

Hearing Film

Tracking Identifications in Contemporary
Hollywood Film Music

Anahid Kassabian

Routledge
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Listening for Identifications

A Prologue

I can hear it as if it were yesterday. I was sitting in a classroom, “watching” John Cassavetes’s *A Woman Under the Influence*. My heart broke every time I heard Gena Rowlands sing the “Dying Swan,” and my eyes welled with tears at the image of a black laborer singing “Celeste Aida” for a dozen of his coworkers at the breakfast table of this tortured, crazy Italian-American lady. Why, I wondered, did none of the course readings, and none of the readings in any other courses, care about or try to explain this experience? Why didn’t they attend to film’s music, when it seemed to me so obviously crucial? I spent my senior year, and my first year or two in graduate school in the mid-eighties, writing about that film and its music. (My friends referred to it as the only film I’d ever seen.) Fifteen years later, it hardly appears in this book; my questions eventually drew me elsewhere. But its shadows are throughout.

Hearing Film begins from a simple premise I first began to think about in class that day. Music draws filmgoers into a film’s world, measure by measure. It is, I will argue, at least as significant as the visual and narrative components that have dominated film studies. It conditions identification processes, the encounters between film texts and filmgoers’ psyches. The study of film music, however, cannot begin by simply tagging music on to previous approaches to film.

Hearing Film calls for a major shift in the study of film. First, any story of identifications with films must take account of engagements between filmgoers and film scores. Second, those engagements are conditioned by filmgoers' relationships to a wide range of musics both within and outside of their filmgoing practices. Third, the study of film music both requires and enables the study of the political and social relations of contemporary life.

Identification processes through film music cannot be understood in a single way—not all scores offer similar paths to identifications. There are two main approaches to film music in contemporary Hollywood: the composed score, a body of musical material composed specifically for the film in question; and the compiled score, a score built of songs that often (but not always) preexisted the film. Composed scores, most often associated with classical Hollywood scoring traditions, condition what I call *assimilating identifications*. Such paths are structured to draw perceivers¹ into socially and historically unfamiliar positions, as do larger scale processes of assimilation.

When an offer of assimilating identification is (unconsciously) accepted, perceivers can easily find themselves positioned anywhere—sledding down the Himalayas, for instance—and with anyone—a Lithuanian sub captain, perhaps, or a swashbuckling Mexican orphan peasant.² There is no necessary relationship between film perceivers and the identity positions they take on in an assimilating identification. Nor is there any relationship between their own histories and the positions. Scores that offer assimilating identifications, I argue, try to maintain fairly rigid control over such processes, even as—or because—they encourage unlikely identifications.

Compiled scores, however, can operate quite differently. With their range of complete songs used just as they are heard on the

radio, they bring the immediate threat of history. Most people in the movie theater, even on opening day, have probably heard at least a few of the songs before, whether the score is made up of oldies or new releases. Airplay for the songs may serve as good advertising for the film, but it means that perceivers bring external associations with the songs into their engagements with the film.³ A score that offers assimilating identifications is much harder to construct from such songs. More often, compiled scores offer what I call *affiliating identifications*, and they operate quite differently from composed scores. These ties depend on histories forged outside the film scene, and they allow for a fair bit of mobility within it. If offers of assimilating identifications try to narrow the psychic field, then offers of affiliating identifications open it wide. This difference is, to my mind, at the heart of filmgoers' relationships to contemporary film music.

I chose to focus on contemporary films for several reasons. First, we have heard a great flowering in film music. The thick expansive orchestral scores of John Williams and Danny Elfman have been side-by-side in theaters with, on the one hand, the much sparer sounds of Hans Zimmer and Terence Blanchard, and on the other with compiled scores of music by Sublime, Celine Dion, Dinah Washington, Barrio Boyz, Marianne Faithfull, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Pinetop Perkins. The soundtracks of the 1980s and 1990s provide a veritable candy store for film music scholars.

Second, there is far too little work in this area. Film music scholarship has privileged mass-market U.S. films of the first half of the twentieth century, from silents to “classical Hollywood.”⁴ Substantial work has been done on silent film music (Anderson 1987; Marks 1997), where questions focus on sources of musical materials and performance practices. Most film music scholarship

focuses heavily, if not exclusively, on classical Hollywood practices (Gorbman 1987; Flinn 1992; Kalinak 1992; and Brown 1994). In this scholarship, the concerns have been dominated by the music's relationship to the film's narrative systems and operations.

Third, contemporary films pose a new set of problems to film music scholars. First, decades of political struggles by women and people of color have made possible films—*Mississippi Masala*, *Mi Familia/My Family*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Mi Vida Loca*, *Boyz N the Hood*, *Waiting to Exhale*, and *Malcolm X*—that would never have been made under the classical Hollywood studio system. These films have not only changed the narrative landscape of mainstream moviemaking, but they have also significantly broadened its range of musical materials.

Fourth, I have chosen to work on contemporary Hollywood film because I find some versions of the return to historicism in film studies disturbing. "The end result has been a new antiquarianism, [which] seeks to delegitimize the sort of engaged interventionist analysis that made film theory such a vital force in the academy during the 1970s and 1980s" (Collins, Radner, and Collins 1993: 2–3). My focus on the 1980s and 1990s allows me to consider film music's role in the changing pressures of identity formations such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender.

Finally, the pandering of mass media industries first to the "baby boom generation" and more recently to "Gen X" has led to an explosion in the use of compiled soundtracks. These soundtracks pose an entire new field of questions for film music scholars. For example, Jeff Smith (1998) discusses the placement and marketing of songs in such scores. Daniel Goldmark suggested recently that there are important questions about the gendered division of labor and the roles of composers versus music supervisors, the people (often women) who choose the music for compiled scores.⁵ My argument here is a comparative one: compiled scores offer

affiliating identifications, a major shift from the assimilating identifications offered by classical Hollywood scoring practices.

This book treats contemporary film music because it is an understudied arena that provides an occasion to think through new musical materials, composition practices, narrative landscapes, psychic processes, and social contexts.

Over the course of film's century-long existence, film music has always had an odd status. On the one hand, it has been a subject of much discussion. There is an enormous body of public intellectual, journalistic criticism, in the form of reviews of scores and recordings and interviews with and biographies of great composers. There is also a slimmer body of scholarly work, from early works like Kurt London's 1936 *Film Music* to Royal S. Brown's 1994 *Overtones and Undertones*. On the other hand, no significant body of criticism actively includes analysis of film music; it has rarely been pursued by the semiotic, narratological, or psychoanalytic theorists of (what they call) "film." The film of these theorists and their theories, seen but never heard, was more silent than any silent film. So not only has film music scholarship failed to ignite broad swaths of critical imagination, but the music itself has, for the most part, been bracketed from film scholarship altogether.

Hearing Film seeks, quite bluntly, to change all that. There is no more sense in calling a visual object of analysis a "film" than there is in calling a screenplay a "film." A film as perceived by any kind of audience—public or scholarly—has words, sounds, images, and music. It is not merely *seen*, as in "I saw the greatest film the other day," nor simply viewed by "film viewers." Music and filmgoers engage each other in bonds that intersect other tracks of films in complicated ways. My purpose, here, is to help provide some tools for considering both the identifications and the role of those ties in perceivers' experiences of films.

Like all forms of culture, music presents its students with particular problems. One argument, for example, suggests that music is somehow specifically and unmediatedly of the body, that music works on listeners at least in part without the mediation of culture. Some music scholars argue that rhythm, volume, and vocal timbre are acoustical relations between physics (e.g., sound wave characteristics) and physiology (e.g., increased pulse rate).⁶ This is undeniable, as are the relations between physics and physiology that condition vision; the very perception of motion on film relies on them. This is no site on which to distinguish music from verbal or visual representations.

