Music, Sound and the Moving Image: The Present and a Future?¹

Anahid Kassabian

Music, sound and the moving image is without a doubt safely ensconced as both a field in musicology and as an interdisciplinary area in its own right. While there are many different ways to approach writing its history (tracing its roots in theatre and opera, studying early practices and their relationship to classical Hollywood scoring, a comparative study of how scoring traditions began and solidified internationally and so on), and while film music has been written and thought about since the earliest days of film, I would argue that the field as we know it actually begins to take shape with the publication of Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* in 1987.² Following *Unheard Melodies* was a series of books throughout the 1990s, all of which came from film scholars.³ As musicologists’ interest in these works grew, and as musicology began to imagine including the study of film music, some scholars began to express their dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the musical imprecision, insensitivity or even incorrectness of these works. As a corrective to the – then and now – all-too-silent mainstream of film studies, these books were most welcome, but, it was whispered, they weren’t always so good *musically*.

Of course, this may well be true. As someone who has studied piano, score-reading, harmony and composition, but has not a single degree in music, I am surely less attuned to musical detail than someone who has spent years as an analyst/theorist. (It is, however, also tempting to blame disagreements, which are not uncommon among analysts anyway, on inadequate education. One has only to attend a few conferences to hear the accusation.) But as more work came from

1 Some portions of this essay originally appeared in David Cooper, Christopher Fox and Ian Sapiro (eds), *CineMusic? Constructing the Film Score* (Newcastle, 2008).
2 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, IN, 1987).
scholars of music, it became clear that much of their work (although, of course, not all) has had a similar flaw. While deeply attentive to the music, the scholarship produced from within musicology—film scholars have said—has looked suspiciously like an analysis of a score and very little like a study of an audiovisual text.

I think both critiques, while perhaps a bit harsh, are not untrue.

We find ourselves, as a field, at an important juncture. On the one hand, film studies persist in a systemic lack of interest in sound and music, although the recent ‘In Focus’ section of Cinema Journal, edited by Michele Hilmes, may be a welcome sign of a thaw. On the other hand, music, which as a discipline has welcomed film music studies in the past ten years (a mere century after the birth of film), has failed to integrate any serious study of the visual and narrative elements of film.

It is clear that all film music scholars should be serious students of both music and film. But we do not yet have ways of institutionalizing such study, and while taught MA programmes might well be a particularly good approach in both the UK and the US contexts (I don’t know enough about others to comment), the few that have been on offer have not succeeded as one might have hoped. Nonetheless, my first point to any serious musicology student of film music is: study film. And vice versa. Audit classes, read introductory textbooks as well as serious scholarship, play—in every way possible—a serious game of catch-up in the other discipline. The following will not stand in for a solid grounding in both disciplines; however inconvenient that may seem, it is nonetheless absolutely clear to me that a reasonable command of both disciplines is a prerequisite to serious scholarship in this field.

It is possible, however, to describe certain basic or primary approaches. The first is to write a cue sheet, in as much detail as possible. A cue sheet is a spreadsheet with the following column headings (see Fig. 2.1).

Not everyone uses identical categories, but the fundamental idea is widely accepted in the field:

- **Time**: as specifically as possible, note the beginning and end of the cue
- **Music**: describe the cue, both aurally and affectively
- **Shot/Editing**: describe the visual components and how they match to musical events
- **Sound**: describe the other aural components, how they match to musical events, and how the soundtrack is mixed
- **Story**: note the place of the scene or sequence in the overall narrative of the film
- **Other Details**: note any relevant extrafilmic facts, such as the history of the song, or aspects of the actor’s or musician’s star-text that are relevant to understanding the scene
- **Significance**: connect the musical and other details to your reading of the film, or to other scenes you’ve already noted
- **Notes**: this is a space for anything else not covered by the above—while you may not have things to say here very often, it is useful in case you want

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to remember a bit of technology or some other tidbit that doesn’t belong elsewhere in the cue sheet.

