CHAPTER VI

Vigo/Jaubert:
Zéro de conduite
and Problems
of Methodology

The Film

Zéro de conduite is the first of two collaborations by Jean Vigo and composer
Maurice Jaubert. Among his thirty-eight film scores, Jaubert also composed
for the Prévert brothers (L'Affaire est dans le sac), Clair (Quatorze juillet,
Le Dernier milliardaire), and Carné (Drôle de drame, Quai des brumes,
Hôtel du nord, Le Jour se lève). However, his partnership with Vigo strikes
a particularly rare resonance, and according to P. E. Salles Gomes, Zéro de
conduite established Jaubert as a film composer. Jaubert’s critical concerns
regarding narrative and expressive possibilities of film music, which he
voiced during the thirties, may account for some of the distinctive qualities
that postwar critics have seen in Zéro de conduite.¹ Here I propose first to
examine his principles at work in the film, and second, to consider some
methodological problems involved in the analysis of film music in general.

Zéro de conduite was arguably the most autobiographical film of the three
that Vigo made before his untimely death in 1934. Its scenes loom out with
the concreteness, as well as the distortion, of memories from childhood.
Salles Gomes documents Vigo’s modeling of the scenario on remembrances
of his past. The film’s curious discontinuity (due partly to severe time and
budget restraints during shooting, but also an integral component of its
"quasi-nilhilistic" style) contributes to its evocation of a nostalgia for what we've never experienced.

Thematically speaking, the school in the film acts as a social microcosm, a locus for a revolution of the imagination. What is "childlike" does battle with "adult" values; the schoolboys' seemingly natural collectivity takes action in the face of the staff's comically rigid hierarchy. While the administrators form a calcified system, an illogical, indeed caricatured, application of meaningless values (meting out zeros for conduct and decreeing Sunday confinements), the children, through intuitive logic, and bolstered by the film's narrative point of view on their side, address the problem of how to live with such a system. The film sets up a dialectic of orders: neat disciplined lines imposed by the school—a static order—versus the boys' unruliness and collective spontaneity, which at least temporarily spawn an order stronger than the imposed one.

Vigo's film does not try to account for everything in "good narrative" fashion. (Why does Gas-Snout patrol the lavatories on Alumni Day?) The curious effect of the elliptical segmenting—Cauusat and Colin walk alongside a fence and ceremoniously bow to each other, Cauusat stays on Sunday with a bourgeoisie family whose putative father is lodged behind a newspaper and whose daughter hangs a goldfish bowl precariously from a wire traversing the salon—is not to distance or to puzzle, but rather to make one feel privileged to participate in them, as if in flashes of memory. In brief enigmatic scenes like these, Vigo's reputation as a surrealist is justified. The dreamlike quality arises from a tension between the real and the imagined, the present and the past, the communicable and the incommunicable.³

Zéro de conduite exemplifies how stylistic choices are also moral and aesthetic decisions. One notes evidence of Vigo's debt to earlier filmmakers of the imagination in subtle parallels to films of Méliès (Cauusat's balloon disappearing act in the classroom), Cohl (Huguet's cartoon coming to life), and Clair (madcap chases in the streets), as well as Chaplin (Huguet imitates Chaplin; children watch him while his back is turned and flee when he faces them... Easy Street) and Linder. But Zéro goes beyond Clair or Méliès in straining at the bounds of narrative logic and visual classicism. In scenes of joyous freedom, such as the classroom under Huguet's non-rule, bodies literally hang from the rafters; pairs of legs dangle into the frame from above; other characters are only partially included in the composition. It is as if the narrator were saying "merde" to the (anal-retentive) regularity of the rectangular film screen. The viewer gets pleasure not only from witnessing the students' freedom of movement, but also from violations of the classical rules of visual order. (This particular scene moves from freedom to imprisonment, however, for as Dry-Fart takes over the class we fade out on an image of straight rows of desks and now-unnatural silence punctuated only by the proctor's repetition of the word "No", . . )

At issue is a set of values and the way the film portrays them. Liberty, anarchy, and repression find their expression in a plot and in a style. Those who draw a direct line of descent from the political anarchist Almeryda—Jean Vigo's father—to the story of Zéro de conduite most staunchly assert that Zéro's unruliness (on all levels) is its message. The film's final sequence, the Alumni Day disturbance, certainly fuels the perspective that the film is anarchistic. Into the courtyard, where authority is depicted more cartoony than ever (the Prefect sits at a small pavilion flanked by dummies), garbage suddenly plummets down, hurled by the four young revolutionaries on the roof. The ceremonies' participants scatter in all directions. Where will the boys' revolution lead them? Certainly the children will not assume control of the school the next day. But the surprise bombardment is a complete success within the context of the film, and that is what counts.