The significant difference between words or pictures and music is, rather, that music is *understood* as nonrepresentational. The heated nineteenth-century debates about program music attest to the commitment of many musicians and composers to this notion. Certainly, most of twentieth-century western art music composition styles—atonality, serialism, aleatory music, computer compositional procedures, and perhaps even minimalism—depend on the notion that music does not “mean” in any direct sense of the term. But the word shift within this paragraph is precisely the shift that takes place in debates over meaning and music: somehow, “representation” and “meaning” come to be synonymous, and arguments that music is “nonrepresentational” are (implicitly, at least) understood as proving that music does not “mean” in any recognizable sense of the term.

I contest this notion quite strongly, for several reasons. First, considerations of music “in general” seem inevitably to take post-Enlightenment western art music as their point of departure (see, e.g., Kivy 1990, 1993). This logic is fascinatingly tautological: in order to consider a general question about universal properties of the organized patterns of sound that constitute music most inclusively defined, these music theorists and philosophers

go directly to the music with which they are most familiar and that was produced within the epistemological framework that conditions their own thinking. Rather than considering, for example, early-nineteenth-century American whaling songs or classical Arabic improvisational music, arguments about the “absoluteness” of music depend on music written as “absolute music” to begin with.⁷ Film music, while born out of the traditions of nineteenth-century European symphonic music, was never meant to be absolute; it has always been considered a meaning-making system by its producers.

Second, there is now a body of work that contests even western art music’s relationship to the production of meaning. Susan McClary has argued that music is ideologically marked:

... the Mozart piano concerto movement with which we are concerned neither makes up its own rules nor derives them from some abstract, absolute, transcendental source. Rather it depends heavily on conventions of eighteenth-century harmonic syntax, formal procedure, genre type, rhythmic propriety, gestural vocabulary, and associations. All of these conventions have histories: social histories marked with national, economic, class and gender—that is, political—interests. (1986: 53)

That perspective on music is growing throughout the discipline. A number of books and anthologies are considering the relationships between various musics, including western art music, and other important axes of contemporary cultural analysis (e.g., gender, autonomous art, disciplinarity, sexuality, value).⁸ This body of scholarship would strongly suggest that film music engages its listeners in important processes of producing and reproducing meanings and ideologies.

Third, mainstream Hollywood film music practices may well

constitute the only musical lingua franca in contemporary western industrialized societies. Because of the monopoly practices of U.S. studios in the global film, television, and music industries, virtually everyone grows into some degree of competence in the languages of film, television, and popular music. As George Antheil said,

Your musical tastes become molded by these scores, heard without knowing it. You *see* love, and you *hear* it. Simultaneously. It makes sense. Music suddenly becomes a language for you, without your knowing it. (1945, as quoted in Thomas 1973: 171)

Rather than presenting an abstract universalism like absolute music, film music functions as a global culture that begs to be studied.

Fourth, specific musics engage with their listeners in specific modes of meaning production. While it may be the case that societies universally produce organizations of sound, it is by no means clear that everyone does so for the same or even related reasons. Music consumption in contemporary western industrialized societies is broadly figured as a leisure activity (although music is also ubiquitously present in workplaces, on telephones, and in stores). But “listening” as an act of consumption does not translate across all cultural borders; in some cultures that do not share production/consumption distinctions with advanced capitalism, music is understood as a participatory process. Even within U.S. mass-mediated musical culture, there is no reason to believe that “new country,” “hip-hop,” “alternative,” and “classic rock” condition meaning production identically or even similarly. Different musics are meant to be listened to differently, and they engage listeners differently.

Finally, meaning production and identification processes are inextricably intertwined, and therefore any consideration of the

question of meaning must inevitably consider the axis called variously “consumption,” “reception,” and “reading” in different theoretical paradigms. As de Certeau suggests,

Many, often remarkable, works have sought to study the representations of a society, on the one hand, and its modes of behavior, on the other. Building on our knowledge of these social phenomena, it seems both possible and necessary to determine the use to which they are put by groups or individuals. For example, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer “makes” or “does” during this time and with these images. The same goes for the use of urban space, the products purchased in the supermarket, the stories and legends distributed by the newspapers, and so on. (1984: xii)

That “and so on,” I am insisting, includes music in general and film music in particular. One important distinction, then, between this book and recent studies of film music is precisely this question of use. While both Gorbman (1987) and Kalinak (1992) focus in particular on the textual strategies of classical Hollywood film scores, I emphasize what de Certeau calls “use” and what I have been calling the production of meaning and processes of identification.

I have chosen to avoid the technical language of music studies wherever possible. This is not because, like some popular music scholars, I question its usefulness, but rather, because it would oppose one of my main purposes. Because music has been claimed by an expert discourse, people feel unauthorized to talk about it. Further, as Kalinak has pointed out, music has long been understood as having unmediated access to the soul (it “soothes the

savage breast”), which also means that it is an article of faith that music cannot be consciously apprehended except through its expert formalist discourse.

Most people imagine that they cannot say anything about music, in spite of regular practices of buying, listening to, and often producing music. They imagine this in spite of regular conversations about songs, performers, albums, radio stations, and concerts; about what tapes they use to work out to, walk to, or cook to; about stylistic pedigrees and generic histories, and much more. While film scholars do not generally feel a need to professionalize themselves in art history or linguistics before talking about “a film,” the strong hold of the “expert discourse ideology” of music has kept a tight lid on the production of studies of film music, and an even tighter lid on their routine inclusion in courses, theorizing, and criticism. I have charted a different path, one that should enable film scholars to talk about music comfortably and willingly as a routine part of their work.

To this end, there are transcriptions of musical examples throughout the book. These are piano reductions, and in no way offer themselves as objects of study to musicologists or music theorists. They are utterly insufficient to that task. But for those readers who were put through a few years of piano lessons, they offer an opportunity to hear a melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic sketch of the music under discussion. I hope sitting down and plunking them out will offer a small pleasure as well as add some support to my arguments.

Hearing Film has two main sections. The first, consisting of chapters 1 and 2, lays the groundwork for studying film music and identification processes. It provides basic tools for reading film scores from the perspective of film perceivers, tools that will be put to use in the later, analytical chapters.

The first chapter, “How Film Music Works,” discusses music and ideology. Over their long history, debates about music and meaning have tended to consider music in the most general terms. I argue instead that, music in general aside, classical Hollywood film music must be thought of as a semiotic system. Musical discourse analysis raises particular problems, however, with a simple transfer of ideas about language to music. Through an analysis of a quantitative study of the responses of six hundred listeners to ten film and television title themes, I argue that film music is, for example, a gendered discourse. (The results of the study suggest that similar arguments could be made about race, sexuality, class, and their mutual imbrication.)

In the second chapter, “How Music Works in Film,” I describe the relationships among single events of music and other aspects of the film. Any one instance of music has various relationships:

- to other music, both within the same film and more generally;
- to the narrative and the world it creates; and
- to other tracks of the film (visual images, dialogue, sound effects).

The purpose of this chapter is both to describe these relationships and their place in the Hollywood film music signifying system and to begin developing some vocabulary for describing them from the perspective of film perceivers. No critical or theoretical practice can proceed without such a vocabulary.

The second section of the book, chapters 3, 4, and 5, considers groups or pairs of films that raise particular questions for the study of contemporary Hollywood scores and how they condition assimilating and affiliating identification processes. Each chapter intertwines discussions of scholarship, readings of film scores, and development of a theoretical position.

“A Woman Scored” (chapter 3) considers early debates in feminist psychoanalytic film theory and in popular music studies specifically as they bear on developing a theory of film music. I argue that, beginning in these formative moments, each field represses the central categories of the other. “Desire” and “agency,” concepts central to these debates, so often bubble to the surface in both the theoretical texts of each field and the scores of contemporary Hollywood films that they cannot be avoided. I focus in particular on a group of films—*Dangerous Liaisons*, *Desert Hearts*, *Bagdad Cafe*, *Dirty Dancing*, and *Thelma and Louise*—that put strong female characters, desiring subjects with plenty of agency, at their centers. After readings of both theoretical texts and films, the chapter concludes by positing a theoretical framework particularly directed toward considering modes of identification through music in films.