Figure 2.1  L.A. Confidential complete music cues
I would go so far as to say that all good analyses are made possible by a well-prepared cue sheet. A cue sheet, however, is not only an important tool in its own right, but the starting-point for a number of methodologies. In a very broad stroke, scholarship on film music takes off from one of three perspectives – the composer’s, the text’s or the audience’s. The first works, from Kurt London through Adorno and Eisler, were addressed to composers. What I mean here, though, is work like Miguel Mera’s film-score guide to *The Ice Storm*, which analyses the score from a compositional perspective. In terms of textual approaches, most of the major works by film scholars on music (for example, Gorbman, Kalinak, Flinn), especially in the 1980s, are grounded in film studies’ main approaches which had their roots in literary studies. None of these perspectives is simple, and all approaches have strengths and weaknesses. It is not my intention to represent them here, but rather to point towards them, and to note that most scholarship in all three areas will begin with a cue sheet, even if the score is available. A cue sheet opens itself, in other words, to multiple methodologies.

My own approach has been to try to theorize listening, or to work from the position of the ‘perceiver’. This is because my interest in film music, and in the study of culture more generally, has some roots in sociological or political concerns. That is to say, alongside a lifelong love of both music and film, I also think we must understand how we come to think, feel and respond the way we do to images, sounds and stories, because I think that has a direct and mutually causal relationship with how we see ourselves and what we think, feel and know about other people and the worlds around us. Leading on directly from this, then, my primary concern in studying film music is the relationship among perceivers and films.

As I argued in Chapter 2 of *Hearing Film*, analyses of film music from the position of perceivers should spring from three basic questions:

1. How is the music’s relationship to the narrative world of the film perceived?
2. How do we perceive the music’s method within the scene?
3. What does the music evoke in or communicate to us?10

Each of these questions arises from a consideration of the relationships among a particular musical event in a film, each of the various threads of a filmic text and the theoretical perceiver(s), exactly as one does in creating a cue sheet. In that

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8 Miguel Mera, *Mychael Danna’s The Ice Storm: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, MD, 2007).
10 Ibid., pp. 41–42.
In answer to the first question, I argued that the traditional categories of diegetic and non-diegetic are inappropriate and should be abandoned immediately, for two reasons. First, as most writers on film music argue, there are frequently musical events in films that are not adequately described by either term.\(^\text{11}\) Second, and at least as disturbingly, the notion of a ‘diegesis’ that may or may not include music suggests that music does not itself participate in the production of that diegesis. But how can something be defined in terms of that which it helps to define? Music certainly participates – quite strongly, I would argue – in creating the diegesis, ‘the narratively implied spatiotemporal world of the film’,\(^\text{12}\) as Gorbman defines it. It cannot, therefore, be defined in terms of its relationship to the very world it helps create. I suggested, instead, that the language used by composers – dramatic scoring, source scoring and source music – offers a more expansive palette. In particular, it offers more room for further expansion, as in Elena Boschi’s discussion of ‘inner scoring’\(^\text{13}\) in Ligabue’s *Radiofreccia* (1998). By this beautifully descriptive term, she means one of the uses of music that Gorbman termed ‘meta-diegetic’ – that is, when we hear music that is coming from inside a character’s thoughts. In the example that Boschi develops, the film’s main character, Freccia, is accompanied by what seems to be dramatic scoring until, in a moment of desperation, he slams his hands over his ears and the music stops. There are undoubtedly countless other nuances of terminology yet to be developed, and a more open field of thought and vocabulary, which I believe the composers’ vocabulary provides, will enable scholarship to move more quickly in these directions.

The second question, regarding the music’s methods,\(^\text{14}\) demands consideration of two continua, which I termed music history and attention. The first interrogates the relationship of any musical event to other musical events, and points along this continuum include: ‘quotation’, where a moment of music quotes another; ‘allusion’, where a quotation brings with it reference to another whole narrative; ‘Leitmotiv’, a term from Wagner that is used, often quite loosely, to describe themes for characters or ideas;\(^\text{15}\) and finally one-time music, which, while referring to


\(^{12}\) ‘At this point, then, we may summarize and define ‘diegesis’ as being the ‘narratively implied spatiotemporal world of the actions and characters’: Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, p. 21 (original emphasis).

