

SYMPHONIES OF HORROR
Musical Experimentation in Howard Shore's Work with David
Cronenberg

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INTRODUCTION

With a career spanning almost forty years, Canadian composer Howard Shore has become one of the most respected and sought after film composers working in the industry today. Much of his work, in particular his scores for the Lord of the Rings films, have received much academic attention; his longstanding working relationship with Canadian horror filmmaker David Cronenberg, however, has not yet benefited from such academic inquiry. Using the films The Brood, Videodrome, The Fly, and Naked Lunch as case studies, this thesis examines the way that Shore uses the arena of Cronenberg's films as a laboratory for personal musical experimentation. Examples include Shore's use of electronic synthesizer sounds alongside a string orchestra for Videodrome, implementations of canonic techniques and against-the-grain writing for The Fly, and the incorporation of free-jazz aesthetics in Naked Lunch. Using as sources Howard Shore's words and what academic inquiry exists in this field, but more often utilizing my own analysis and observations of the music and films, I argue that Shore's scores incorporate such musical experimentation to work in tandem with Cronenberg's own experimental art. As such, Shore's scores for Cronenberg's films are a prime illustration of the practical value of experimental composition, showing that there is room for the avant-garde in music outside of the realm of academia and indeed that such music can have commercial potential.

The catalyst for the subject matter and essence of this thesis was an extremely thought-provoking interview with renowned Canadian film composer Howard Shore, conducted by composer and author Michael Schelle and published in his compendium *The Score: Interviews with Film Composers* in 1999. Knowing that Shore was best known for his work on the *Lord of the Rings* films, and seeking to write on that subject, I consulted Schelle's interview chiefly to find primary source information from Shore himself about some of the most relevant aspects of his *Lord of the Rings* scores, including the tried-and-true topic of Wagnerian leitmotivic development that has been covered in the past by such scholars as Judith Bernanke, who discusses Shore's adaption of Wagnerian techniques in her essay "Howard Shore's Ring Cycle," and Doug Adams in his book *The Music of the Lord of the Rings* films. Schelle's interview with Shore, however, predominantly addresses a different topic: Shore's extensive body of work with

Canadian horror film director David Cronenberg. Their fascinating and lengthy conversation ranges tremendously, and is worth consulting in full by anyone interested in the topic at hand. One of the most salient themes of their conversation was Shore's repeated invocation of experimentalism; in his own words, "I used film scores as opportunities for experimenting."¹ The experimentation in question involved techniques typically associated with the [classical] "art music" world, including techniques associated with composers such as Bartok, Berg, and Penderecki, as well as other aesthetic, compositional and production approaches.

In reading Shore's words, I was struck by how Cronenberg's films appeared to be an ideal arena for such musical experimentation – certainly, the potential of "contemporary film scores as a new-music alternative," to quote Schelle, had never been so apparent to me. Not only was Shore's facility with modern classical compositional techniques clear, but the interview with Schelle inspired me to cultivate the central argument of this thesis. Film scoring, as it is conventionally described by successful composers in the field, is a discipline defined by its subservience to another artistic form. Carter Burwell, known best for his Coen brothers collaborations, stated in an interview that "[he has] never had anyone come to me and [ask for great music]... they just want music that works," and furthermore, that he has "never been asked for interesting music."² Elmer Bernstein, speaking to television and film composer Michael Levine, once stated that film composers "aren't musicians... [but are] dramatists."³ This is not simply a modern trend – back in 1964, the great Bernard Herrmann lamented what he observed as the increasing prevalence of "tone-deaf" filmmakers who were patently disinterested in

¹ Michael Schelle, *The Score: Interviews with Film Composers* (Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 1999), 328

² Michelle Lanz, "Composer Carter Burwell Says Most Directors Don't Care If a Score is 'Good' or 'Interesting'," 89.3 KPCC, December 28, 2015, <http://www.scpr.org/programs/the-frame/2015/12/28/45727/composer-carter-burwell-anomalisa-carol-coens/>

³ Michael Levine, "Why Hans Zimmer Got The Job You Wanted," *Soundtracks and Trailer Music*, July 12, 2013, <http://www.soundtracksandtrailermusic.com/2013/07/hans-zimmer/>

musically compelling scores.⁴ The primary goal of the film composer is not to express their artistic personality and strive for creative flourishing as much modern concert music is – rather, the composer must hold extreme deference to the narrative of the film as the director conceives it. In such an environment, personal artistic experimentation often is forced to take a back seat to telling the story in the most compelling way possible, rather than creating a musically creative score.

Howard Shore's body of work with David Cronenberg presents a fascinating counterargument to this prevailing notion of film music being an unfeasible venue for musical experimentation and creativity of expression. In his interview with Schelle, Shore states clearly: "I thought about film music as an outlet for my concert music... a way to get my concert music performed."⁵ For Shore, Cronenberg's films provided a venue that the composer lacked in his popular music gigs, an environment to push himself to try as many new musical approaches and ideas as possible, to be able to indulge in radical personal, artistic experimentation while simultaneously being able to serve the film – a rare blessing for any film composer, let alone one with as much interest in the world of art music as Shore.⁶

In this essay, I hope to illustrate a couple broad points about Shore's works in collaboration with David Cronenberg. Firstly, I would like to demonstrate the experimental nature of Shore's work with Cronenberg, both in terms of stylistic/aesthetic approaches and in terms of compositional ambition. By "experimental," I mean not necessarily that Shore explores undiscovered grounds in the canon of film music as a whole – though much of the music discussed in this thesis is unquestionably unique – but rather that the Cronenberg films offered

⁴ Julie Hubbert, "Herrmann Says Hollywood Tone Deaf as to Film Scores," in *Celluloid Symphonies*, ed. Julie Hubbert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 321

⁵ Schelle, *The Score*, 324

⁶ *ibid.*, 325

Shore an opportunity to indulge in radical *personal* artistic experimentation. By demonstrating the experimental nature of Shore's Cronenberg scores, I hope to illustrate that there is place in the film music world for adventurous, daring writing that can truly offer composers an alternative to composing in the art music world. Howard Shore's work with David Cronenberg is, in my view, as convincing proof as any film music in the canon that film music can and should be viewed by composers and academics alike as an artistically valuable alternative to "new music," one that can even present composers with the potential for commercial success.