On the other hand, a film professing stylistic anarchy would appear much more unguled than Zéro. Instead, this story proceeds in a number of brief, tailored segments—episodes that all focus around the freedom-repression polarity, and which most often end with the repressive forces of authority gaining the upper hand. Only when the boys organize does the tide change: Tabard's "merde" to the principal sets in motion the series of scenes that lead to the students' Alumni Day "triumph." Exteriors and interiors take on positive and negative values respectively through their placement in the story, as do movement and stasis. The promenade sequence, alternating between shots of the group's joyous rambling and the principal's stifling office, between their noisy fun and his officious verbosity, demonstrates how Vigo's structuring and narrating principles coincide. The "unguled" realm of the imagination does take over completely in the film's final moments: while in the third-to-last shot the four boys crawl atop the school roof, the final image shows them climbing up toward the summit as if somehow they had not arrived there yet. Although the film ends on a spatially illogical note, the episodic patterning that builds up to this ending involving the notion of visual disorganization as one pole in a stylistic system has narratively and stylistically prepared it as the logical result. Music plays a central role in the process.

Method

Although writers on film music frequently allude to specific parts of scores, exhaustive analyses of an entire score and its narrative functioning have been
rare. Zéro’s brevity renders it a good object for close scrutiny: barely sixteen minutes of music are included in its forty-five minutes. In the course of this analysis, attention will be paid to rhythm, form, and representation in both film and music. Zéro de conduite consciously deploys music not only in terms of its emotive and rhythmic properties, but also exploits music as a physical sound phenomenon, and as a recorded soundtrack element.

The score exploits, explores, breaks conventions of the music-film relationship: Jaubert, who among early sound film composers was perhaps most conscious of the breadth of music’s narrative possibilities in film, devoted careful attention to these issues in his articles and lectures during the thirties. To what extent did his critical writing agree with his film-music practice?

Here we must open a parenthesis: how is it possible to describe accurately the film-music practice? What is relevant to the description of a scene and its music—short of another screening/audition of the film itself? Can a standard methodology develop, and if so, how should it appear on paper? We are confronted with problems of notation, priorities, principles of pertinence. Writing about the ways in which film music, coinciding with dialogue and images, functions in the story film, means not merely copying down the composer’s printed score: for the score by itself tells us at best about the instantaneous music-shot relationships, and virtually nothing about music’s effects in the narration. The prevailing scarcity of close, accurate analyses of narrative film music results from this dilemma of notation.4

Along this line, Raymond Bellour pinpointed the exasperating nature of films in general as “unattainable texts”: the filmic text is unattainable because it is an unquotable text.5 In literature, “nothing is more immediate, simpler than to quote a word, a phrase, a few lines, a sentence, a page. Omit the quotation marks that signal it and the quotation is invisible” [p.20]. “The written text is the only one that can be quoted unimpededly and unreservedly”[p. 21].

Similarly, an independent musical work is quotable, says Bellour, since the score is codified into a standard written notation—although with the important difference that

the musical text is divided, since the score is not the performance. But sound cannot be quoted. It cannot be described or evoked. In this the musical text is irreducible to the text, even if it is metaphorically, and in reality thanks to the plurality of its operations, just as textual as the literary text. [p. 22]

The sound film

conjoins five matters of expression, as Christian Metz has shown: phonetic sound, written titles, musical sound, noises, the moving photographic image.