In the fourth chapter, “At the Twilight’s Last Scoring,” I pose the question: What metaphors or models of identification can describe relations of different axes of identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) and different modes of textuality (visual, verbal, musical)? As part of the liberal discourse of the nation, the category of “American” claims to include all axes of identity. As part of the mass culture discourse of Hollywood, however, “American” is established negatively precisely as excluding those identities the nation’s liberal discourse claims to include. Through critiques of three 1980s action-adventure blockbusters (*The Hunt for Red October*, *Lethal Weapon 2*, and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*), I develop a theory based on the notion of “assimilation.” Subjects marginalized by dominant ideologies are not excluded in these films, but rather are “invited” to identify temporarily with the straight white male hero, whether or not they also manage the difficult process of identifying with a non-straight, non-white, and/or non-male character.

In the final chapter, “Opening Scores,” I return to films that, like those in chapter 3, make available a wider range of identificatory possibilities. Comparing two films set in high schools—*Dangerous Minds* and *The Substitute*—and two interracial romances—*Mississippi Masala* and *Corrina, Corrina*—I consider how film scores can group together several different entry points of identification. To describe engagements with such scores, I use the metaphor of “affiliating” identifications, in contrast to the narrowing track offered for assimilating identifications. The chapter closes with a discussion of the relationships between these two directions and their relationships with and coexistence in scores.

Throughout the literature on how films engage viewers (or spectators or audiences) in identification processes, there is very little mention of music. And throughout the literature on film music, there is very little work on identification processes. Yet music is one of the major tools Hollywood films use to track identifications. Through two distinct models of contemporary Hollywood musical practice, two paths of engagement have developed. The ties between assimilating identifications and composed scores on the one hand, and affiliating identifications and compiled scores on the other, are not absolute, but they are important. Moreover, some scores combine both kinds of music and both kinds of offers of identification. There is, I hope and assume, much more to say about these questions than can be said in one book.

Hearing Film will have succeeded if you, the reader, come away convinced of three things. First, music conditions perceivers’ psychic engagements with films. Second, no serious theory of identification processes can be silent. And third, different scores condition different identification processes. Weighty cultural, ideological, subjective work is done by controlling, assimilating identifications on the one hand, and by opening, affiliating ones on the other.

We make our lives in identifications with the texts around us every day. Many of these texts are music, yet we continue to think of them as background, perhaps absent from consciousness, perhaps entertaining, perhaps annoying, but in all cases ultimately innocuous. *Hearing Film* offers a different perspective on one arena of these ubiquitous sounds. It is my most dearly held hope that readers will come away from this book convinced of the importance of listening critically to films. Not as an addendum to careful visual or narrative analysis, but as a central part of any and every film critical practice. Every discourse, from political rhetoric to academic discipline-speak to fashion, demands careful, thoughtful, informed attention, and ubiquitous musics such as film music are no exception.

But the beginning of any critical practice must be a consideration of how meaning is made, the question to which I turn in the following chapter.

1

How Film Music Works

There has been a tendency in European and American thought since the Enlightenment to categorize music as a particularly pure art. Music has been understood to produce meaning only on the most abstract, spiritual, or formal levels. Baroque and pre-Baroque notions that, for example, specific scales or phrases might have specific meanings have been denounced since the Enlightenment. Music became the foremost example of autonomous art, art for art's sake. Communication of meaning came to be considered outside the realm of music's tasks; western instrumental art music is called "absolute." As Stravinsky put it:

... I consider that music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature. If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality. (1936: 91)

Expressing the same view, Adorno argues in his typology of musical listeners that music listening ought to be concerned with form, not imagined meaning. The fourth type of listener in his hierarchy is the "emotional listener," about whom he says:

Moreover, the problem of the “conscious”/“unconscious” distinction and simultaneity returns us to the “attention” continuum. It might seem that this continuum could be expressed in terms of degree of *conscious* attention, but the above consideration of horror music should make the problems with this clear. On the other hand, it is less likely, as a broad generality, that perceivers will pay as much attention to mood music as to commentary, or (from the reverse perspective) that, for example, sole-soundtrack music will be perceived as subconsciously as music under dialogue.

A Preliminary Vocabulary for Film Music Analysis

In separating the issues discussed in the sections “Music and the Narrative,” “Music and the Scene,” and “Music and the Message,” I tried not to encourage the kind of analytical method I avoided throughout this chapter. None of these issues exists separately from any other, but they must be recognized before their relationships can be analyzed. It is important to note that in the analysis of any specific film music, treating one of these issues is likely to be misleading without also considering the others and the relationships among them. I have indicated within the chapter what an analysis of these relationships might look like, using terms from earlier sections to point out common (clichéd?) alignments such as “ethnic one-time dramatic scoring.” These common alignments remain among the many underanalyzed aspects of film music.

Establishing that film music is a semiotic system both in its own right and within films only makes possible the process of analyzing the dispersed identification processes within which it operates. Film music conditions identification processes in powerful ways. Throughout the second section of this study, I will argue that analyses of those identification processes provide a new realm of possibilities for both film theory and the study of music.

3

A Woman Scored

During the 1980s, the number of films scored with popular music soundtracks rose dramatically. Films from a wide range of genres appeared with pop soundtracks of various kinds. The success of the soundtrack album of *The Big Chill* created a craze for compiled scores, that is, soundtracks that are a compilation of (usually rock and pop) songs, while growing numbers of MIDI-literate musicians offered the possibility of synthesized scores at very attractive prices. These trends provoke many different kinds of questions for both producers and scholars. What kinds of pop scores are most common? Which films (or groups or genres of films) tend to have popular music scores? What meanings do pop scores bring to films? What meanings might audiences make of them?

These questions take on a particular shape in compiled popular music scores for films centering on female characters. After marking some founding “deaf spots” in popular music studies and feminist film theory, I discuss the scores of several such films that do not use classical Hollywood scoring. They suggest that compiled scores, at least, require new approaches that stage productive critiques of both popular music studies and feminist film theory.

Returning Desire and Agency:
Simon Frith and Teresa de Lauretis

Much work in popular music studies takes place on the terrain of Marxist approaches to popular culture. As Keith Negus writes in his introductory popular music studies textbook,

In chapter 1 I start by considering how different writers have characterized the audiences for popular music (which in recent times has frequently been as active, creative and oppositional) and then provide an immediate contrast to this in chapter 2 by focusing on approaches to the music industry (often portrayed as mechanistic, exploitative and conservative). These first two chapters are set up in this way so as to emphasize a series of dichotomies that have often separated discussions of musical production and consumption (commerce/creativity, determinism/free will, constraining/liberating). . . . (1996: 2)

Such oppositions have long haunted much work in popular music studies. As early as *Sound Effects* (1981), Simon Frith identified the conflict and worked through both positions; nearly twenty years later, the question persists.

Early feminist film theory had to contend with a similar theoretical sticking point, although it appears at first glance to be radically different. Psychoanalytic film theory focused on what it called “spectatorship” or “spectator positionality,” textually produced subject positions from which a film can be read. This spectatorship involved an elaborate series of mechanisms, all deployed in ways that made the film the endpoint of the camera’s gaze, and the protagonist—and by a series of transferences, the director and the spectator—its beginning. When Laura Mulvey pointed out in 1975 that these models of film spectatorship were inherently (that

is, both theoretically and filmically) gendered, feminist theorists of film began a long struggle to describe feminine spectator positions and to account for identification processes available to women/female spectators.