METHODOLOGY

I would like to take a moment here to address some of the unique methodological issues I experienced in the conducting of this project, and justify some of the decisions I have had to make throughout the course of my research. The study of film music, in particular the music of "cult works" such as the Cronenberg horror films, is one that presents distinctive challenges from an academic perspective. The academic study of film scoring has a tradition of thought just like any other. However, not only is the body of work in this field comparatively small, but much of the existing intellectual work in the field is only truly applicable to this particular project in the theoretical, abstract realm. Writing exists on how the aesthetics of music complement picture, the myriad of ways in which we as viewers perceive the sensory experience of sight and sound working in tandem to produce the art of the cinema, and how academics can and should write about this experience, but within certain movements of film-making, there is a dearth of existing scholarly work on the actual material itself upon which a writer can build. Howard Shore's work with David Cronenberg is one such arena. Therefore, it is virtually impossible for a writer on this subject to base analysis of these films and soundtracks on primary and secondary sources, simply

because in this case they scarcely exist aside from brief, fragmentary remarks from the composer and others. The bulk of this paper's serious analytical work will thus be grounded not so much in consultation with sources written about the topic at hand as it will engage with the films themselves, and original research that I have conducted through analysis of the material. Chiefly, external source material will pertain more to Cronenberg's films and philosophies/theories related to them than it will to Shore's music.

A related challenge when writing about the majority of film music is that most of the repertoire in question does not have reliable sheet music scores to analyze like one can do for most music in the classical genre writ large. Much of the music is not public domain; some non-public domain music has published orchestral scores, but less mainstream fare such as the Cronenberg films do not have scores of the soundtracks available for study. All of the included musical examples in this paper have been transcribed myself by ear; often, these transcriptions are of complex and intricate material that is not easily discernable under dialogue and sound effects. I have therefore been reliant on soundtrack releases for some of my transcription work, albeit with the knowledge that the soundtrack releases often can contain important differences (see: *Videodrome*, whose mix was significantly altered by the record label Varese Sarabande when released).⁷ All of my transcriptions for *The Brood* and *Videodrome* were done based on the film, not using soundtrack albums, while my transcriptions of material from *The Fly* and *Naked Lunch* were done both using the film and the corresponding soundtrack albums (in order to decipher details buried by sound effects and dialogue in the film's sound mix). My transcriptions vary in nature depending on what I am attempting to illustrate – some are simple Schenkerian harmonic frameworks, while others are more detailed in order to demonstrate coloristic devices

⁷ Tim Lucas, *Studies in the Horror Film: Videodrome* (Lakewood, CO: Centipede Press, 2008), 130-133

and compositional details. All of my barring and time signature choices in these transcriptions are merely editorial, conveying the music as I perceive it, since I do not have access to Shore's own working scores as reference. As I will address in the following "theoretical frameworks" section of this paper, analyzing film scores in an "absolute" manner divorced from narrative context is a potentially problematic theoretical approach. Therefore, each section of film analysis in this paper will draw upon both transcriptional musical analysis and analysis grounded in narrative context. The central argument of this thesis, however, is primarily concerned with Shore's compositional experimentation, and therefore I will be placing significant emphasis on musical details when necessary.

I would also like to briefly address the matter of film selection and justify my choices of films to examine in this study. The Howard Shore-David Cronenberg collaboration to date has spanned well over thirty years, and includes close to twenty films with great stylistic and aesthetic diversity. Due to the impossibility of analyzing such a body of work in its entirety, it was of importance for me to select a handful of films that work towards my thesis in some representative way, or are noteworthy enough in their own right to merit special attention. *The Brood* (1979) was selected due to its noteworthy status as being both Howard Shore's first "serious" film score (Shore considers the film to be his debut score despite having done one other project for film before it, 1978's *I Miss You, Hugs and Kisses*) – it was also Cronenberg's first time working with a film composer and thus is a landmark work for both figures.⁸ I chose *Videodrome* (1983) to be a representative score for Shore's early experiments with electronic music – although 1981's *Scanners* was his first work driven by synthesizers, *Videodrome* was Shore's first score sequenced using a computer, and represents an innovative approach to

⁸ Schelle, *The Score*, 325

hybrid/electronic composition.⁹ *The Fly* (1986) was chosen due to its prominence as a profoundly successful film – the film is often considered Cronenberg’s breakthrough feature, and was by far his highest grossing film to date. The score is noteworthy for its exploration of advanced contrapuntal techniques and what Shore himself identifies as an “operatic” aesthetic (so much so that he would decades later turn the plot of the film into his first proper opera).¹⁰ 1991’s *Naked Lunch* represents perhaps the most radical aesthetic experimentation of Shore’s career – the soundtrack sees Shore join forces both with his frequent collaborators in the London Philharmonic Orchestra and legendary free-jazz icon Ornette Coleman for one of Shore’s most strikingly idiosyncratic scores. All of these films illustrate Shore’s willingness to experiment with radically different aesthetics and compositional techniques in order to most effectively work with Cronenberg’s narratives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the key issues in the discourse about film music studies over the past half-century or so, and one that is of particular relevance to this project, is where exactly scholars in this field should place their emphasis: on the music in an absolute sense, or on narrative context first and foremost? In the introduction to his compendium volume *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, K.J. Donnelly of the University of Southampton outlines the two approaches: he describes the former as being influenced by the formalist analysis of notes on paper and musicological analysis, a sort of analysis that evolved chiefly for the study of nineteenth-century art music and that focuses mainly on the abstract nature of “the music’s essence.” This approach he clearly criticizes, due chiefly to the fact that film music by definition exists not in a vacuum but alongside another