The first two of these pose no apparent problems for quotation . . . [although dialogue] undergoes a certain reduction as soon as it is quoted: it loses intensities, timbres, pitches, everything that constitutes the profound solidity of the voice. The same is true of noises . . . what might be called motivated noise, which can always be evoked more or less since it indicates the real, should always be distinguished from arbitrary noise, which can go so far as to serve as a score, then escaping all translatability since it is not even codified as the musical score is . . . noise constitutes a greater obstacle to the textuality of the film the more it is one of the major instruments of its textual materiality. Musical sound obviously takes this divergence between text and text to the extreme: given the specifications implied by the phenomenon of combination which makes film music not a work in itself but an internal dimension of the work, we have here against the problems posed in this respect by musical works (code vs. performance). [pp. 23–24]

Bellour devotes greatest attention to the dilemma of quoting the moving photographic image (the fifth of Metz’s “matters of expression”), which few would dispute is the definitive textual component of cinema. If one desired to quote the film’s image-track as faithfully as one can quote literature, one would be obliged to show the film itself. Bellour concludes that the only solution can be found in the compromise of using stills: although

The frozen frame and the still that reproduces it are simulacra. . . . Obviously the language of the analysis is responsible for the rest. It attempts to link together the multiplicity of textual operations between the simulacra of the frozen images like any other analysis. [p. 25]

And finally, since film analysis does not deal purely with separate textual images but must also contend with “that absolutely illusory thing known as its story,”

Thus it constantly mimics, evokes, describes; in a kind of principled despair it can but frantically try to compete with the object it is attempting to understand. [p. 26]

1 have quoted extensively from Bellour’s essay to emphasize the problematic situation of even the relatively well-established field of close film analysis. Few such methodological considerations have even entered the picture in the field of film music, although the very disorganization of its critical literature has at times yielded curiously excellent results. If it is only since the seventies that the methodical use of stills became customary in film analysis, as early as 1938 Eisenstein described a sequence from Alexander Nevsky in stills juxtaposed to the musical score to demonstrate the exact audiovisual correspondence that he and Prokofiev supposedly
[135] trumpet

[140] harp

[145] trombone

[145] flute

[147] (strings, flute)

[153] (C major arpeggios in harp)

[155] (e3)

[155] He's dead...

"Il est mort..."
Rhythms noted from shots 21–38 are diegetic sounds of trains.

Trombone... "...foutons le camp!"

Causset: "...En fiche-nous la paix!"

Parrain: "Dis-donc, Causset, finies les vacances."

Parrain: "Par ici, vous. Allons!"

(Jump cut)

Causset: "Violé Monsieur Pète-sec. On ne rigolera encore pas cette année."

Excuse me... René Tabart will return tomorrow.

It was a corpse, I tell you. I can prove it.

Mme Tabart: "Pardon, monsieur. René... René Tabart ne rentrera que demain matin. Il a le coeur gros ce soir."

Causset: "Un mort..."

Caussat & Bruel: "Colin... ? Vieux Colin... ?[?] avec un mort!"

...je te dis, un mort.

La preuve..."
achieved. In 1957 Roger Manvell and John Huntley used Eisenstein's basic format to cite segments of 
*Henry V, Louisiana Story, Julius Caesar,* and *Odd Man Out,* regrettably, the authors did not follow up their transcriptions with any analysis. As for Eisenstein, his work has stood alone as a vigorous and thorough—if somewhat delirious—combination of transcription and analysis.

The other approach, used by film composers, concentrates on transcribing the complete musical score itself: additional cues for images, actions, and lines of dialogue briefly evoke the music's position in the given scene. Needless to say, the composer and his/her notation system are weighted heavily toward the music at the expense of minimizing the visual importance of the moving compositions on the screen as well as the score's moment-by-moment relationship with the story.

Working with this mixed heritage of film music notation, I have set forth the inaugural sequence of *Zéro de conduite,* concentrating on the music's functioning with relation to the diegesis ("that absolutely illusory thing"). I have chosen to consider the sequence from the perspective of the musical rhythm that governs the soundtrack and often the images themselves. I have not deemed it essential to write out the entire score, but rather to indicate rhythm, principal melodies and harmonies, and instrumentation. The shot lengths are not described in absolute time (i.e., in seconds) but in terms of their co-incidence with the music. The "textual simulacrum" will then serve as a point of reference for analysis.