\(^{13}\) Elena Boschi, ‘“Please, Give Me Second Grace”: A Study of Five Songs in Wes Anderson’s *The Royal Tenenbaums*’, in Cooper, Fox and Sapiro, *CineMusic?*, pp. 97–110.

\(^{14}\) That is, how the music goes about accomplishing its purpose.

\(^{15}\) See, for a discussion of *Leitmotiv* in relation to film music, the opening section of James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeyer (eds), *Music and Cinema* (Hanover,
musical codes generally, does not refer to any other specific musical event. Again, more points are almost certainly possible on this continuum, but these four offer a starting-point.

On the attention continuum, *Hearing Film* again posits four points: theme songs, sole-soundtrack music, music and sound without dialogue, and music beneath dialogue. The issue here is the relationship in the attentional field between this particular instance of music and other threads of the film, such as visual, sound and dialogue. While it is not easy to assign a cognitive or psychological measure of attention, it is nonetheless important to try to map the relative presence of music in the attentional field. 16 These possibilities, like those in the music history continuum, will already have been detailed on the cue sheet, so their study is more a matter of noticing salient relationships than finding them in the first place.

The third question is arguably the murkiest, the most challenging intellectually, and it has also been the focus of most film music scholarship, in one way or another. It is, of course, the question of meaning, and there are several different intellectual histories that converge here. On the one hand, we have the long-standing philosophical debates about musical meaning, which include classical treatises, papal encyclicals, eighteenth-century Affektenlehre, nineteenth-century writings on ‘absolute music’ and twentieth-century music semiotics. On the other hand, the introduction of literary theory into musicology brought with it a particular approach to the problem of meaning: beginning with semiotics (and, to a lesser extent, Russian formalism), moving into structuralist narratology, and then into psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, meaning was understood to be embedded in form, which opened new avenues for the study of musical meaning. Thus, the question of meaning in film music is a nexus point for several different, though related, intellectual and philosophical trajectories.

In *Hearing Film*, I argued that there are three kinds of meaning to be apprehended: identification, mood and commentary. These categories are not only not to be seen as exclusive, but must be considered as overlapping fields of activity. Music for identification can tell us everything from historical period and geographical location of the story or scene to all sorts of things – age, class, race, gender, sexuality, urban/rural – about individual characters. Mood music is simply that – cues that set the tone of a sequence, frequently informing us of how to feel before other aspects catch up to it with verbal and visual information. And commentary can be anything from the building of suspense that accompanies an otherwise innocent scene to

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16 There are relatively few studies of attention in the contemporary study of culture; two important exceptions are Jonathan Crary’s *Suspensions of Perception* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) and Jonathan Beller’s *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH, 2006). Questions of attention in music listening are addressed in Marta García Quiñones’ ‘Escucha Ambiental y Tradición Musical: Cuando las emisoras de música clásica programan para el oyente distraído’, in Marta García Quiñones (ed.), *La música que no se escucha* (Barcelona, 2008), and Ola Stockfelt’s ‘Adequate Modes of Listening’ in David Schwartz and Anahid Kassabian (eds), *Keeping Score* (Charlottesville, VA, 1997), pp. 129–46.
something more like ostranenie (the Russian formalist idea of defamiliarization) or Vemnfremdungseffekt (Bertolt Brecht’s idea, based on ostranenie, a distanciation or alienation effect). In this last usage, music discourages psychic identification with a scene or character, encouraging critical faculties to remain active.

When these various meaning formations of a cue overlap, very creative uses of music can arise. In Hearing Film, the example I used was the theme of Jaws, which, after its first appearance identifies the shark, its low-pitch ostinato signifying mood (threat/danger), and its appearance before the shark is visible, constituting commentary. Similarly, Boschi has argued that the use of Nick Drake’s ‘Fly’ in The Royal Tenenbaums comments on Richie’s state of mind, both lyrically and with reference to Drake’s star-text, and creates a mood for his conversation with Margot.\footnote{Boschi, “Please, Give Me Second Grace”} And, for one last example, the sequence in Bloodbath at the House of Death (a spoof of horror films starring Vincent Price) in which a character walks down a hallway, the camera shooting over his shoulder, the solo cello increasing in volume, clearly signifying threat, until he reaches the end of the hallway, opens the door, and finds someone sitting on the toilet, trousers around his ankles, playing the cello. These complex and multivalent uses of music in films offer unusually wide ranges of possibilities for music in relation to other forms or aspects of a form.