⁹ *ibid.*, 326

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 341-342

visual medium, and as a “popular” medium, it also exists in a rich and multifaceted cultural context. Donnelly points both to semiotics and to musicology as two different ways to situate film music in cultural context; in the case of the former, “cultural coding” and the way that musical language signifies culturally recognized ideas, and in the case of the latter, historical, performative, and societal contexts.¹¹ In the canon of film music studies, perhaps the most notable advocate of context-heavy narrative analysis is Claudia Gorbman – in her book *Unheard Melodies*, she argues that “to judge film music as one judges ‘pure’ music is to ignore its status as a collaboration that is the film,” concluding that analysis beyond purely musical territory is necessary to understand why film music is effective in its cinematic context.^{12 13}

However, Donnelly does not reject formalist analysis altogether. He acknowledges that implementation of such analysis is a logical tool in the film music scholars’ toolbox, since a great deal of film music engages on a deep level with the same nineteenth-century art music that was initially the primary subject of such analysis. Donnelly criticizes heavily the tendency of scholars in his own discipline, film studies, to display “[an] almost total lack of any consideration of the music itself,” as he believes that the film studies tradition prioritizes the study of “narrative... [and] the genre’s themes and history” at the expense of discussion of the music itself. However, such discussions should also not “divorce [film music] from cinematic context,” an act that would “lose sight of the music’s function and social existence.” What

¹¹ Kevin J. Donnelly, “The Hidden Heritage of Film Music: History and Scholarship,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. Kevin J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 2-3

¹² James Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music II: Analysing Interactions of Music and Film,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. Kevin J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 39

¹³ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 12

Donnelly ultimately advocates for, therefore, is a blend of the two approaches – a multifaceted analytical process that takes into account both “the logic of the film and the logic of the music.”¹⁴

In their essay “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music: Analysing the Music,” scholars David Neumeyer and James Buhler outline an approach to film music study that focuses on what they call “purely musical parameters” – acknowledging that such analyses that privilege the music itself “distort the filmic experience,” they nonetheless assert that such music-centric analysis “has the advantage of focusing attention on the extensive work that music performs in shaping the filmic experience.” In other words, understanding the logic of the music is instrumental to understanding why it achieves what it does in the context of the film experience. Despite the fact that, by their admission, the analytical tools developed to study absolute music cannot solely explain the “dramatic functions or psychological power of music,” they nonetheless write that such tools are valuable to develop a thorough understanding of the way music “works,” in particular because so much of film music literature draws from the canon of nineteenth-century symphonic repertoire.¹⁵ Neumeyer and Buhler outline six different categories of parameters that they view as meaningful aspects of a work of film music to analyze: pitch relations, style topics, tonal design, leitmotivic development, timbre, and form. In each of these cases, they view the imagetrack as a “super-libretto” for the music, allowing them to focus on musical analysis while recognizing that the soundtrack must remain subordinate to the image.¹⁶

Within the category of pitch relations, Neumeyer and Buhler identify two basic binary oppositions that they believe are relevant to film music analysis: major/minor and

¹⁴ Donnelly, “The Hidden Heritage of Film Music,” 2-4

¹⁵ David Neumeyer and James Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music I: Analysing the Music,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. Kevin J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 19-20

¹⁶ Ibid.

consonant/dissonant. In doing so, they refine the ideas of Royal S. Brown, who, in his book *Overtones and Undertones*, writes that “the major mode... ties in with a greater sense of stability and order... than the innately more chromatic... minor mode.” Instead, Neumeyer and Buhler argue that the subjective difference between the major and minor modes for listeners has to do more with affect. Invoking Claudia Gorbman’s idea of “cultural musical codes,” they contend that the major mode signifies ideas, concepts and feelings different from those signified by the minor mode. Particularly, Neumeyer and Buhler take issue with Brown’s characterization of chromaticism and tonality – they argue that chromaticism does not necessarily weaken key stability, and often in nineteenth-century practice and beyond is used to strengthen key relationships and provide *pathos* and heightened emotional affect, *not* the disorientation of keys. They thereby refute Brown’s assertion that the minor mode’s affective power comes from the fact that its “innately chromatic” nature provides it “[less] stability.” Similarly, Neumeyer and Buhler object to Brown’s characterization of the consonance/dissonance binary. Specifically, they point to Brown’s apparent inability to distinguish between tonal dissonance (i.e., suspensions, accented passing tones and the like) and atonal dissonance, such as that of Schoenberg, where dissonance is “emancipated” and does not by necessity involve a resolution of tension to consonance. Brown writes that “even the most dissonant film scores rarely venture too far from tonality” - a statement that, to Neumeyer and Buhler, illustrates that Brown labels all dissonance in film music as tonal dissonance. They outline the affective difference between the two classifications of dissonance as follows: tonal dissonance, due to its entailed resolution to consonance, functions on the principle of tension and release, the “relatively predictable... build-up and discharge of tension” that fuels dramatic progression. By contrast, atonal dissonance does not, musically speaking, mandate such a resolution, and thus, they write, atonal systems

“frequently produce the effect of an open system, of leaving matters unsettled, of not being able to find a point of definitive closure.” Thus, dissonance can have dramatically different affective impacts upon listeners depending on whether the musical context is broadly tonal or broadly atonal. They conclude that atonal systems are most common in suspense, horror and science-fiction films, writing that “in horror films... tonality [goes] awry to the point of incomprehension.”¹⁷