Structure

The musical organization of the "ragged" little sequence closely follows its narrative organization. The story opens, we will recall, as the schoolboy Caussat and the adult Huguet wordlessly share a compartment on the moving train (shots 1–7, meas. 1–20). The train slows to a stop—first division—and schoolmate Bruel clammers on. The ride continues, joyously now, as Caussat and Bruel play tricks with fingers, trumpets, feathers, balls, balloons, and cigars. As the train screeches to a halt, the sleeping Huguet thuds to the floor, and the boys half-seriously mistake him for a corpse. Second train stop, second division. The boys join their colleagues on the station platform. For train (Dry-Fart), Colin, Tabard and his mother, and the decidedly undead schoolteacher Huguet are presented. Finally, after everyone has filed out of the station, a fade-out ends the sequence as a fade-in began it.

So the first of these three sections consists of an exposition: vacation finished, the train in motion. The music that accompanies this rather mournful
collection of shots plays in G minor; it is dominated by a bassoon playing
the principal four-note motif, and the low strings playing a "trainlike"
rhythmic ostinato in the bass (see example, Part I). The music then decel-
erates with the train; as a matter of fact, there is no way for the viewer
to know that the train is slowing down except for the musical decelerando on
the soundtrack.

Part Two, the leg of the voyage with Bruel, begins in the major subdomi-
nant of the original G minor (C major); woodwinds play the theme in double-
time (see example, Part II).

I have labeled melodic elements a and b to indicate how b, the train-
rhythm accompaniment for Part One, actually incorporates itself into the
melody for Part Two: not in its original form, but with one passing-tone
added, and in melodic inversion (I have re-inverted it, and placed it in the
bass clef, as "*" so that the musically untrained reader may compare it to b
of Part One). It may be noted also that the exact intervals among the four
melodic components of a have not been retained (except for the semitone
between the second and third notes), but the shape of the melody is un-
mistakable.\(^9\) Jaubert's economical choice and manipulation of motifs results
in continuity in score and in filmed segment. One may consider Part Two
the real development section of the sequence, in several capacities. It is the
longest and most eventful of the three parts, and is distinct from its neigh-
boring sections by virtue of its joyful mood. Narratively, it gives a first view
of the marvels that seem to occur whenever the schoolboys are left to interact
freely with one another. In addition it introduces visual thematic material
that will crop up throughout the film giving it further formal cohesiveness.
The scene presents visual motifs as playthings: the body, various balls, feather-
s, a trumpet, smoke.\(^{10}\) Musically, this is a section of development and
recapitulation: moving from C major and voyaging harmonically through a
tonal menagerie (A\(^\#\), D\(^\#\), C, E, and G major), the four-note melody (a) is
performed by a zoo of solo instruments, undergoes melodic variations, and
comes to rest on an elephantine trombone rendition in G minor—which
magically resolves to G major as the boys puff contentedly and the train
pulls into the station.

At this juncture, the train's arrival, the third segment begins. Huguett
slides to the compartment floor, and one of the boys whispers loudly, "He's
dead!"—the first nonmusical sound in the film. The instrumental music ends
with an onomatopoetic flourish and thump in G major to underscore Hugue-
t's fall and the ride's end.—"Let's beat it!" Beginning with shot 21, the
"natural" sounds of the train station are heard, and thus between shots 19
and 21, tonal music has given way to dialogue and sound effects, the sound-
track elements that will finish out the sequence exclusively.

This does not mean that the "music" is over.\(^{11}\) For music is rhythm, and
and the soundtrack continues just as rhythmically as before. First the ambient
steam-locomotive sounds are heard in a 3/4 rhythm (cf. shot 21) and then,
beginning with shot 22, they form another rhythmic pattern with a steady
repetition of eighth notes. The most elegant evidence that this section is
planned musically is to be found in shots 26 and 27. Causset and Bruel shout
in resonant stage whispers to their pal Colin that they have just shared their
train ride with a dead man (their words are unfortunately indistinguishable
to my ears, and the dialogue in L'Avant-scène du cinéma is inaccurate at
this point),\(^{12}\) but what is all the more discernible for my lack of comprehen-
ion is the rhythm of their speech:

\[
\text{A} \quad \frac{\text{Allegro}}{\text{Co-lin \quad \text{vieux Co-lin \quad un mort.}}}
\]

What follows, in perfectly continuous timing, is a battery of "natural" lo-
comotive steam sounds as if in response to the rhythm of the boys' speech
(example B: the several measures are reduced to their rhythmic and not
their "realistic" or representational content).
Furthermore, just as various solo orchestral instruments punctuate certain actions on the train ride, a "concrete" solo instrument now performs schoolteacher Huguet's "theme" on the platform. After Causset says "The proof? There's your corpse," a nearby train whistle toots loudly on the soundtrack to punctuate Huguet's approach into the shot's foreground. The whistle happens to sound again exactly at the moment when Huguet, having presented himself to Dry-Fart, tips his hat. A ridiculous punctuation, the lead informs Huguet's character with a note of the fantastic and lighthearted, and from the outset it sets him apart from the other adults, redeeming him from the stifling musical silence that envelops his stiffer colleagues at the school.