With a carefully constructed cue sheet in hand, each of these questions should be reasonably easy to answer. The question then becomes what to make of it. Here, my approach always is to pinpoint music’s distinctive contribution, which might be posed as follows:

- What do we hear that we don’t see?
- What do we hear musically that we don’t hear verbally?
- What do we hear musically before hearing it verbally or seeing it?

The meanings or ideas or emotions that music evokes or expresses in advance of, or exclusive to, other aspects often turns out to be very interesting indeed, in part because it may well be affecting perceivers’ interpretations without consciously registering. The clearest example of this would be horror music, which is a very interesting topic indeed.\footnote{The edited collections from Mark Evans’s series and from Routledge on horror film music.} Horror films would be a great challenge without recourse to the musical tactics that build suspense and tension over the long sequences during which we, as audience members, know something is about to happen (even though most or all of the characters on screen don’t), but not what or when. But more subtle uses can be found, too. Dangerous Minds, I suggested in Hearing Film, does something less predictable in the score (by Wendy and Lisa, formerly of Prince’s orbit) than in the film, and it is certainly possible to interpret the score as an internal critique of the liberal-white-educator-saviour narrative that is the recognizable trajectory of the film.
In sum, then, a cue sheet makes possible interpretations of films that are subtle and supple and musically sensitive, and a series of well-executed cue sheets can lead to larger theoretical arguments about, for example, the relationship between specific film genres and specific musical strategies, or character types and musical genres, or orchestrations and affect.

But is a cue sheet a viable approach to the study of all relationships among music and moving image? While film music and sound are just barely taking their place in the academic canon of approved objects of study, film has already been supplanted, many would argue, by other forms as the dominant mediated narrative of everyday life in the West. Certainly television has occupied that place of honour, and it would not be difficult to contend that even television has been supplanted by the Web and videogames.

So what of the cue sheet in these media?

Well, the answer is not as simple as one might have hoped. In the case of television, which is by far the closest analogue to film, series demand an analysis that extends over multiple episodes, so the cue sheet remains pertinent, but multiplies even at first glance in number. Moreover, however, television studies since Raymond Williams’s argument about ‘flow’ have recognized that the operative unit of television reception is not necessarily the single programme. Programming happens in blocks, and it is advertised and written about in those terms. This is how television marketing is understood – a mode of thinking not similarly available to scholars. While compelling approaches to the study of flow are lacking, and while scholars still write about single programmes, or even single episodes of series, a clear and identifiable problem persists in thinking about music and television.

In ‘Television Studies: Why the Silence?’, Michele Hilmes has made this argument quite clearly. She suggests that we think of television in terms of its ‘streaming seriality’ and of its tendency to use sound ‘to bridge the different textual levels and mark them within the diegesis’, what she calls television’s ‘supertext’. Clearly, the study of television music and sound presents problems not simply addressed by importing approaches from the study of film sound and music. Unfortunately, as Hilmes and others have argued, there is a dearth of scholarship in this area.

And that’s only the beginning. The Web and videogames present a whole new order of problems. Almost all of film music scholarship is focused on the matching of visual and musical events. Meaning is produced – or, as I prefer, evoked – in that match. But neither music on websites nor videogame music can be organized by such events, because interactivity creates a situation wherein the control of the user is such that a change – of location, of activity and so forth – can happen at any time. This makes both matching and visual events associated with musical changes more or less impossible, unless, of course, one were prepared to tolerate

musical ‘jump cuts’ – radical shifts from a prior unresolved musical field to a new, unrelated, unprepared one.

Music on websites and in video games, it seems to me, focuses on two of the categories I discussed above in relation to film music: identification and mood. Identification is a well-worn staple of film music, and discussions of these uses appear over and over again both in scholarship and in writings by, and interviews with, composers.