Since that model of feminist film theory consistently worked from derivations of structuralist models of psychic processes (Lacan), narrative (Genette, Lotman), and language (Saussure), inquiry was mainly directed toward texts. Questions of either production and industries or consumption and audiences disappeared in discussions of how traditional editing practices and camera technique created suture and spectator positions. At worst, “readers” functioned only as spaces for the cultural product to do its work.

In “Desire in Narrative” (1984), a crucial early attempt to introduce the social into psychoanalytic theories, Teresa de Lauretis described identification processes that significantly resemble the oppression/liberation problem in popular music studies. She argued that there are two distinct kinds of relays that produce identification, one based on looking and seeing, the other on narrative. Visual identification, when considered without narrativity, might relegate the “woman spectator” to the entirely masculine position Mulvey first articulated. But, de Lauretis argued, narrative identification offers two different positions—“the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject, and . . . the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image” (1984: 144). In other words, a narrative has one and only one agent, and that agent is a male figure (the figure of narrative movement). As I described in chapter 1, de Lauretis built this argument on Jurij Lotman’s plot typology, in which he says that there are only two types of characters—mobile heroes and immobile figures of plot space—and two motions—entry into and exit from closed space. De Lauretis aligned immobile figures of plot space with “non-man, an absolute

abstraction" (p. 121), and further with the narrative image, the figure of narrative closure.

Through analysis of these two figures, she argued that narrative identification is *always* double;

both figures can and in fact must be identified with at once, for they are inherent in narrativity itself. It is this narrative identification that assures "the hold of the image," the anchoring of the subject in the flow of the film's movement; rather than, as Metz proposes, the primary identification with the all-perceiving subject of the gaze. (p. 144)

The coproduction of narrativity and spectatorship she posited connects the pair narrative movement/narrative image to seeing/seen. In terms of the deployment of power, these founding oppositions of feminist film theories and of Marxist popular culture studies—liberatory/oppressive, seeing/seen, narrative movement/narrative closure—are structurally identical and epistemologically similar. And de Lauretis's answer is quite similar to Frith's; each rejects the either/or option in favor of both/and. In terms of their relations to agency on the one hand and desire on the other, however, their differences demand close attention.

Theories of identification processes have still not adequately engaged questions of agency. Their concern has been with the structures and operations of desire and fantasy. But the consequence of these structuralist tendencies in psychoanalysis has been its undoing. Many feminist theorists have abandoned it altogether in favor of, for example, empirical audience studies, not least because psychoanalytic theory's "stiffness" makes it difficult to talk about differences among women, or differences in identification processes, along lines other than gender or sexual difference.

On the other hand, Marxist theories of popular culture provide

no model for describing engagements between desire and texts. While "false consciousness" has long been critiqued as demeaning and overly simple, a dedication to agency and intentionality has prevailed in popular music studies, preventing it from considering subjectivity as a major theoretical issue. It is, for instance, telling that one of the earliest and only articles in popular music studies that engages film and literary studies' debates about subjectivity, Sean Cubitt's "Maybellene: Meaning and the Listening Subject" (1984), is rarely cited and has not yet provoked a similar debate in popular music studies. Similarly, David Schwarz's article "Listening Subjectivity" ([1993] 1997a) on new minimal music has not been taken up by music theory or musicologists. "Listening" has never come close to having the same intellectual force as "reading" in literary studies and "spectatorship" in film studies.

The similarity between Negus's description and the questions Simon Frith poses at the end of the second chapter of *Sound Effects* indicates the degree to which the opposition capitalist/oppressive versus populist/popular/liberatory still governs popular music studies. Frith says:

The problematic issue that runs (if in different ways) through the history of all forms of popular music since the development of industrial capitalism is the relationship between music as a means of popular expression and music as a means of making money. . . . [R]ock fun is never really "innocent"—there are always manipulative processes involved; but neither is rock consumption necessarily therefore "passive"—rock meanings aren't *determined* by their commercial means of production. (1981: 38)

Throughout the book, Frith attempts to maintain both positions simultaneously, but instead oscillates between them. The organization of the book itself contributes to producing this theoretical

problem: the sections are called “Rock Meanings,” “Rock Production,” and “Rock Consumption,” suggesting that separating these issues breaks them down into manageable “chunks.” It does, of course, but the separation also makes it difficult to trace the coproduction and comanagement of meaning, production, and pleasure. The problem of *Sound Effects* may be grounded in the difficulty of trying to think about rock music in circulation (through production, text, reading, and lived cultures) by thinking of it as a series of moments.

In the last two paragraphs of the book—a section entitled “Last Words”—Frith faces the oscillation again:

Rock music is capitalist music. It draws its meanings from the relationships of capitalist production, and it contributes, as a leisure activity, to the reproduction of those relationships; the music doesn’t challenge the system but reflects and illuminates it. Rock is about dreams and their regulation, and the strength of rock dreams comes not from their force as symbols, but from their relationship to the experience of work and leisure: the issue, finally, is not how to live outside capitalism (hippie or bohemian style), but how to live within it. The needs expressed in rock—for freedom, control, power, a sense of *life*—are needs defined by capitalism. And rock is a mass culture. It is not folk or art but a commoditized dream: it conceals as much as it reveals. For every individual illuminating account of our common situation there are a hundred mass musical experiences that disguise it. Rock, for all the power of its individual dreams, is still confined by its mass cultural form. Its history, like the history of America itself, is a history of class struggle—the struggle for fun. (pp. 271–72)

Frith locates rock, quite rightly, in terms of its relationship to

capitalism, and in this all popular music theorists agree. What I find compelling about his description here is its proximity to the issues of subjectivity and psychoanalytic models so rigorously denied by popular music studies. To say that the needs expressed in rock are the needs defined by capitalism is, I think, to say with Althusser that we are subjects formed in ideology. To call rock a commoditized dream is to say that it is not only about the commodity but also about desire and fantasy, a never-to-be-fulfilled desire tapped by musical as well as verbal and visual signifying systems for processes of identification. This implied subjectivity, which never enters Frith’s theoretical account, never has the chance to mediate the disturbingly unsettled waters as was promised earlier on. Nor has it entered popular music studies since; its absence is a constitutive deaf spot of the field.

De Lauretis has a similar problem in “Desire in Narrative.” She states emphatically that the double narrative identifications are simultaneous:

The analogy that links identification-with-the-look to masculinity and identification-with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two. Neither can be abandoned for the other, even for a moment; no image can be identified, or identified with, apart from the look that inscribes it as image, and vice versa. (pp. 142–43)

She associates the failure to understand this simultaneity with the absence of sexual difference as a category in earlier psychoanalytic film theories, and with Mulvey’s ascription of a “purely” masculine position to cinematic identification. Somewhat later, however, when attempting to articulate a position that could be called “resistant spectatorship” (it remains unnamed in her text), she says:

... if the spectator's identification is engaged and directed in each film by specific cinematic-narrative codes (the place of the look, the figures of narrative), it should be possible to work through those codes in order to shift or redirect identification toward the two positionalities of desire that define the female's Oedipal situation; and if the alternation between them is protracted long enough (as has been said of *Rebecca*) or in enough films (and several have already been made), the viewer may come to suspect that such duplicity, such contradiction cannot and perhaps even need not be resolved. (p. 153)

The alternation that produced a theoretical failure a few pages earlier now becomes the marker of a feminist future for film. Like Frith, de Lauretis uses a sleight-of-hand to introduce agency by implying a progressive feminist future based on authorial intent—that is, good feminist filmmakers making good feminist films would change the conditions and interplays of subjectivity, desire, and identification for their viewers. Annette Kuhn and many feminist film theorists proposed quite similar programs, and “reading against the grain” became a dominant paradigm of feminist film studies. While it may be troubling to locate all power once again in production-text relations, it seems clear that de Lauretis's proposal at least reintroduces agency and consciousness into psychoanalytic theory. And while film studies struggles with the legacy of these questions, it has by no means found its way to a compelling account of agency.