The boys and their teachers walk off into the night to the offscreen accompaniment of a train accelerating and leaving the station, and the image fades to black. Again, this first fade-out in the film lends support to the idea that the film's beginning is organized into one continuous sequence from shots 1 through 38. The musical score's tonality changes after Part One (meas. 1–20)—from G minor to C major and related keys; its instrumentation changes after Part Two (meas. 21–110)—from orchestral instruments to organized noise. Thus the entire sequence unmistakably comprises a musical-poetic whole. Jaubert had a pioneering concern with the porous nature of the wall separating music and natural sound, and with the unique possibilities that cinema offers for organizing sounds into music:

Freed from all academic impediments (symphonic developments, orchestral "effects," etc.), music, thanks to the film, should reveal to us a new character. It has still to explore the whole territory which lies between its frontiers and those of natural sound. . . . Music must never forget that in the cinema its character of sound phenomenon outweighs its intellectual and even metaphysical aspects. . . .

Instrumentation

The composer sarcastically reproaches his contemporaries for the conventions of instrumentation they perpetuated:

Generally speaking, music is asked to provide commentary on the action. Is the scene tragic? A few accents on the horn or trombone will emphasize the image's darkness. A sentimental scene? Give it a violin solo: that will, it is believed, render the hero's declaration of love more convincing.14

Zéro's score avoids the instrumental clichés that were so wholeheartedly adopted in Hollywood. Instead, each solo completes and gives unique definition to actions on the screen. In this perspective, Eisenstein spoke of Prokofiev's intuitive genius in scoring solos for Alexander Neusky: "It seems to me that it's precisely from the tonality and timbre chosen for the image that the melodic and orchestral musical equivalent emerges."15

Equivalence—not illustration, commentary, or explanation. To understand this distinction in Jaubert's practice, turn to measures 45 to 48 in Zéro. The violin and oboe introduce a sprightly rhythmic three-note motif as one of the boys one-ups the other with a ball-and-spring toy. Perhaps an oboe alone would have done about as well here—but the violin brings in special qualities. The movement of the ball popping up from the spring mechanism is amplified by the bouncy, almost pizzicato notes from the resonant violin. Elsewhere, from measures 70 to 74 and 98 to 104, the trombone plays the four-note motif, corresponding to the images of Bruel's mammary-suggestive balloons, and the friends' sucking and smoking cigars. The trombone, full and blowy, comically reinforces these physical aspects of the images it accompanies. In every case throughout Zéro's score the physical qualities of the solo instrument—register, timbre, articulation—correspond in some way to the physical and dynamic content of the images. (The train ride sequence also has "motivated solos," a different use of solo instruments: for example, the trumpet that plays on the soundtrack as Causset plays his toy trumpet. Here, the music is clearly aping representational functions the way musical accompaniments did for silent films.)

Just as remarkable as Jaubert's efficiency with melodic motifs and solo instruments is the tonal variety he achieves with such a small ensemble. According to his biographer, François Porcile, the orchestra for Zéro consisted of only eleven instruments: four woodwinds, percussion, trumpet, trombone, harp, piano, violin, and violoncello, and additional singing in three scenes. The score is based on extreme orchestral economy and imaginative choice of solo instruments.

Rhythm

For Jaubert, the function of film music

is not to be expressive by adding its sentiments to those of the characters or
of the director, but to be decorative by uniting its own rhythmical pattern with the visual pattern woven for us on the screen.

That is why I believe it to be essential for film music to evolve a style of its own. If it merely brings lazily to the screen its traditional interest in composition and expression, then instead of entering as a partner into the world of images, it will set up alongside a separate world of sound obeying its own laws. Even if this autonomous sound-structure reveals all the marks of genius, it will never have any point of contact with the visual world which it ought, nevertheless, to serve. It will live its life, sufficient unto itself.

