

Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture

Series Editor

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The aesthetic union of sound and image has become a cultural dominant. A junction for aesthetics, technology and theorisation, film's relationship with music remains the crucial nexus point of two of the most popular arts and richest cultural industries. Arguably, the most interesting area of culture is the interface of audio and video aspects, and that film is the flagship cultural industry remains the fount and crucible of both industrial developments and critical ideas.

Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture has an agenda-setting aspiration. By acknowledging that radical technological changes allow for rethinking existing relationships, as well as existing histories and the efficacy of conventional theories, it provides a platform for innovative scholarship pertaining to the audio-visual. While film is the keystone of the audio visual continuum, the series aims to address blind spots such as video game sound, soundscapes and sound ecology, sound psychology, art installations, sound art, mobile telephony and stealth remote viewing cultures.

Emilio Audissino

Film/Music Analysis

A Film Studies Approach

Second Edition

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NOTES TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition, prepared at the request of the publisher Palgrave Macmillan, comes with updated sources that include the post-2016 publications and expand the scope of the literature review. Notably, I have added perspectives from Multimodal Studies and Social Semiotics, areas that I confess I discovered only upon my relocation to Linnaeus University in Sweden. Apropos, I wish to thank the IMS Research Centre (Intermedial and Multimodal Studies) at Linnaeus University, and its director Professor Jørgen Bruhn, for having supported the preparation of this new edition with much welcome extra research time. The other major addition consists of an entirely new chapter with three additional case studies: the agency of timbres in film music; the use in horror and comedy cinema of what David Ireland has called ‘incongruent music’; the ‘sound-design’ style of contemporary Hollywood music. Indeed, one criticism that I received about the first edition was: ‘And what about sound?’ Well, actually the title of the book is ‘*Film/Music Analysis*’, so I suppose I clearly stated that I had deliberately circumscribed my attention to the musical aspects of the soundtrack. Truth is that, in today’s scoring, music and sound are not as clearly separable and distinguishable as before. I have therefore embraced the criticism and have added the aforementioned case study about the current trend of film music in Hollywood. Despite my attempts to limit to the minimum the notorious ‘Adam’s Syndrome’ that affects us academics (and afflicts our readers)—that is, the compulsion to either assign new names to new discoveries, or to call old discoveries with

new names—I felt it necessary to augment the previous set of film-music functions with a new one useful to qualify this latest film-music trend—I called it ‘somatic-perceptive function’.

On this occasion, I wish to reiterate my thanks to my mentor during my Southampton days, Kevin Donnelly, for his invaluable teachings. A grateful *dank je wel* also to Emile Wennekes, who has been a treasured supporter and advisor in my career. I would like to remember with the deepest gratitude the late David Bordwell, whom I met during the preparation of the first manuscript and who has been a constant role model. Finally, I wish to wave my hand to the anonymous reviewer from one major film-music journal who, ten years ago, curtly rejected the type of film/music analysis here presented as ‘pseudo-scientific’. If I knew the reviewer’s identity, I would gladly mail them a copy of this second edition—an inscribed one.

Kalmar, Sweden
April 2025

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The spur to develop what I present in this book came from a practical need. For my previous monograph on John Williams I needed to study his film music not as ‘music’, because mine was not research in musicology but in film history and stylistics. I also needed to analyse the role of his music in film, and Williams’s music is mostly in the area of what would be called ‘accompaniment’ music, not ‘comment’ music. More than tools to interpret its meaning, I needed tools to analyse its formal agency. I came to the conclusion that Neoformalism was the right approach for my scope. As a former film-maker, when I watch a film that has some effect on me—perceptive, affective, ideological, etc....—what intrigues me most is to understand how said effect has been produced and induced. In general, I find Neoformalism a stimulating way of analysing films because it entails a sort of reverse engineering: from the finished artefact, one has to reconstruct and examine the creative steps that led to the result. Specifically, I also find Neoformalism to be very helpful in investigating what music can do when combined with visuals. Since it proved very handy to me, I resolved to fully develop a Neoformalism-based method to the study of music in film.

I call this method ‘*Film/Music Analysis*’. The slash sign between ‘film’ and ‘music’ is not intended as a frill, a pretentious coinage—well, not only. If I say that I perform a ‘film-music analysis’ the general understanding is that I am going to dissect musicologically a piece of music written for the

screen. The slash sign in film/music analysis is to be interpreted as a relational sign: this is an instance of film analysis in which particular attention is placed on the music as to its interaction with the other components of the film. And the order is also important: in '*Film/Music Analysis*' film analysis is the first concern, as it stems from a film scholar's perspective.