I have combed through Frith's and de Lauretis's texts so carefully to show both that the “repressed” of the unconscious returns in Marxist approaches, and that agency cannot be silenced in psychoanalysis. And while these texts—from twenty years ago—articulate early positions in popular music studies and feminist film theory as we now know them, these repressions have not

changed. Neither studies of identification processes with film nor popular music scholarship have reconciled the conflicts of desire and agency. But at least in the case of popular music soundtracks—as I discuss in the next section—both are necessary to any understanding of film music identification processes.

Singing a Song of Sexuality:
Cay, Vivian, Brenda, Jasmin, Baby, Johnny,
Thelma and Louise

In film after film since the mid-1980s, scores for female narrative agents have abandoned the symphonic Romanticism of classical Hollywood in favor of pop—and especially compiled—soundtracks.¹ Surely, a major factor in the trend toward pop scoring is soundtrack album sales, but just as surely, that is insufficient explanation for the particularly widespread use of compiled scores in films with “updated” female characters. In classical Hollywood film, female characters are traditionally defined by the two sexualities Kalinak describes in “The Fallen Woman and the Virtuous Wife” (1982). And agents of narrative are male. Thus, films with female narrative agents themselves take on the embattled relationship between desire and agency by representing agency in female characters and by putting them at the center of their narratives. This contradiction has drawn feminist film analysts for some time. Combined with film studies' penchant for classical Hollywood films as objects of study, the conflict between desire and agency made film noir and “weepies” the major genres of feminist film theorizing in the 1970s and 1980s (for example, Kaplan 1978; Doane 1987; Gledhill 1987; Flinn 1992).

The relationship between desire and agency in the films considered in this chapter is enacted in particular ways by their pop scores, ways that point to the problems these scores manifest for

the dominant theoretical paradigms of both popular culture studies and feminist film theory. Pop soundtracks highlight the deaf spots of both feminist film theories and popular music studies because popular musics depend on a web of memory, emotion, and identification—that is, on the mutual predication of desire and agency. The soundtracks point toward a Marxist psychoanalysis in which desire and agency would not only not be radically separated, but would be analyzed as mutually defining and producing.

Of the five films considered in this chapter, *Dangerous Liaisons* is the only one that does not use popular music in its soundtrack. Most of its score consists of Baroque period music, whose obvious function is to signify historical location, much like period costumes and sets. To leave analysis of the soundtrack there, however, dismisses some of its most unusual features. There are a number of reasons to suspect that the Baroque score activates more meanings than simply period. For example, one of the few instances of traditional Hollywood scoring is used for a sexual scene between the Vicomte de Valmont (John Malkovich) and Madame de Tourvel (Michele Pfeiffer). As Valmont pushes Tourvel down on the bed, kissing her, the music suddenly swells in lush romantic language. The movie's ending, in which we discover that Valmont and Tourvel truly loved each other, comes as no surprise to the film's soundtrack, because it knew there was "real" emotion between them much earlier.

But, as I argued in the first chapter, the possibilities for female characters in classical Hollywood scoring are severely limited. Scoring the Marquise de Merteuil (Glenn Close) as one of classical Hollywood's two options—a fallen woman or a virtuous wife—would significantly change the film. Baroque music has a potentially contradictory range of connotations, including intricacy, excess, ornamentation, restraint, calculation, and lack of emotion. These qualities describe the film's vision of the Marquise

far more accurately than a jazz sax could—while both the sax and the harpsichord can convey the strategic deployment of a female body in service of acquiring power, the Marquise's particular *kind* of power is not within the repertoire of classical Hollywood's ideas about female sexuality.

The associations of Baroque music, by themselves, are too diffuse to serve *Dangerous Liaison's* purposes. The opening sequence of the film narrows its meaning in the film's internal language; Baroque music, within the film, means dry, unemotional calculation. For the first three minutes, shots alternate between the Marquise and Valmont, each being groomed and dressed by a host of servants, choosing wigs and shoes and earrings, being powdered and sewn into clothing, taking on the trappings they require to function for a day. These activities, the background music, and the camera work join to make this establishing sequence exude a calculated and elaborate production of self and power.

And it is in part the use of Baroque music through which the film positions the Marquise as its central figure. The effect of the very final sequence of the film—in which we see the Marquise in a close-up shot, removing her makeup, looking much older, and shedding a single tear—depends on the narrative and musical construction of her as calculating, and that construction depends partly on the meaning of Baroque music within the film. Certainly, this sketch of a reading raises as many questions as it answers, beginning (for example) with why the kinds of power and the kind of female sexuality that the Marquise represents seem to belong in the eighteenth century, and how Baroque music came to acquire the associations it has. But it does show that late German Romanticism is not the only western art music tradition that can be used to score a Hollywood film. And that musics outside classical Hollywood's semiotic code offer a wider range of possibilities for female characters.

For perceivers of *Dangerous Liaisons*, the female narrative agent is made possible because the film created an internal musical language for itself outside of the conventions of classical Hollywood Romanticism. But films with contemporary popular scores and films like *Dangerous Liaisons* with art music scores depend differently on audiences' relationships to their musical genres. I raise the example of an art music score here to point out that pop scores are not the only alternative to classical Hollywood, even if they are currently the most common (and most lucrative, Pachelbel's "Canon" in *Ordinary People* and Ravel's "Bolero" in *10* notwithstanding).

The four films I discuss more fully range from quite small to lavish. *Desert Hearts* is a small independent film that played art houses for short runs and received more attention on video. (It did have selected mainstream release outside the United States, for example, in London.) *Bagdad Cafe* is Percy Adlon's second film, a German independent made-for-TV production with small but worldwide release. *Dirty Dancing* enjoyed the most mainstream success. It was extremely successful as a first-run release, had huge soundtrack and video sales, and even produced a spin-off road company show and concert video. *Thelma and Louise* was something of a sleeper. Audiences, especially women, flocked to it in spite of the bad reviews, and it developed a cult following, with women wearing buttons like "Graduate of the Thelma and Louise Finishing School."² These films don't immediately appear to have much in common. But all of them revolve around female narrative agents, and all use popular music scores.

Desert Hearts is the story of two women who fall in love with each other. Cay is an aspiring artist trapped in Reno, the local wild woman "dyke." Vivian is a carefully controlled English professor from Columbia, in Nevada to divorce. The film is based on the 1964 novel by Jane Rule, and is quite well known in lesbian communities. It uses nineteen different country and western and rock 'n'

roll songs in its score.³ These songs are important in the score not because country and western has a precise, guaranteed meaning, but rather because they do not belong to the tight meaning system of classical Hollywood scoring practice. Instead, each of us brings meanings from the individual and collective uses of songs in our everyday lives. The meanings perceivers bring to the songs include some ways that rock 'n' roll or country and western signify as genres, but they also include more specific meanings generated by perceivers' very different relationships to the genres in general as well as the specific songs. Those particular relationships between perceivers and songs help listeners identify with the lovers through our own memories of learning about our sexualities.