Let film music, then, free itself from all these subjective elements; let it also, like the image, become realistic; let it,—using means strictly musical and not dramatic—support the plastic substance of the image with an impersonal texture of sound, accomplishing this through a command of that mysterious alchemy of relationships which belongs to the essence of the film composer’s trade. Let it, finally, make physically perceptible to the inner rhythm of the image, without struggling to provide a translation of its content, whether this be emotional, dramatic, or poetic.*

From this eloquent statement of film music’s objective functions let us extract Jaubert’s comments on rhythm. Music ought to “make physically perceptible . . . the inner rhythm of the image.” Exactly what is meant by the inner rhythm of an image? Does Jaubert invite the reader onto Eisensteinian grounds again, suggesting an equivalence between spatial compositions and temporal ones? Is he referring to movements within a shot, or to the rhythms of editing itself? or to the “subjective tempo” of an image in its narrative context? Jaubert might agree with all three of these attempts to corner him—although, I suspect, he would not be wholly pleased. Let us examine some of these aspects of rhythm in Zéro’s train sequence.

First, the bass ostinato: its rhythm is the train’s rhythm, its variable pace reflecting, really denoting, the speed of the train. Music is functioning as noise (and in doing so invites us to perceive everyday sounds as permeated with musical rhythm). Here the rhythm acts as a representational element: since there is no diegetic sound at all until shot 19—we are in effect watching a “silent film”—the music takes over the iconic duties of the soundtrack in the meanwhile. Vigo evidently considered establishing shots prosaic, for there is none at the beginning of the scene (the only shot defining the space of the compartment is the fifth in the sequence). Merely the door-window, smoke outside, and the rhythmic bass on the soundtrack provide the narrative information.

Between measures 17 and 20 we (musically) hear the train slow down to a halt. After Bruel has climbed on, the rhythm picks up again (meas. 21 to 24) in the ‘cello, indicating that the train is once more on the move. This rhythm is much faster than the original bass rhythm. Aside from its loosely representational role, the rhythmic bass has an emotive function; it serves to indicate a rise, a quickening, in spirit with the entry of Caussat’s comrade. Allegro becomes equivalent to allégretto, pointing also to a politeness of tempo (auditory) and motion (visual) that pervades Zéro. The schoolmasters, seemingly impervious to motion, are usually seen standing, ordering, sitting, sleeping. The boys are happiest running, playing, and in kinetic states with respect to the film frame as well; and sprightly music is very often present to insist on the rhythms of their movements.

Editing to music. If Zéro’s style capitalizes on the poetic interrelationships “found” between musical rhythm and natural rhythm, we might expect Vigo to edit shots according to the same rhythmic patterns as well. Indeed, he does: it is clear from the transcription of the sequence on the preceding pages that musical rhythm is a primary principle according to which the sequence is constructed. Following are examples of cuts to music.

1. The beginning of shot 2 coincides exactly with the beginning of the repetition of the four-note G minor motif in the bassoon.

2. The theme’s recapitulatory statement, beginning in meas. 13, begins at the same time as shot 5. In the images as well as in the music, several disparate introductory materials have been presented, and the composition of shot 5 recapitulates them in a manner similar to the way the music recapitulates its own thematic material.

3. Shot 16, the low angle shot of the boys and their cigars, begins in precise conjunction with a final statement of the motif, this time in G major by the flute.

4. Other shots are cut so as to begin on a musical downbeat: examples are shot 4 (meas. 9), shot 6 (meas. 18), shot 9 (meas. 35), shot 11 (meas. 39), shot 15 (meas. 101), and shot 17 (meas. 102). Additionally, other shots that are edited to logical rhythmic beats within a measure, usually the third beat, are shots 1, 3, 8, 12, 14, 16, and 17.

Further, movements within a shot often are timed to match the rhythm on the soundtrack. Several of these image-music orchestrations occur during shots 12 and 14, the lengthy two-shots of the friends as they play “épater le copain” with their successive amusements. For instance, measure 45 inaugurates the three-note motif in A major, as Bruel gets out his ball toy. Measure 58 seemingly motivates Bruel to play the notes on the trumpet that Caussat is blowing. With a transition in the score from C major into E major at the beginning of measure 64, Bruel takes a balloon out of his coat pocket.
Caussat feels Bruel’s right balloon in time with measure 66, and the left balloon to the rhythm of measure 67, and so on.