In July of 2007, the New York Times called to interview me for a piece about music on real estate developers’ websites. Splashed on the front page of the section on 5 August 2007 was an article, ‘Selling a Concept with a Song’ by Stephanie Rosenbloom, about high-end condominium developers using music on their websites. In preparation for our interview, I looked at and listened to lots of websites for high-end products such as condominiums, sports cars, designer clothing, jewellry and so on. To my surprise, most of these were silent.

Moreover, the ones that had music, like the ones Rosenbloom was interested in her article, were using music in highly predictable ways. Not only were they predictable, but they were very much like the videogames: they used classical music to signify elegance and class (Richard Meier’s ‘On Prospect Park’ has a minimalist piano piece, for example), smooth jazz to signify relaxation (the newly converted Plaza Hotel has a jazz trio), world lounge and techno to signify downtown hipness (the Setai, New York, bought tracks from the Buddha Bar CD series).

This is hardly surprising. Both composers and scholars – and producers of all kinds – know that music is a quick and effective shorthand to do the cultural work of communicating identity. And so both games and websites think of this as a possibility, and I think of it when I listen to them. (In fact, so did the article’s author, Stephanie Rosenbloom. She heard most of the same things I did, which I take to indicate that our insights have been around long enough to have been made public, which seems to me to take somewhere from 10–20 years. That alone suggests it might be time for some new ones.)

The other major category of activity in film and television music has always been mood, and you hear this in the games and websites, too, but in a much more diffuse way. Because of the absence of synchronization, they can only communicate the most general and diffuse of moods, such as the relaxing ‘vibe’ of smooth jazz on the Plaza website. In games, one sometimes finds mood music in, for example, fight sequences. So while quest-based games more frequently use music to establish place and identity, as I discussed a minute ago, some hack ‘n’ slash games, such as Devil May Cry, will have rock or dance music, such as darkwave, to accompany

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25 Devil May Cry (Hideki Kamiya, 2001).
fight sequences. In mixed games, such as *Prince of Persia*, music along those lines accompanies fight sequences, but not puzzle activities. What becomes clear, then, is the inversely proportional relationship between attention and synchronicity. When music is far forward in the attentional field, such as in websites, synchronicity is relatively minimal. When music is in the background, however, synchronicity helps to keep it that way, by practices such as ‘sneaking’, ‘an industry term for beginning a musical cue at low volume usually under dialogue so that the spectator would be unaware of its presence’. This is an area in music, sound and moving image studies begging to be studied.

This leads me to the question of areas of study. Music, sound and the moving image is a field with a very broad range of unexplored areas – it really is a paradise for postgraduates.

Before I offer an idea of a new theoretical direction, I want to reiterate a tentative list of topics I’d like to see studied. I first offered these at the Sound, Music and the Moving Image conference organized by the Institute for Musical Research in September 2007, and I was greatly heartened by the number of people who came up to me afterwards to tell me they were working on one or another of the things I mentioned. The list will quickly become dated, but it is important that we keep generating ideas of new areas into which the field should be pushed. Here’s my current list:

1. Hollywood sound, and indeed, film sound in general, where Liz Weis’s and John Belton’s early and important anthology was less generative than one might have hoped, although there are a few projects in the pipeline, including work by both Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda on point-of-audition and subjective sounds;

2. Other national or regional cinemas, where the European Film Music collection edited by Miguel Mera and David Burnand makes an important opening and where Phil Brophy’s discussions of bodily sounds in sports and violent films and sound design in anime open whole new fields of inquiry; Mark Slobin’s forthcoming collection on global film music will also add to this literature;

3. Non-Hollywood English language films, an area in which Annette Davison’s book stands alone, at least to my knowledge;

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26 *Prince of Persia* (Jordan Mechner, 1989).
27 *Kalinak, Settling the Score*, p. 99.
28 Liz Weis and John Belton, *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1985).
29 Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (eds), *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (Champaign, 2008).
30 Miguel Mera and David Burnand (eds), *European Film Music* (Aldershot, 2006).
33 Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the*
4. Television music, where work by Norma Coates and Murray Forman, and the special issue of Popular Music edited by Keith Negus and John Street are beginnings; questions to pursue would include the widespread use of popular music that has been commonplace at least since Dawson’s Creek and many others;