Neumeyer and Buhler emphasize the analytical category of style topics as being the most commonly utilized categories used in non-specialist writing about film music. The style topic, analogous to Gorbman’s “cultural musical codes,” represents a semiotic language in which a musical “sign” calls to mind a predictable response for the listener (such as an atonal cluster “portending the monster behind the door”). They write that the successful implementation of proper style topics is of such importance in film composition that the “central musical event in film music [is the proper selection of a style topic], and [pitch relations] serve as the technical means of articulating the style topic.” Analysis of style topics takes places over three levels: musical traits characteristic of a style topic, how the music of a particular scene invokes a style topic, and how the topics are utilized to tell the narrative.¹⁸ Tonal design, by contrast, is in Neumeyer’s and Buhler’s estimation a less useful way for a scholar to discover insights regarding the *functional* affective role of a score in film. Despite being a dominant tool for analysis of concert music (and indeed often is a definitive structural determinant for classical art music), Neumeyer and Buhler write that large-scale key relations are not frequently studied in analysis of film music, chiefly because a film, unlike a concert work, does not contain a singular body of music but rather uses music intermittently, and therefore large-scale key tonal designs

¹⁷ Ibid., 19-23

¹⁸ Ibid., 24-25

are not really perceivable (or able to be retained in memory throughout the duration of the film) by the majority of viewers. Using the example of Bernard Herrmann's score for *The Trouble With Harry*, Neumeyer and Buhler argue that, even when a large-scale tonal design can be found through analysis, "it [does not] really make sense to trace functional progression of keys across the several cues... especially since cues are often separated by large stretches of non-musical sound." Such analysis of large-scale tonal design, in their view, is more likely to reveal subtle insight into the composer's own "private" take on the film rather than a conscious effort to convey narrative via key centers.¹⁹

For Neumeyer and Buhler, the leitmotif is the strongest possible way for a film composer to achieve the kind of compositional unity usually reserved for concert works. Indeed, they write of a "brute-force quality about the unity the leitmotif delivers – a unity posited rather than won." The technique has received criticism from certain writers, such as Adorno and Eisler, who dismiss leitmotif use in films as being inflexible and a "bad habit"; nonetheless, it is a prevalent device in the film music canon, and scores implementing the technique quite frequently succeed in Neumeyer's and Buhler's estimation. Analyzing leitmotifs involves both analysis of the motif itself (i.e how specific musical details relate to that which the motif represents, often invoking style topics), and the varied ways in which the composer implements the motif throughout the course of the film. For Howard Shore himself, the leitmotif is primarily valuable not just for its unifying potential but for its clarity – he has stated that he implemented leitmotivic development in the *Lord of the Rings* score due to the sheer complexity of Tolkien's world in order to help the viewer keep track of events on screen, but that Cronenberg's films, which "have to do with ambiguity," do not call for such a lucid approach to musical narrative.^{20 21}

¹⁹ Ibid., 26-28

²⁰ Ibid., 28-30

The category of timbral colors, as described by Neumeyer and Buhler, can in a sense be expanded to include arrangement choices and general questions of tone and feel as music is perceived by the listener. They write that not only can timbral choices provide “as much [meaning] as pitch sequences and tonal associations,” but that the level of meaning that can be encoded in a timbral “sometimes... seems almost linguistic in its specificity.” In the case of film music, “syntax” (that is to say, analytical musical logic *a la* nineteenth-century art music) often is disregarded in favor of pure timbral aesthetics – for instance, the transposition of a theme not due to a tonal relationship schema but simply because the theme played in the new key has a more appropriate timbral effect.²² A final analytical category of importance for Neumeyer and Buhler is that of form, and how music can contribute to the film’s form. They write that the use of music “helps [the film] assume a distinctive and definitive shape,” through such tools as the mere presence (or lack thereof) of music, recurrence, contrasts in style, the achieving of small-scale unity (ex. a montage sequence), an escalation of dramatic tension via such devices as an building ostinato, and a shift in musical elements to underscore a transition in visual imagery or scene change.²³

These insights are of value to a scholar on film music, and many of these categories will be invoked as I dive into detailed analysis of the scores at hand. In particular, pitch relations, style topics, and timbral colors will prove of interest as I explore the specific musical decisions Shore makes in the Cronenberg films to push his personal boundaries and create experimental scores that work in tandem with Cronenberg’s narratives. However, analysis of the way in which

²¹ Loic Valceschini, “Locarno 2016 Interview: Howard Shore Talks His Career and Lifelong Collaborations,” *ScreenAnarchy*, August 15, 2016. <http://screenanarchy.com/2016/08/locarno-2016-interview-howard-shore-talks-his-career-and-lifelong-collaborations.html>

²² Neumeyer and Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches I,” 30-31

²³ *Ibid.*, 32-35

film and music interact to produce an aggregate affective impact on the viewer is necessary to understand the way that film music contributes to the effectiveness of the narrative. Buhler addresses this topic in a follow-up to the essay referenced in the preceding pages, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music: Analysing Interactions of Music and Film.” In this essay, he outlines a series of ways in which a scholar can approach the way that film music functions not as a purely autonomous element, but as an element that by definition works in tandem with picture to create an aggregate effect: to understand “music as it works within a general filmic system.”²⁴

Buhler begins by adapting a distinction articulated by Gorbman in *Unheard Melodies*: the terms diegetic and non-diegetic, which in a film music context represent the contrast between “the music of the narrative” (for instance, a song sung by a main character on screen) and background music. Buhler identifies transitions between the two types of music, or “audio dissolves,” as being a key way that music can function in a filmic context to ease the audiences’ experience of a transition from, for instance, the “real to the ideal realm.”²⁵ This distinction is of interest for the topic of Cronenberg’s films because this dichotomy is one that Shore first takes advantage of to provide narrative grounding (in *Videodrome*) and then works to utterly erode in order to achieve a sort of radical disorientation for the viewer (in *Naked Lunch*).