In fact, it is in this extraordinary concert on Vigo’s Jaubert’s part to match auditory with visual rhythm that we may find a partial explanation for two of the awkward jump cuts in the sequence. Notice the timing of the jump cut that occurs near the end of shot 12, when Caussat removes the mouthpiece from his toy trumpet before he plays it through his nose. Caussat’s original playing lines up well with meas. 56f, and the match continues acceptably through Bruel’s playing (meas. 58, 59). In order that the close-up of the “nose-trumpet” should not end up out of synch with the music’s rhythm, Vigo seems to have deemed it necessary to cut a few frames out of shot 12’s final moments when Caussat removes the mouthpiece. If this was indeed the reason for that jump cut, we can see to what unorthodox lengths Vigo would go to preserve the audiovisual integrity of the rhythm behind this sequence.

The transcription and discussion of the music in this first sequence brings to light several important aspects of Vigo’s and Jaubert’s approach to film and film music. We have noted Jaubert’s economy of composition and instrumentation achieving a remarkable variety of narrative effects. We have cited Jaubert’s concern with music as physical sound, and consequently have seen that Zéro’s score assumes representational functions, and conversely that sound effects assume musical functions. We have uncovered some formal relationships between soundtrack and image-track: the musical demarcations and subdivisions of the diegetic action, correlations between musical phrases and actions on the screen, and so on. Above all, it becomes evident how important rhythm is in the poetic unfolding of the sequence—important enough to influence strongly the sequence’s actual editing and important enough to necessitate discontinuity cutting. What should be quite clear at this point is the close interdependence of music and images. It may surprise the reader that Jaubert wrote in 1936 that “music must remain the servant of the image.” But let us recall that there are dumb, slavish servants and there are indispensable, imaginative ones, like Molière’s Dorine and Renoir’s Marceau.

**Filmed Riot, Musical Organization**

An analysis of Zéro’s music would not be sufficient which neglected to consider the sequence of the dormitory revolt near the end of the story. Two additional film-music factors demand attention here: musical themes and electronic recording.

First, to understand the treatment of musical themes, let us list some of the recurrent melodic figures. Two principal motifs run through the train music (see p. 128): the ascending eighth-note figure in the bass, which we labeled \( \text{b} \) (subsequently transformed but retaining its intervallic integrity), and the slower, four-note figure, \( \text{a} \), which moves a skip down, a step up, and another skip down. Another of the film’s repeated melodies is the boys’ song (\( \text{A} \)) over the beginning credits, diagnostically sung later as their marching song during their outing in the village.

Solo snare drums also briefly intrude on two occasions: when Dry-Fart jumps out to awaken his sleepy students in the morning, and when Huguet herds them from the courtyard into the classroom. Aside from this the only music remaining (not repeated in the score) is the ensemble music accompanying the strollers’ increasingly wild pursuit of a woman they spot on the street. For reasons which will become clear, we shall note here two closely related motifs from that music:

\( \text{B} \) accompanies the boys’ chase after Huguet, and, soon after, the entire group is chasing the elusive gentlewoman; \( \text{C} \), a demure version of the latter half of \( \text{B} \), plays while Huguet and the boys first tip their hats respectfully to the fashionable lady.

The non-diegetic music on the soundtrack during the nocturnal revolt includes bits and pieces of all the motifs heard previously on the soundtrack. I shall not reproduce the score for the revolt—an unnecessarily laborious undertaking for both writer and reader—but shall merely note down some motifs from the music, and trace their origins.

As the boys begin their “revolution,” running atop the beds, screaming,
and generally disheveling everything within their enthusiastic reach, the music begins militantly in the piano’s lower register (D).

The figure is reminiscent of other motifs heard in previous contexts: (1) the very opening of the score, the “train motif” in the cello, also consisting of eighth notes played staccato, also in a minor key. The motifs differ in instrumentation, and the melodic direction is inverted (as it was, for that matter, in Part Two of the train sequence). (2) The latter half of the boys’ marching song contains the same descending melodic figure, only in triple rhythm (E).

(3) The lady on the street is introduced to a descending melody (F),

and as I have just pointed out, the cousin of this same figure is found in the chase music for the promenade sequence as well.