The work is articulated into three parts. Part one is the *Pars Destruens*, in which I present a review of the issues that I think make most past and current approaches incomplete or biased. Part two is the *Pars Construens*, in which I present my frameworks of reference, mainly Kristin Thompson's Neoformalism. But film music is also music, and even if the method I propose does not entail in-depth harmonic analysis or descriptions of the contrapuntal design, and it strives to keep the references to the musical text to a minimum, yet some concepts from Music Studies are to be brought in. These are drawn principally from Leonard B. Meyer's music theories and connected to Neoformalism with an overarching framework based on Gestalt Psychology. Then, I propose a method to analyse music in films based on the spheres of mental activity in which the film viewer is engaged: perception, emotion, and cognition. The third Part could be called *Pars Demonstrans*. It consists of a set of case studies focussed on single topics and musical agencies: an examination and criticism of Stilwell's 'Fantastical Gap' in *Laura*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *The Sea Hawk*; a discussion of Chion's 'anempathetic effect' in *Hang-over Square* and *A Clockwork Orange*; a look into how songs and lyrics operate in films, with examples from *Breaking Bad* and *Casablanca*; an analysis of how music combines with the other cinematic elements in the opening-title sequences to set the tone for the narrative and prefigure future developments, with examples from classical Hollywood films and a more extended analysis of the opening sequence of *The Hateful Eight*; a study of the overarching design of the music in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. The closing chapter is a full analysis of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, focussing on how the score cooperates with the other filmic elements to produce the local and global design of the narration, and also comparing my film/music analysis of this pair of films with other analyses by musicologists.

The research for this study was financed with a Vice Chancellor's Award in Film from the University of Southampton, and the bulk of this was written during my stint in their Film Department. I would like to offer my warmest thanks and appreciation to Kevin Donnelly, my always friendly and helpful supervisor, with whom I had a number of

extremely pleasant and enlightening consultations—namely, he pointed me to Gestalt Psychology as a perhaps better fit than Cognitivism for my work. My thanks also go to Francesco Izzo for his musical advice. And I also extend my appreciation to all the other people I had the opportunity to work with at Southampton: Tim Bergfelder, Beth Carroll, Mike Hammond, Sally Keenan, Lucy Mazdon, Paola Visconti, and Michael Williams. For making this book possible, I am grateful to Palgrave Macmillan, and in particular to Lina Aboujieb and Karina Jákupsdóttir, who assisted me in the production phases.

I would also like to acknowledge the Worldwide Universities Network that awarded me a ‘Research Mobility Programme’ grant to spend a period of study as ‘Visiting Scholar’ at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. I was graced with the chance of being able to write the parts about Neoformalism there, in Neoformalism’s birthplace. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, who were so kind as to welcome me in their community during my visit, and to offer me invaluable advice and seminal directions for my research. The good parts in the following pages are the fruits of such consultations; any bad part is to be imputed solely to my misunderstanding.

Finally, a due acknowledgement to my stable family—my parent Silvia and Vittorio and my sister Sara—who have always borne with my traveling around, appearing and disappearing, and strange occupational status during these years. Grazie!

Imperia, Italy
May 2017

PRAISE FOR *FILM/MUSIC ANALYSIS*

“In this compelling analysis of how film music functions in a wide variety of contexts, Audissino illustrates his clearly explained theoretical concepts with numerous well-chosen examples and substantial case studies. Approaching its subject primarily (and refreshingly) from a film-studies perspective, this book will equally prove an immensely useful and thought-provoking resource for anyone interested in music and cinema”.

—Mervyn Cooke, Professor of Music, University of Nottingham,
UK, and author of *A History of Film Music*, 2008

“In *Film/Music Analysis*, the author displays an impressively broad knowledge when critiquing previous writings on the subject of analytical approaches to musical scores in films. He offers a new type of analysis, based on the neoformalist approach. It assumes that a film’s score is not a self-contained piece of music inserted into it, to be analyzed simply as music. Instead, for Audissino, music serves as one of the many filmic techniques that together function to make up the narration of a story. Film music is thus treated as comparable to cinematography, staging, acting, special effects, editing, and other components of movies. A series

of compelling examples demonstrates the practicality of this sensible approach, one accessible to film scholars who are not musicologists”.

—Kristin Thompson, Honorary Fellow, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, and author of *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*, 1988

“More than thirty years ago, Claudia Gorbman pioneered placing film music within regular film theory. Now it once again seems necessary to apply a theoretical frame which allows music to be treated as a cinematic device and not as autonomous music. Here Emilio Audissino couples neoformalism and Meyer’s musicology into an analytical tool that highlights the interplay between film and music. This book is indispensable for every scholar who wants to analyze and understand film music”.

—Ann-Kristin Wallengren, Professor of Film Studies, Lund University, Sweden, and co-editor (with K. J. Donnelly) of *Today’s Sounds for Yesterday’s Films: Making Music for Silent Cinema*, 2016

“Audissino’s neoformalist approach is not merely a distinctive addition to the analytical toolkit for professionals, I have been using his perspectives on film/music analysis intensively in the classroom for years. His model is especially useful for bringing students from various disciplinary backgrounds together. Students of Film Studies are not presupposed to possess profound music-theoretical skills, yet can still formulate sensible conclusions on how music functions within a film score; musicology students do not need an all-encompassing knowledge of the technical lingo of filmmaking. This second edition makes Audissino’s work even more useful due to the incorporation of (the increasingly important) timbral aspects of soundtracks, as well as addressing additional cinematic genres”.

—Emile Wennekes, Chair Professor of Musicology: Music and Media, Utrecht University, The Netherlands, Chair of the Study Group Music and Media (MaM) of the International Musicological Society, and co-editor (with Emilio Audissino) of *The Palgrave Handbook of Music in Comedy Cinema*, 2023

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