Buhler outlines two essential ways in which non-diegetic scores can be seen to interact with narrative on film: synchronization and counterpoint. Synchronization refers to an approach in which a film composer writes music that, to invoke Max Steiner, the legendary pioneer of film music composition, “[fits] a picture like a glove.” The idea here is that music should take its cues from the film, working in parallel with the imagetrack to reinforce it instead of straying away

²⁴ Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches II,” 39

²⁵ Ibid., 41

and striving for independence. Such a technique utilized in the extreme has become known as, perhaps pejoratively, “Mickey-Mousing,” where sound is so closely synchronized with picture that the effect is not unlike that of a cartoon.²⁶ By contrast, a contrapuntal approach to film music composition entails a relationship between picture and sound that is “neither redundant (as with synchronized sound) nor simply arbitrary (as when sound and image [are totally unrelated])... sound might add something not already present in the image.”²⁷ In practice, it is extremely rare for either approach to be used in an extreme, ideal form; even dialogue, which is almost always synchronized to the visual of moving lips on screen, sometimes departs from that ideal, and music that functions in counterpoint to picture without incorporating occasional sync points would “seem strangely indifferent to the narrative.”²⁸

An example of a particularly effective use of music functioning in counterpoint to image is that of “reading against the grain.” In this case, music that is not superficially coordinated with picture may help inform the viewer of meaning not immediately apparent in the visual image, encouraging the viewer to reinterpret the image in a different light.²⁹ One such example from a relatively recent entry in the film music literature is that of American composer Larry Groupé’s score to the 2011 remake of *Straw Dogs*; in one meaningful scene, the camera pans over a beautifully idyllic and pastoral farmhouse, into which the main characters are set to move. But, rather than scoring the moment with traditionally idyllic music, Groupé underscores the moment with a sequence of chromatic, tonally unrelated triads, including a tritone leap from a C-sharp minor tonality to a G minor chord. Groupé’s decision to score the scene in this way is noteworthy because this idyllic farmhouse is the site of a brutally violent siege sequence towards

²⁶ Ibid., 45

²⁷ Ibid., 46

²⁸ Ibid., 47

²⁹ Ibid., 49

the end of the film – by working against the grain, he encourages the viewers to feel unsettled by the farmhouse, even though the image itself contains nothing that should disturb the viewers, and the characters on screen do not share this perspective.³⁰

None of this, of course, answers the question of to what degree the soundtrack can truly be said to stand apart from the film – that is to say, whether its ontological status has a noteworthy amount of meaning on its own terms. Composer and academic Michel Chion's answer to this is an emphatic negative, to such a degree that he has made the quite radical claim that "there is no soundtrack." To Chion, "the soundtrack is inert and with no autonomous meaning" without the film providing meaning to it.³¹ In such a reading of a soundtrack's ontological importance, analysis of specific musical elements would be considerably less illuminating than discussion of the film and the way that filmic meaning is perceived. Chion himself, however, provides us with a justification for the analysis of sound on its own terms: he writes that "the creators of a film's sound... know that if you alter or remove these sounds, the image is not the same."³² If this is the case, then analysis of the soundtrack itself is after all of value; for if the filmic meaning is so dramatically colored by the influence of music that alterations to it inexorably color filmic meaning, then it is worth analyzing the sounds themselves to discover what aspects of the music produce such an effect on the image.

My own theoretical approach to this project rests upon this final point. Drawing upon Buhler's emphasis of studying "music *in* film rather than music *for* film," I seek to analyze Howard Shore's scoring work with David Cronenberg in its proper context, understanding that

³⁰ Larry Groupe, Lecture at the Palomar Film Music Workshop in Pauma Valley, CA, Summer 2015

³¹ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (trans. Claudia Gorbman) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 39

³² Michel Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema* (trans. Claudia Gorbman) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4

ultimately what is of primary importance to the efficacy of the film is the way that film sound and film image work in aggregate to produce an effect on the viewer.³³ However, I will use close analysis of “purely musical parameters,” including those outlined by Neumeyer and Buhler, to demonstrate the specific compositional decisions Shore makes, and why he might seek to do so to tell the narrative in question.³⁴ If the central issue of this thesis is that of compositional decisions made by Shore, and how they are made in order to convey a narrative, then grappling with purely musical elements of the score is as critical to understanding Shore’s approach to scoring Cronenberg’s films as analyzing the way that score and images interact in these pictures.

³³ Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches II,” 39

³⁴ Donnelly, “The Hidden Heritage of Film Music,” 2-4

EARLY EXPERIMENTATION: *The Brood*

In the latter half of the 1970s, Howard Shore's primary musical gig was that of musical director for Saturday Night Live, a gig he got thanks to a friendship with SNL director Lorne Michaels that extended back to both men's teenage years. Due to the nature of the gig, Shore's primary musical activity during those years was grounded in the music of the popular domain. In addition to performing with the shows' musical guests, most of whom being pop musicians of the day (with some exceptions, such as Ornette Coleman, the free-jazz icon with whom Shore would later collaborate on *Naked Lunch*), Shore played the part of a bandleader in two parody blues bands. One of these bands, "Howard Shore and his All-Bee Band," would be the genesis of the Blues Brothers partnership of John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd, a name that Shore himself suggested to the two entertainers. Such territory was familiar ground for Shore at this stage in his career; the composer's first major musical breakthrough was his role as saxophonist and founding member with the commercially successful jazz-rock band Lighthouse in 1969.

Shore's years as musical director for SNL were formative for him artistically, due to his experience working with a vast diversity of artists in a variety of popular styles, but towards the end of the decade, the composer began to feel that the position was artistically limiting. Shore had aspirations of writing other music, not in popular styles, but in the territory of "art music" – concert music, involving forces of instrumentalists that he lacked access to as SNL's music director, such as string ensembles and orchestral forces. While scoring the low-budget thriller film *I Miss You, Hugs and Kisses* in 1978, Shore approached David Cronenberg, whom he knew from their shared background coming from the same neighborhood in Toronto, about working on Cronenberg's next upcoming film, *The Brood*. While Shore's motivations for wishing to work on *The Brood* were in no small part related to his affinity for Cronenberg as a colleague and his

prior exposure to Cronenberg's shorts, Shore was perhaps chiefly motivated by his desire to have a venue to indulge in personal experimentation; working on film scores, especially non-mainstream pictures such as the early Cronenberg films, would allow the composer to have his aspirations of having his concert music performed and released, and would allow him to explore a side of his artistry that he had to neglect during his tenure as Lighthouse saxophonist and SNL's music director. Furthermore, Cronenberg allowed Shore enough creative freedom to experiment in ways that many directors would not – a fact that Shore has mentioned on multiple occasions.^{35 36 37}