A comparison of all these motifs to the C minor motif launching the dormitory riot (see C) shows that while each motif has a distinct musical identity, each also bears a fundamental relationship of similarity to the C-minor figure. Likewise, we can find a family tree for virtually every other motif in this crowded selection of riot music. H is another example.

Each of the motifs in the riot sequence serves as a combinatoire of anterior musical material. But only in a generalized sense do they convey thematic significations associated with the narrative. In other words, the C minor figure does not make the listener consciously recall the train ride, the village outing, and the pursued lady; we would better make these connections if the music associated with them consisted of one stable, consistent motif. Here it is more a question of musical resemblances too subtle and evanescent to generate denotation the way, say, Ford’s Indian drum motif does in Stagecoach. The motivic combinatoire behaves less specifically, more “poetically”; in evoking similar music it has the effect of summing up previous musical material: mirror-fragments from the boys’ lives are picked up, transformed, and placed in an apparently chaotic piece that plays while they riot.

This is music whose tonality, harmony, rhythm, continuity in general, keep threatening to disintegrate completely—again, an apt mirror of the frenetic activity on the screen. Suddenly the music leaps to an E major chord and stops dead, as on the screen Gas-Snout opens the dormitory door, pokes his nose in, and hastily retreats. A “controlled breakdown,” musically speak-
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ing; followed by silence, and then the famous backwards music to the boys’ slow-motion procession among the pillow-feathers.

Electronic Recording

... Let us recollect that [the new film music] will be recorded. Once recorded, the music ... will stand equally to benefit from all the various manipulations which the sound-track is able to undergo. It is well known that the sound-track receives its impressions from the vibrations of light caused by the vibrating diaphragm of the microphone, itself set in motion by the sound-vibrations of the orchestra. Indeed, one can say that recording consists in the photographing of sound. The director, with this photograph at his command, is in a position to treat sounds just as he treats images: the technique of mixes and cuts is just the same. Indeed, the device of re-recording allows him to go further still in manipulating the sound-track. A certain sound or musical phrase, or several, can be first recorded separately and then transferred together to a single strip of film.18

To produce the haunting music for the slow-motion sequence in the dormitory, Jaubert had to go through several steps involving the manipulation of his photographed sounds. He used for the melody a phrase in the boys’ marching song

which a soprano’s voice transforms into a slow, mellifluous anthem without words. First he had to record the melody, then rerecord it backwards, and transcribe the backward version for his musicians to execute it, an extremely difficult task owing to its awkwardly unmusical character in that form. This is its state in the finished soundtrack. The music thus underwent two electronic reversals, so that we may hear the melody make musical sense forwards. At the same time, we hear all the instrumental articulations backwards—i.e., a note’s resonance will be heard before its attack—producing the otherworldly effect that matches the visuals so well.

All that Vigo had requested for the scene was "une musique de dessins animés," cartoon music.19 Why, then, did Jaubert go through all these musico-electronic contortions for a score otherwise made as simply as possible? The answer lies in the scene’s importance in the film. Although the actual revolution does not take place until the following day when the boys open

fire and pelt garbage on the Alumni Day ceremonies, the nighttime dormitory riot makes the stronger impression. The slow motion photography purifies the "jeunes diables," cinematically transforming them into angelic figures clothed in white and surrounded by white. The cross-shaped standards the boys bear are both a parody of religion (this partially explains why Zéro was censored for so many years)19 and a celebration of its rituals. The marching-song theme renders this music the triumphant marching song of the imagination: its electronic treatment parallels in beauty the slow-motion reproduction of the images. (The real technical analogue to the slow-motion photography would of course be to play the music in slow motion too; but anyone who has ever heard a 45 rpm phonograph record at 33 rpm knows that this doesn’t work).

From the riot scene’s rejection of conventional modes of representation arises not chaos but a different order. And in fact, can we not say the same for the music? To record a piece backwards makes chaotic non-sense of it: but to return it to its normal state via a second transformation restores it to a new order, creatively different from the original. It seems that Zéro de conduite accomplishes this in formal, thematic, and ethical terms. A line from Zéro’s original story outline reads: “If we must be prisoners, at least let us choose our prison, let’s be happy and have fun there, so that we will want to stay there for the rest of our lives.”20