The choice of popular musics thus helps make *Desert Hearts* something other than an archetypal Hollywood romance. It avoids the trap of trying to represent lesbian sexualities in terms of Hollywood heterosexist feminine sexuality. By bringing memories, with their associated emotions, from audience members' unconscious into consciousness, it both particularizes Cay and Vivian's relationship and provides particularizable paths of entry for identification. And, since Patsy Cline—two of whose songs are used in the film—has a wide following in gay and lesbian communities, it manages to address two distinct audiences—heterosexual and lesbian—along different lines at the same time.⁴

There are, however, indications that *Desert Hearts* is not especially concerned with addressing itself to a heterosexist audience. The scene in which Cay and Vivian first make love has no background music. The soundtrack is filled only with diegetic sound—the sounds produced by their mouths and breath. Since this sequence would traditionally be heavily scored, the absence of music makes it seem more graphic than it actually is. If this scene is addressed to an audience unaccustomed to seeing, or unprepared to see, women making love to each other, it is only by virtue of its shock

value, which could have been reduced drastically had the scene been scored.⁵

The final sequence of the film, in which Vivian convinces Cay to ride with her on the train to the next station, uses Ella Fitzgerald's "I Wished on the Moon." This choice lies outside not only classical Hollywood scoring practices, but also the genres established by the rest of the score as its internal language. The rest of the film's score serves a broad range of purposes, from establishing time and place to addressing different audiences. But jazz isn't quite so located, especially not this song.⁶ The choice of an Ella tune for the final sequence makes the scene seem somewhat transcendent, as if it could be taking place anywhere and any-when, as long as that place and time were not a Hollywood movie. It also leans the (non)resolution of the film somewhat toward a happy ending; the urban associations of jazz lend credibility to the reading that Cay continues on with Vivian to New York.

Like *Desert Hearts*, *Bagdad Cafe* presents an alternative to heterosexual love, but this time it is through an intimate friendship between the two central characters: Brenda (CCH Pounder), an African-American owner of a cafe and motel, and Jasmin (Marianne Sägebrect), a white German tourist. The film opens with Jasmin leaving her husband in the middle of the Nevada desert, and Brenda and her husband getting into a screaming match that provokes him into leaving her. The film chronicles the development of their friendship, from mutual terror through cautious understanding to a centrality ordinarily only granted in films to heterosexual romantic relationships.

The score's two themes underline the private and public aspects of their connection; privately, they provide each other with primary companionship, while publicly their relationship magically transforms the community of the cafe. The interiority of their relationship is the pop ballad "I Am Calling You" (since used in AT&T

Example 2
Bagdad Cafe: Rag

Shuffle
♩ = 88

Men:

Voices

Piano

Woman:

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system features a vocal line for 'Men' in a bass clef and a piano accompaniment in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The second system features a vocal line for 'Woman' in a treble clef and a piano accompaniment in a grand staff. The third system shows a piano accompaniment in a grand staff. The tempo is marked 'Shuffle' with a quarter note equal to 88 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piano part includes various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopation.

commercials); the magic that their friendship works on the denizens of the Bagdad Cafe is scored with a kind of neo-Scott Joplin rag.

The first theme, including its lyrics, suggests that Brenda and Jasmin's friendship successfully provides the intimacy that their marriages didn't; the second theme suggests that their relationship magically transforms the community around them. The rag theme signifies as a genre, carrying meaning in much the same way that Baroque music does in *Dangerous Liaisons*; "I Am Calling You" functions more in the modality of Patsy Cline in *Desert Hearts*, connecting the friendship with a realm of desire within the audience members' experiences. The rag theme signifies as a piece of music from a historically black genre that became popular internationally and that was repopularized by *The Sting* in 1973. In that way, its bright, cheerful (interracial) sound serves perfectly to represent the black, Native American, and white community of the cafe.

The legato phrasing, the long durations of "I" and "you," and the close-to-the-mike vocal technique all mark the first theme as a love song. It thus enables *Bagdad Cafe's* audience to imagine female friendships in eroticized terms. Ultimately, each woman repartners—Brenda with Sal and Jasmin with the painter Rudi Cox (Jack Palance). It is, of course, possible to read this as a containment of a lesbian subtext. But the music—both the persistence of "I Am Calling You" and the ending of the film with the rag—suggests instead that Jasmin and Brenda's friendship exceeds any such narrative containment.

Dirty Dancing presents the most conventional sexuality of these four films. (Not coincidentally, it was the most expensive and commercially successful among them.) It uses a combination of period songs, contemporary popular songs, and classical Hollywood techniques to score a film set in 1963. The reason for this

choice seems clear enough: *Dirty Dancing* is a teen film, pitched to a teen audience to whom the music of the early 1960s would not necessarily speak. Like that of *Good Morning, Vietnam* or *Dangerous Liaisons* or *American Graffiti*, the soundtrack of *Dirty Dancing* places its auditors in the period in which it is set. But it is also a time-shifting mirror image of *The Big Chill*, which uses older music for the soundtrack of a contemporarily set film to help audience members identify with their peer group as it is being represented on screen. In other words, just as *The Big Chill* uses yesterday's music in a today-set film to connect today's adults with their youth, so *Dirty Dancing* uses today's music in a yesterday-set film to connect today's youth with yesterday's youth. And, by using classical techniques at select moments, it sets firmer boundaries on interpretation than a strictly compiled score could.

The plot of the movie is quite simple: a young girl named Baby, on vacation with her upper-middle-class family, meets a young man—Johnny—working at the resort as a dance instructor. They fall in love, and he teaches her to dance. The characters, too, are familiar: she, a warm-hearted liberal do-gooder; he, a working-class angry (and very sexy) young man. She teaches him about optimism and self-reliance; he teaches her about her body.

The opening sequence establishes the meaning of white sixties music in the film: it is innocent, nostalgic, hearkening back to a prepubescent peace of mind. Baby's family is on their way to a Catskills resort for a vacation. In a voiceover, Baby says:

That was the summer of 1963, when everybody called me Baby, and it didn't occur to me to mind. That was before President Kennedy was shot, before the Beatles came, when I couldn't wait to join the Peace Corps, and I thought I'd never find a guy as great as my dad.

The song on the radio is “Big Girls Don’t Cry.” The audio track in this sequence sets up the entire film: Baby is going to learn to mind being called Baby, she is going to find a guy as great as her dad (maybe greater), and liberal politics will have something to do with her accession to adulthood. (One way to read *Dirty Dancing* would be as a female oedipal drama, a reading that this voiceover encourages.)

Music and dance, inseparable throughout the film, define two constellations of identity: middle-aged, middle-class, repressed, and Jewish versus young, working-class, sexual, and not-quite-white (Irish? Italian? Latina/o?). While the guests take mambo and cha-cha dance lessons, the entertainment staff has steamy dances of their own after hours. As Shumway says, “*Dirty Dancing* portrays the R&B records played by its working-class characters as sexually liberating and as transgressive of the aesthetic and moral norms of the middle-class adult culture of the Catskills resort” (1999: 46). In this way, Johnny has—and imparts to Baby—a kind of knowledge from which good daughters of the middle class ought to be protected, at least according to their fathers. (A comparison to *Flashdance* might suggest why female characters can marry up in class, while this is forbidden to male characters.) In the final sequence, when Johnny and Baby dance on stage, her father gets up to stop her, but her mother stops him. She later leans over to her husband and says, “She gets that from me,” taking credit for a knowledge of bodies and sexuality that he has tried to deny throughout the movie. (There is an interesting connection between the father’s discomfort with bodies and his professional status as a doctor. While bodies are his business, they apparently cannot be his pleasure.)

This final sequence, which contains one of three original songs, quite clearly sets out to connect (and, judging by the reaction of my students at the time, succeeded in connecting) its teen audi-

ence with the happenings on stage. They can identify with the heroic gesture Johnny makes in declaring his love for Baby, and they can identify with Baby’s rush of romantic pleasure in being so chosen. This worked, in part, because at the time of the film’s release “The Time of My Life” was getting lots of airplay. The song was already available to teen audiences for romantic identifications, and the song and the film cross-marketed each other. (Eventually, the road show and the concert video did the same for both the album and the video in an elaborate marketing web.)