The Brood's score was written and recorded for a larger ensemble than Shore was accustomed to working with in his work as a popular music artist, but nevertheless Shore had to face the reality of budgetary restraints; in a production scenario described by the composer as “guerrilla film-making,” Shore wrote the score for a relatively small ensemble of twenty-one string players, who tracked the film's entire score in just seven hours. The recording sessions marked Shore's first experience both recording with and conducting a live orchestra, providing him with the experience working with a classical ensemble that he had desired for years.³⁸ The experience was novel for Cronenberg as well; the director, due to the miniscule budgets with which he was accustomed to working, had never worked with a film composer, either producing silent films with added spoken commentary or needle-drop (pre-existing licensed) music.³⁹

³⁵ *Movie Geeks United*, “Interview with Howard Shore,” April 14, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kp7TJaF3uKc>

³⁶ Amit Sen, “Howard Shore: An Interview with Film Music Royalty,” *Rhinegold*, May 31, 2016, http://www.rhinegold.co.uk/classical_music/howard-shore-interview-film-music-royalty

³⁷ Schelle, *The Score*, 325

³⁸ Sen, “Howard Shore: An Interview with Film Music Royalty”

³⁹ *Movie Geeks United*, “Interview with Howard Shore.”

At its core, *The Brood* is a story that intertwines Cronenberg's typical themes of the scientific practice gone wrong with what can be seen as a thinly veiled allegorical depiction of events in the director's own personal life; namely, his ongoing legal battle with his estranged wife for custody over their daughter. Psychiatrist Dr. Hal Raglan (Oliver Reed), in an adaptation of Freud's talking cure into the realm of the physical, encourages his patients to externalize their trauma through physiological alterations to their bodies, a practice that turns sour as one of his patients, Nola Carveth (Samantha Eggar) produces a murderous "brood" of childlike creatures that violently act against the subjects of her discontent. Meanwhile, Carveth's estranged husband, Frank (Art Hindle), fights for custody of their daughter, Candice, fearful of the effects that being around Nola will have on their daughter. The *denouement* of the story provides no resolution to the unhappy state of affairs; Frank is forced to choke Nola to death to save Candice from Nola's psychically connected brood of murderers, and the film closes with a shot of physiological effects (in this case, eruptions) on Candice's arm, strongly implying that Candice has not escaped the clutches of her disturbed mother unscathed, and that the cycle of deranged violence will continue well into the future lives of the protagonists. Writing about *The Brood*, philosophy of film scholar Daniel Shaw states that the conclusion of *The Brood* is both "depressing and deterministic." He quotes film scholar William Beard's assertion that the narrative of the film, which "[contains a] chain of obscure necessity [that] determines the lives of those caught in its web," portrays a "bleak determinism... that is visually manifested in its cold settings and which is hard for even the most self-preserving viewer to dodge."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Daniel Shaw "Psychological Determinism in the Films of David Cronenberg," in *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*, ed. Simon Riches (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 121

Beard concludes that the “cold, sad helplessness at the end of the road” is so profoundly bleak that it is an “unusual emotional paradigm” for any film, horror pictures or otherwise.⁴¹

The bleakness of Cronenberg’s picture is complemented by a strikingly cold, stark score from Shore, in which even the sound of the ensemble itself is rendered emotionally inhospitable by the barren and thin effect of a small, dubiously recorded string ensemble devoid of the characteristic warmth innate to a larger string ensemble recorded in a reverberous studio space. The harmonic language that dominates much of the score is clearly observable in the music of the opening titles (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

The Brood: Main Title

Strings

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 112$

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 128$

gliss.

ppp

sfz

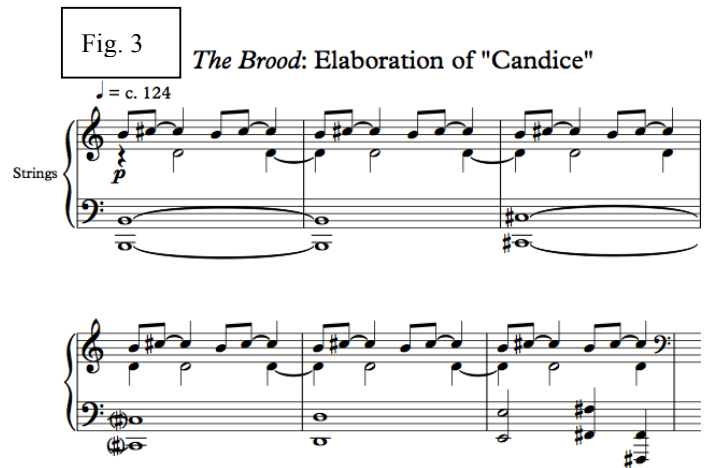
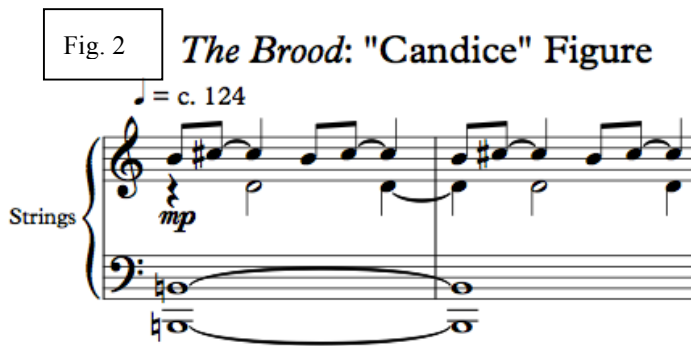
detached, accented

⁴¹ R. Barton Palmer, “The Politics of Mad Science in *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*,” *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*, ed. Simon Riches (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012), 184