5. Music video, which has generated a number of good books and articles but which has still not developed into a field with something between the most general theorizing and specific textual analyses of single videos;

6. Animation, which with the exception of Dan Goldmark’s Tunes for Toons, has seen startlingly little inquiry into films, including Disney, the brothers Quay, Wallace and Gromit, Jan Švankmajer, or television, including anime series, contemporary adult programming such as Adult Swim and so on;

7. Music in film and TV advertising, where I think Kaarina Kilpiö’s work on ads from the 1950s to the 1970s shown in film theatres in Finland is exemplary, and also the paper on TV ads by Barry Salmon and the forthcoming collection edited by Nikolai Graakjaer and Christian Jantzen;

8. TV sound, where the only work I know is by Norwegian scholar Arnt Maasø, but there is indeed much to think about;

9. Experimental films, about which the artists themselves often express their thoughts on sound and music, but about which I know of no scholarly literature;


10. Video art, an area with a very small, but growing, body of work led not least by my colleague’s Holly Rogers’ article and book in progress;

11. Video games, another growing field, in which Karen Collins is one of the few experts – these studies should include the development of musical genres, of the relationships between musical practices and technological challenges and possibilities, and of expressly musical games;

12. Music on the Web – here I know of no scholarship whatsoever, and the questions and genres abound – Internet ads, viral videos, websites, porn sites, MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) and other online game genres all present distinct challenges to prevailing scholarly models and tools;

13. Music in film and television documentaries – Alfred W. Cochran and Neil Lerner have each produced good work in this area, but it is crying out for sustained attention;

14. The various new forms being developed due to new technologies, from ‘Misheard Lyrics’ videos on YouTube (for example, the one of Sean Paul’s ‘Temperature’ or the Moroccan videos that Tony Langlois discusses in Miguel Mera’s forthcoming special issue of Music, Sound, and the Moving Image on adaptations, in which artists use an astounding array of video clips to accompany their own works, to Shzr Ee Tan’s paper on a podcast critical – in a very tongue-in-cheek, parodic way – of current politics in Singapore.

All of these topics, and many others, should be generating many projects. We might think of music, sound, and moving image as an academic growth industry, not entirely in jest. I have always thought that this is one of the most important arenas of musical and media scholarship, on the one hand precisely because it has the least developed vocabulary, which makes it difficult for audiences to engage critically, and on the other hand because it teaches much – perhaps nearly all – about music and meaning to most listeners who grow up with films and television. It also invites connections to sound studies, an arena in which lots of very exciting scholarship is going on and which is, I would argue, another academic growth industry.

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43 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfXke_z6t3I>.


But to return to the problem of new theoretical directions in this field, I’ll begin from what might seem like an unlikely place. I’ve always thought that the critique of clichés in Adorno and Eisler’s *Composing for the Films* was itself vulgar and wrong-headed, because it fails to understand the nature of signification. Music signifies precisely by using well-worn connections between musical materials and processes and non-musical ideas, just as language does. The connection between a sound and an idea is established through use over time, becoming a convention and ultimately a meaning. You can’t abandon clichés, because they are precisely the tools of the compositional trade, at least in mainstream film production settings.

Remembering this gave me pause as I was thinking about the real estate websites. I know full well that what I’m saying runs the risk of being exactly the same thing I disagree with in Adorno and Eisler. But it seems to me – and I hope – that I’m thinking about the problem of clichés from a different direction. I’m not concerned that timbres or chord progressions mean particular things – that’s not only quite useful, but also one of the fundamental strategies available to music and the moving image specifically, and to musical signification more generally. Rather, I’m concerned that the palette of ideas that people ask music to express is too limited.

There are two problems here, not one. First, film music composers, and to a lesser extent theatre and opera composers before them, learned very early on that music could quickly and effectively communicate geography, history, class, race – all kinds of things we might call identity in a large way, or place in another generously conceived way. This means that for advertising especially, but for the games as well, communicating an identity or place is handy – it’s well-prepared, easy to accomplish, and it can speak to either an audience’s actual location, an aspirational one or a complete fantasy.

