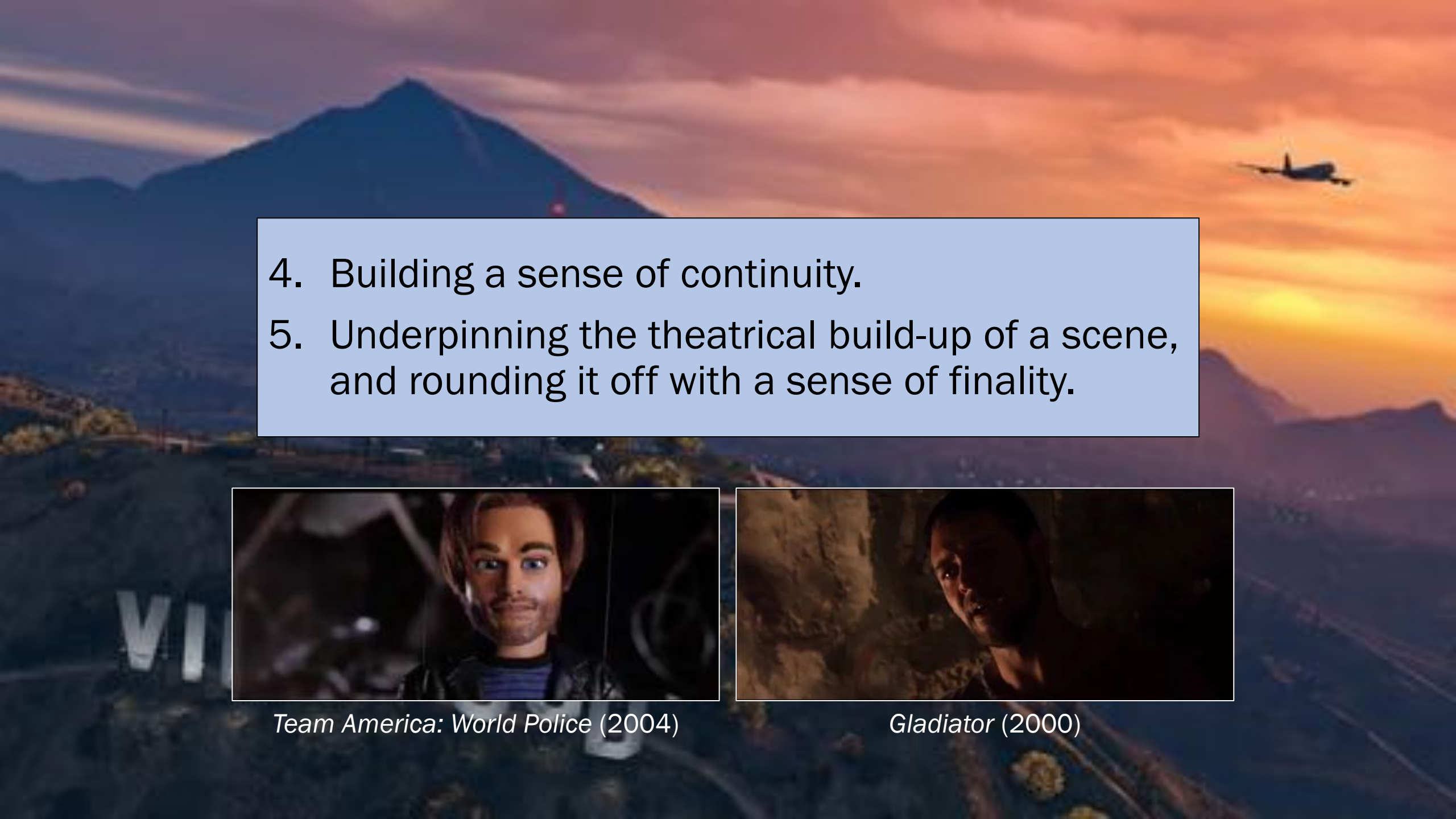

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Film music's functions (Aaron Copland, 1949)

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Team America: World Police (2004)

Gladiator (2000)

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Pierrot le fou (1967)

Advent Rising (2005)

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Battlefield 1 (2016)

Peggle (2007)

Further reading

- Copland, Aaron. 2004. 'Tip to Moviegoers: Take off Those Ear-Muffs (1949).' In *Aaron Copland: A Reader: Selected Writings 1923-1972*. New York; London: Routledge. (pp. 104-111)

- Chion, Michel. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* transl. Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Donnelly, K. J., William Gibbons, and Neil Lerner, eds. 2014. *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*. New York, NY; Abingdon: Routledge.

- Summers, Tim. 2016. *Understanding Video Game Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Wierzbicki, James. 2009. *Film Music: a History*. New York: Routledge.

- Game music and sound bibliography:
  https://www.sssmg.org/wp/bibliography/

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