The title “The Time of My Life” marks one of the most compelling features of popular music: songs choreograph good and bad times, serving as cues for memories of *specific* times of your life. In other words, the song articulates lyrically one important relationship between popular musics and lived cultures: most people, myself included, organize and evoke their memories in part through practices of music consumption. By combining period songs, such as the Ronette’s “Be My Baby” and Otis Redding’s “Love Man,” with contemporary pop, *Dirty Dancing*’s score was able to agglomerate nostalgia, current top 10 sounds, and classical Hollywood music. In this way, the identifications it conditioned opened onto perceivers’ relationships to the songs, but carefully tracked their attachments toward the coming-of-age scenario.

The score of *Thelma and Louise* is also a compiled-composed combination. Country, blues, and rock tunes make up most of the score, with composed synth-blues-rock material for the dramatic sequences. The music is laid down in very nontraditional ways; for example, the second cue in the film (Martha Reeves singing Van Morrison’s “Wild Night”) begins as Louise walks to her car, not before or on the cut, and not under any sound effect. The combination of vocal music—to which perceivers are likely to give more attention than instrumental music—and nonstandard cueing gives the music an unusually high profile. And the audio

mix also makes a high profile on the soundtrack likely. Many songs throughout the film are used as dramatic scoring, and they increase and decrease in volume to allow for dialogue. For example, the third song, "House of Hope," begins as Thelma throws her suitcase in the car, continues over various cuts that signify time passing, and gets softer while Thelma and Louise talk and louder when they've finished. Because quotations of popular songs are less frequently mixed this way—this mixing is usually reserved for one-time dramatic scoring—the rise and fall in volume makes the songs more noticeable. Finally, the mixing makes it possible to hear the lyrics of the songs most of the time, and the lyrics very often contribute to the production of meaning in a sequence.

In this sense, audio production choices condition paths of identification because they condition the attention continuum, just as perceivers' histories condition the music history continuum. Similarly, the relations between music and visual tracks also condition identification processes. Pop song cues match visual tracks quite easily at their entrances, but very rarely do they continue to match tightly. While such sequences could, for example, use music-video-style rhythmic visual editing, or could structure a sequence precisely to follow musical structure or lyrics, such breaks with continuity editing are rarely permitted. Because continuity editing is so inviolable, pop soundtracks have an aleatory quality—the songs have only a very loose fit with the visuals. These loose matches contribute further to the larger range of identifications possible with pop soundtracks than with classical scores.

The early portion of the soundtrack seems to speak for Thelma and Louise differently from the songs in any other film I've discussed so far. While only six of the eighteen songs on the soundtrack are sung by women, four of those comprise the soundtrack until Thelma and Louise arrive at the bar. The soundtrack suggests

a world of women that is supported by the visuals and dialogue. The only men in this part of the film are Thelma's husband Darryl, who is irredeemably stupid (later in the film he stands in his pizza), and a cook at the diner who propositions Thelma when she calls to talk to Louise (he has no other lines, and seems like a stereotypical "good ole' boy").

This unlikely space that the film first defines is disrupted by Harlan. When Harlan and Thelma begin to dance, the male vocalist's presence is undeniable—we see the band. For the first time in the film, both musically and visually, Louise and Thelma are represented in relation to the world around them, not just to each other. When they stop after fleeing the parking lot, the song on the coffee shop jukebox is Tammy Wynette's "I Don't Wanna Play House."

It would be difficult not to read this as speaking directly for both Louise and Thelma. As the movie continues, it becomes clear that Thelma will not play house with Darryl any more, and Louise won't start doing it with Jimmy. (In fact, they have so completely rejected being relegated to domestic space that they never again enter it. We see Darryl in his house, and Detective Slocum breaking into Louise's apartment, and Jimmy in his apartment, but never again does either Thelma or Louise enter a home or apartment.) But even as early as this coffee shop sequence, the music clearly suggests that they have begun to reject traditional gendered power dynamics.⁷

By using popular music, the film grounds the entire narrative in the everyday. The apparently fantastic story of two women shooting some guy in a parking lot, taking off, holding up convenience stores and blowing up big rigs becomes more "natural" when the music that accompanies it sounds like what one listens to in one's own car rather than in a symphony concert hall.⁸ (In this way, it becomes immediately apparent how socially

conditioned this kind of audio identification process is. Some people's car radios routinely emit country music like that of Charlie Sexton and Grayson Hugh, others are tuned in to rock 'n' roll oldies, and many are unlikely ever to hear a single song from the soundtrack of *Thelma and Louise* in an everyday context.) Part of our access to identification with Thelma and Louise depends on our access to identification with their music, which helps explain the peculiar combination of, for example, Tammy Wynette, B. B. King, and Michael McDonald (of the Doobie Brothers). Processes of audio identification—which are crucial to the operation of this film—are facilitated by the presence of country, blues, and rock.

The protected space Louise and Thelma lost to Harlan is recreated in Louise's car. (*Thelma and Louise* as a revision of the boy-on-the-road genre has been much discussed, but little has been said about the heroines' unusual relationship to the car itself. They turn what is traditionally a male-gendered space into their own, in part through their rejection of traditionally female space.) As they drive, they find themselves alone in vast open spaces, and one way they pass time is by singing along with the car radio. They bounce, they shout, they use the songs to express defiant and dyadic pleasure. But they cannot contain the meanings of the songs. After Detective Slocum examines Louise's apartment, on the cut back to Louise and Thelma in the car, we hear them singing quite loudly to the Temptations' "The Way You Do the Things You Do." "The Way You Do the Things You Do" is a crossover hit that maximizes audience access; "everyone" knows it. As with the question of ordinariness, our ability to identify with their pleasure in this scene depends quite heavily on our relationships to this song, and much of the audience is likely to have one. Of course, those relationships will range from simple recognition (which is a pleasure in its own right) to genre or group fandom to highly individualized relationships (e.g., "our song," or

"That song was playing when . . ."). Whatever the case, access to Louise and Thelma's bonding in this scene would be very different for someone who had never heard the song or any other example of its genre before.

The composed portions of the score also make use of country, blues, and rock. Entire portions of the score sound as if they could belong in any film with a synth-pop soundtrack; for instance, the main title rhythm is a rock drum machine standard:

Example 3

Thelma and Louise: Drum machine



But other sections of the score are particularized by (synthesized) slide guitar and even banjo. The slide and banjo operate semiotically, both because the instruments themselves signify and because, as with any other instrument, the music played on them participates in musical signification processes as well. In this way, the score of *Thelma and Louise* provides ample support for Kalinak's argument that even pop scores use classical procedures and techniques.

Fairly early in the film, the percussion track of a composed section doubles in perceived speed, that is, it shifts from eighth-note to sixteenth-note patterns, when Louise decides to go Mexico and asks Thelma to go with her. (A sixteenth-note has half the time duration of an eighth-note; since it takes twice as many sixteenths to fill up the same time as eighths, this shift makes the perceived speed of the music double without an entire beat changing duration.) It changes specifically underneath her words "Everything's changed." The increased sense of speed signifies increased tension,

increased action, increased danger, and/or increased speed. Later, mariachi trumpet figures moving in major thirds begin appearing on the soundtrack, implying a future in Mexico that we later learn is not to be.

As these examples show, classical Hollywood technique enforces certain meanings much more heavy-handedly than the pop songs usually do. Classical technique depends on semiotic production of meaning, that is, it depends on certain musical features, alone or in combination, bearing certain specific meanings: short, fast iterations equal tension, mariachi trumpets equal Mexico.

The sex scene between Thelma and J.D., however, offers an example of how classical technique can be combined with a preexisting song ("Kicking Stones" by Chris Whitley). On a cut from Jimmy and Louise to a close-up of J.D.'s glistening torso, a sixteenth-note pattern on keyboards and bass begins. As he begins to lower himself down onto Thelma, the slide guitar enters. As he begins to kiss her belly, a woman sings "ooh-ooh." A male vocalist is added; then, as J.D. pulls Thelma on top of him, there is a leap in the volume. While the musical language may not be the symphonic Romanticism of classical Hollywood, there is not a single cueing or mixing decision here that would surprise any Hollywood composer. (The sex scene between Sebastian and Annette in *Cruel Intentions* [1999], played out to "Color Blind" by Counting Crows, operates almost identically.)