Second, I think we are at a challenging theoretical junction, created on the one hand by our overreliance on models from literary and cultural studies, and on the other by the centrality of place and identity in the study of culture generally. I’m always suspicious of arguments about the specificity of forms because they so often serve as excuses; nevertheless, I’m quite sure that the different relationships of sound and music to referentiality and representation mean not only that we need to develop our own theories about those things, but also that we need to imagine that things might be communicated aurally that are not communicated visually or verbally. Certainly in the growing arena of theories of affect, for instance, sound and music must have a particular place. I will return to affect below, because I think it may offer some interesting futures for us.

The prevalence of studies of identity across the disciplines is clear, and it has certainly left its mark on the study of sound and music in moving image media. *Hearing Film* was one of many works deeply marked by that tradition – I am by no means suggesting that it was unproductive or a dead-end. But it has in some ways become a path of least resistance, one well-worn way to think about the relationships of aural materials and visual images. As I argued earlier, identity/identification and mood are the two holdovers from film music practices into non-synchronous audiovisual forms like websites and especially videogames. These uses, combined
with the challenge of non-synchronicity, open onto questions of affect in particular ways. As Patricia Clough writes in her introduction to *The Affective Turn*, current scholarship treats

... affectivity as a substrate of potential bodily responses, often autonomic responses, in excess of consciousness. For these scholars, affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, to engage, and to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive – that is, aliveness or vitality.

This description resonated for me, from the moment I read it, with what music in general, and film music in particular, is routinely said to do. It draws on potential bodily responses, often autonomic, raising heart rate, tears and arousal of all kinds. This is what is generally called mood, although in the literature the term is far too broad to be useful. But the physiological responses we have to the musical processes that signify terror, for example, are preconscious, and if we could begin to understand these responses, we might be able to offer new strategies for website music and many other things.

Before readers assume that this might mean something that precedes the social, or that logically precedes consciousness, let me offer you Clough’s next few lines.

Yet affect is not ‘presocial,’ as Massumi argues. There is a reflux back from conscious experience to affect, which is registered, however, as affect, such that ‘past action and contexts are conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed.’ Affect constitutes a nonlinear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracted, but always with ‘a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder’.

In other words, conscious experiences are banked in the body, accreting autonomic responses to them, so that in the future the response precedes conscious recognition of the stimulus. This is why my heart starts beating faster before I notice the rising rate and volume of the ostinato that warns me something is about to happen.

There is, of course, much, much more to say on the topic of affect, but I offer it here as a potential new approach. Here, then, we can see an approach to film music that sidesteps semiotic approaches to the question of music and meaning, moving instead towards a kind of embodied information storage and retrieval system that short-circuits, as it were, conscious or cognitive engagements. What I perceive consciously, first, is my body’s responses, not the stimulus and its meaning. My point is simply this – our models for the study of audiovisual relationships and audiovisual media have relied on narration and narrativity on the one hand, and

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47 Ibid., p. 2.
48 Ibid.
synchronization of sound and image on the other. If we begin to think about affect instead – provoked not least by the changes that videogames and websites make audible – new possibilities arise. This ability to produce affective responses, or affect itself, is one of music’s singular strengths. Precisely because of its difficult relationship to referentiality and representation, music has always operated on the plane of affect. Thus while different forms of audiovisual media may require different methods of study – be they cue sheets, lists of songs across a programming block, or other as-yet-undeveloped tools – a consideration of affect may turn out to be a unifying approach across this widely disparate field of cultural activity. Our pounding heartbeats may yet lead us to new and fruitful theoretical approaches to the study of music, sound and the moving image.

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Films and Videogames


Devil May Cry (Hideki Kamiya, 2001).

Jaws (1975) directed by Steven Spielberg, music by John Williams, Universal Pictures.

Prince of Persia (Jordan Mechner, 1989).

Radiofreccia (1998) directed by Luciano Ligabue, music by Luciano Ligabue, Medusa.