The film opens with a series of sharply dissonant chords articulated in full strings. All of these initial six chords, barring the first chord of the sequence, are inversionally related rearrangements of the same harmony, and all of the chords share a similar harmonic logic. This primary chord is comprised of two sets of fifth-related harmonies: an open fifth (A, E) and an open fifth a half-step lower (G#, D#) with an added A#/Bb ninth. The result is a series of half-step dissonances – A/G#, E/D#, and Bb/A, or expressed as an integer set, [01256] – that are articulated one after another with no resolution into whole-step [relative] consonances (a series of atonal dissonances, to use Neumeyer's and Buhler's language). The fast figuration on the first measure of the second system is also ruled by half-step logic, this time a set of [016] trichords moving in first contrary, and then parallel motion, with an inner voice doubling the ascending motion a minor second below the primary voice to create half-step dissonances on every eighth note. In the second half of the example, the low strings perform a series of phrases dominated by half-step motion, such as the repeated Eb-Fb motions and the closing two measures of the excerpt, which are comprised of an [012356] set of pitches. Meanwhile, the high strings provide a dissonant harmonic pad of two half-step dissonances: Eb/Fb and Ab/A. The opening harmonies of the film are reprised verbatim at many points in the film to underscore the dramatic horror of the moment, such as shots of the institute run by Dr. Raglan (the institute whose techniques result in the creation of Nola's violent brood), or a particularly grotesque shot of Nola licking a parthogenically born "fetus." In this way, Shore establishes the aesthetic of horror itself as a "primary recurring motif" of sorts for the film.

This kind of half-step logic is one of two essential colors in Shore's palette on *The Brood* – the other color is used almost exclusively to represent Candice, and first appears when the viewer first sees a shot of her in the first few minutes of the film. Her music, as demonstrated in

fig. 2, is a largely harmonically static figure over a pedal-tone B. A three-voice string texture outlines a B minor 9 chord by way of a characteristic *whole*-step motive. A clear contrast is therefore established between the half-step music that defines much of the horrific themes of the film, and the whole-step Candice motive. Candice's theme is most notably elaborated upon



during one foreshadowing scene, in which Dr. Raglan visits the shed in which Nola lives and that, shortly after, serves as the scene of the ultimate climax of the drama (Dr. Raglan's gruesome murder at the hands of the brood, and Frank killing Nola to save his daughter, who has been kidnapped and is being held by Nola in the shed). The scene itself is visually innocuous, but, underscoring the horror that is to come, Shore expands upon Candice's figure by adding a menacing ascending B minor bassline (fig. 3). By invoking Candice's theme at this moment, Shore strengthens the connection between diatonic logic and Candice, but also, by association, links Candice's musical material to her mother. In its initial context, a simple and innocent "reveal" of Candice in a benign context, her theme seems uncharacteristically somber; although a tonal contrast from the viciously dissonant language of the main theme, the brooding and morose character of her theme seems disproportionately heavy aesthetically. This incongruity is only truly explained at the close of the film, when the viewer sees a shot of eruptions on Candice's arm and understands that this character is fated to follow in her mother's footsteps. To use

Buhler's terms, Shore works in counterpoint with the visual image, adding narrative depth to benign shots by foreshadowing drama that is to follow and encouraging the viewer to "read" a character in a profoundly different manner than the images suggest.

The musical connection between Candice and her mother is made explicit by the way that Shore scores the extremely climactic moment when Frank, who is confronting Nola to keep her calm while Dr. Raglan rescues Candice, sees the grotesque physical mechanism by which Nola generates her murderous offspring. Rather than scoring such a moment with the half-step

Fig. 4

The Brood: "The Reveal"

♩ = c. 112

The musical score for 'The Brood: The Reveal' is presented in two staves. The top staff, labeled 'Strings', is in 4/4 time and features a complex, high-register melody with many accidentals, marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The bottom staff, labeled 'Synthesizer', is in 4/4 time and features a sustained, low-register cluster of notes, also marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The tempo is indicated as approximately 112 beats per minute.

material that

accompanies some of
the most disturbing
imagery of the film,

Shore utilizes a D

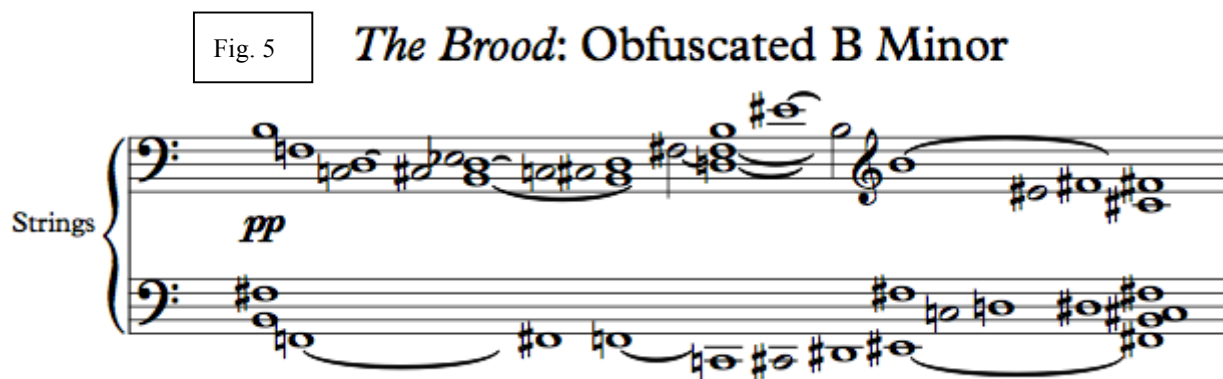
dorian diatonic

cluster, sustained by

a synthesizer (the only use of synthesizer in the entire score) while the high and low voices of the strings evoke different diatonic collections (D minor in the first bar, D dorian in the second two bars) (fig. 4). The ascending bassline recalls the elaboration of Candice's theme, while the minor diatonic cluster and high strings pattern on this reveal of Nola's true nature thematically link Nola (and the horror she has spawned) to Candice.