Using songs classically in this way is becoming more and more common. By and large, however, songs work differently. Pop songs sometimes enter into meaning production through language, as in "I Don't Wanna Play House," but most often depend broadly on the identities of the musical genre's audience and on identification processes between the music and the perceiver that took place before the film. These modes of meaning production suggest a return to the first section of this chapter; pop

scores operate through both agency and desire, however incompatible they may seem.

Reconciling (?) Desire and Agency

What makes all of these films stand out is not the mere fact that popular music is used on their soundtracks. (Some of the most "masculine" films of the 1980s—for example, *Above the Law* and *Boyz N the Hood*—use popular music as well.) Rather, reading scores as I did these—for the identification processes they condition—draws on the relationship between agency and desire. The films work against classical Hollywood's earlier dictates about femininity and female sexuality (to the complicated extent that they do) by mobilizing popular musics to tap emotions and associations that audiences connect with the musics before they ever enter the movie theater. Clearly, the practice of scoring female narrative agents with pop soundtracks makes possible a more diffused set of identifications for perceivers.

Desire and agency speak to each other in these films. They raise questions of meaning production, pleasure, uses, and social context and, therefore, intersect with the paradigms of feminist film criticism and of popular music studies in critical and interrogative ways. In other words, neither film theory nor popular music studies offers a narrative of reading/consumption/spectatorship that accounts for the specific identification processes popular music soundtracks entail. I want to address popular music studies and feminist film theory through these questions because each highlights the strengths of one paradigm and the weaknesses of the other. Since its formative moments, popular music studies has tended to emphasize the questions of uses and social context, while film theory focused on questions of meaning production and pleasure. But as the readings of the scores and their films

above demonstrate, social context is intimately imbedded in questions of meaning production—in popular music so intimately that to privilege lived cultures over texts, or vice versa, severely undermines the power of a theoretical approach to popular music soundtracks.

As I pointed out earlier, feminist film theories have taken identification processes as their analytical point of entry. For example, the identification processes encouraged by *Good Morning, Vietnam* and *Desert Hearts* differ notably, depending heavily on sexual difference for their productions of pleasure; traditional psychoanalytic readings of the films would put them at opposite ends of a spectrum. *Good Morning, Vietnam* fetishizes the Vietnamese female body, presenting Vietnamese women as infinitely substitutable and desirable in the sequence in which Robin Williams as Adrian Cronauer, the deejay, rides all around the city mistaking every woman in a white dress for the one he's looking for. *Desert Hearts* succeeds, at least partly, in avoiding that fetishization by showing two women loving each other, thus problematizing the masculine identification processes of much traditional film practice. Obviously, removing a heterosexual masculine look does not remove masculine subjectivity from the circuits of desire in a film. But the kind of familiar visual erotic pleasure produced by looking at a female body through identification with a male character is interrupted when the looking and desiring character is a female one.

As Sharon Willis argues in *High Contrast*, however, identification processes engage perceivers in scenarios, not single positions.

An analysis equal to the complexity of the psychic operations involved in identification has to acknowledge, first of all, that identification is not a state, but a process, and that as such it is likely to be mobile and intermittent rather than consistent. We will do better to think of viewer identifications as scenarios rather than

as fixations. Hardly confined to identifications with characters, then, these scenarios may equally well fasten on situations, objects, and places, or the cinematic apparatus itself. (1997: 102)

But what is the place of music in such identification processes?

Some psychoanalytic theorists of music suggest that it takes us back to a prelinguistic moment, a time when we were surrounded by our mother's voice, swimming in a bath of affect. Feminist work on psychoanalysis, particularly in film theory, suggests that this is an impossible scenario, since already socialized adults cannot be mystically sent back to some preoedipal moment (Doane 1987; de Lauretis 1984; Modleski 1991). Kaja Silverman (1988) reformulates this problem by arguing that the sonorous envelope is a fantasy constructed retroactively by the subject. As with other kinds of identification processes, the fantasy of the sonorous envelope is a misrecognition, a Lacanian *méconnaissance*. David Schwarz's 1997 *Listening Subjects* engages Silverman's model on the terrain of specifically musical sounds; he suggests that certain composition and performance techniques draw listeners into different fantasies of regression. But what of film music, which perceivers hear less consciously than either Silverman's voices or Schwarz's musics?

A number of logics of film music listening have been identified, beginning with the earliest writings on "silent" film, about what film music does. (It is clear that there never was anything that could reasonably be called "silent" film. See King 1984; Marker 1997.) Among the arguments are that music seals over anxieties about discontinuous images, that it reinforces meaning, that it diffuses the unidirectionality of visual relations. These and other explanations abandon altogether any notion of film music in a continuum of musical experiences for listeners. In other words, I would quite forcefully add to this list the possibility that perceivers have prior relationships with music of the genres they hear in

scores—country, blues, rock, etc. Moreover, they surely also have a relationship of long standing with the film music genre itself. Insofar as, within this genre, specific types of music have specific meanings, a perceiver may derive pleasure from an instance of film music because it evokes an accumulation of meanings from previous film experiences.

How meaning and pleasure come into being, however, only partly explains the relationship of perceiver to soundtrack. Soundtrack sales suggest that perceivers involve soundtracks in a variety of productions of meaning and pleasure after or without the “original” context of the film, using them in a range of contexts. I am arguing that this extrafilmic life is what makes them “tick”: they depend on perceivers’ memories of uses of the songs from many different contexts.

Because they engage perceivers in such different ways, pop scores require theories of both agency and identification. As I suggested in the first section of this chapter, feminist film theories and Marxist popular music studies each map out a continuous returning of what they repress. Psychoanalytic theories of culture repress the knowledge that unconscious processes are also historically determined, and that the boundary between an unconscious and a conscious is permeable. Marxist models repress the flip side of that coin: texts engage readers in unconscious processes as well as conscious ones, it is possible to know something about the structures and operations of those unconscious processes, and the boundary between unconscious and conscious processes is permeable.

Popular music soundtracks operate by crossing that boundary, evoking memories of emotions and subject positions, inviting perceivers to place themselves on their unconscious terrains. In order to address these webs of memory, affect, identifications, and the production of meanings, a theory that can account for

the relationship between unconscious and conscious processes is necessary. The kinds of meanings perceivers produce in relation to *Dirty Dancing*, for instance, depend heavily on age and class, both generally and particularly in relation to the soundtrack. Perceivers of *Desert Hearts* cannot all understand Cay and Vivian’s relationship similarly, because they cannot hear the music with the same histories.

Music works this way in film. It crosses over the boundaries between unconscious and conscious processes; it contradicts or shifts what seem like heavy-handed meanings in the visuals. (At least, it *can* do these things; in the next chapter, I will argue that it can also serve as a guarantor of meaning.) A Marxist psychoanalytic model of music perception and audiences can account for relationships among conscious and unconscious pleasures, among differences in consumption and reading practices, and among soundtracks as they address different audiences simultaneously.

As I will argue in the next chapter, not all films encourage the diversity of subject positions that these films do, but looking only at tightly controlled dominant texts can produce disturbingly monolithic theoretical models. The theory of music perception I proposed in this chapter attempts to explain both the similarities and the differences in the Tagg and Clarida study, to account for dominant ideologies as they are expressed in music and for soundtracks that are organized differently, and to leave room for perceivers who do not lose their histories at the theater door. Alongside these films with their dispersed identification processes, however, 1980s Hollywood also produced what we might call “hyperclassical” films such as the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series. These films returned to the tightest musical meaning system available just at the moment when mass culture seemed to be opening up to those it had historically excluded. It is to this phenomenon that I turn in the next chapter.