Shore generally uses half-step (atonal) and whole-step (almost always B minor) logic in a conventionally opposed, distinct manner in *The Brood*, but some of the most deft and ambitious music of the film involves cases where the logic of one informs the other. The most remarkable such sequence occurs when Dr. Raglan is hunting for Candice in the upstairs bedroom of the

shed while Frank attempts to keep Nola placated downstairs. The harmonic progression of this sequence is essentially an obfuscation of B minor – the harmony moves in such a way that B minor is obscured by a series of passing chromatic motions that “jeopardize” B minor’s essence, just as Candice’s safety is jeopardized by the violently horrific nature of the brood. Fig. 5 demonstrates the manner in which chromatic tones prevent the viewer from perceiving an intact and pure B minor sonority – observe the fact that at no point in time are the three pitches of a B



minor triad, B/D/F#, articulated at the same time without either one of the essential pitches missing or with additional chromatic tones obscuring the tonality. This musical idea returns, with more intensity, as the brood, detecting Nola’s rage, moves to kill Candice – once more, the tonal purity of B minor is compromised just as Candice’s safety is endangered on screen.

In various interviews conducted after the release of the film, Shore has acknowledged that he was greatly influenced by the work of the great Bernard Herrmann in the scoring of *The Brood*. There is an obvious aesthetic similarity between the score for *The Brood* and Herrmann’s score for Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 classic *Psycho*: both are scored for solely a string orchestra. The use of such an ensemble in both cases results in very particular aesthetic effects: for *Psycho*, the string ensemble’s single tone color, recorded almost entirely using mutes, results in a cold and dark aesthetic effect that was intentionally chosen to work with the black and white

cinematography of the film.⁴² The use of a small string ensemble for *The Brood*'s score provides a similar aesthetic of a lack of warmth that complements the overwhelmingly bleak atmosphere of the film. Furthermore, Shore's musical aesthetic bears a vague resemblance to Herrmann's writing on *Psycho*, as both scores emphasize half-step dissonances and plodding quarter-note rhythms for tension. The most notable Herrmann-ism of *The Brood*'s score, however, is a nearly verbatim quotation of the infamous "shower scene" figure from *Psycho*, a repeated series of screeching half-step dissonances in quarter-notes in the high strings. Shore utilizes a virtually identical musical device in several of the film's most brutal scenes, including the murder of Nola's mother at the hands of one of her childlike assassins (a scene that bears some cinematographic resemblance to the shower murder in *Psycho* as well in terms of its point-of-view perspective and pacing). This "shower scene" music is also used in visually benign scenes, such as the moment when Frank learns of the existence of Nola's brood – while not a visually graphic moment, the music connects Frank's discovery of the brood to the murders already depicted. The use of such music here also guides the viewer into an "unconscious flashback," as the music's reprise encourages us to think of the murders, and make a connection between the murders and the brood that Frank himself is only starting to realize.

The Brood's score contains some of Shore's most dissonant and difficult scoring of his entire career, with its starkly unrelenting atonal character and unforgiving dissonances, but nevertheless is, by and large, a fairly conventional score. With few exceptions, half-step dissonances are used in dramatic moments to create tension and urgency, a classic and typical device in horror film scoring. As Buhler writes, "the most advanced compositional techniques... can be used very conventionally," meaning that the use of such techniques does not necessarily

⁴² Steven Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 237

make a film score more sophisticated or experimental in the overall effect of the picture.⁴³

Nevertheless, Shore's score for *The Brood*, taken in the context of his career up until that point, demonstrates his willingness to challenge himself as an artist and tread unfamiliar ground in the interest of most effectively working to enhance Cronenberg's narratives. The following case studies will show Shore exploring different arenas of musical experimentation, often working with the picture in far less conventional ways, but consistently demonstrating his ethos of personal experimentation that he established from his very first Cronenberg collaboration.

⁴³ Buhler, "Analytical and Interpretive Approaches II," 58

SYNTHESIZED SURREALISM: *Videodrome*

Following the deeply personal horror-suspense narrative of *The Brood*, Cronenberg's next two films, *Scanners* (1981) and *Videodrome* (1983), explored further the realm of the technological, pushing his work closer to the realm of science fiction. *Videodrome*, in particular, was Cronenberg's first noteworthy exploration into the philosophy of technology; influenced by Marshall McLuhan, who was a media studies lecturer at the University of Toronto during Cronenberg's years there, *Videodrome* explores the potential for television to have profound effects both personal and societal on those who consume it. The film revolves around a TV programmer, Max Renn (James Woods), and his deepening obsession with a rogue signal, Videodrome, picked up by one of his employees – a “show” consisting of graphic scenes of torture and murder without any semblance of narrative or plot. Renn slowly descends into madness under the influence of the signal, which is later revealed to be not a television show, but actual, unstaged events broadcast with the intent of “purging” the country by the bizarre means of a lethal signal encoded into the transmissions that provokes hallucinations and the onset of cancer for those who view it. In his landmark text *Understanding Media*, McLuhan emphasized the importance of the nature of the medium itself, manifest in his famous axiom “the medium is the message” – for him, media had profound impacts on the nature of culture not because of the content conveyed by a medium, but by qualities inherent to a particular medium and the way we consume it.⁴⁴ Such a theme clearly resonates in *Videodrome*, where societal impact is caused not by the nature of the content of the show, graphic and repulsive though it is, but rather through an encoded signal that results in mental and physical impairment.

⁴⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Hamburg: Gingko Press, 2003), 8

To correspond with a deepening focus on the realm of the technological, Howard Shore scored *Scanners* and *Videodrome* with electronic elements, influenced by the work of Toru Takemitsu and his synthesis of electronic layers and conventional classical instrumentation (for instance, the Japanese composer's 1965 chamber music work *Valeria*, which combines strings and woodwind forces with an electric organ). *Scanners* was Shore's first experiment with the combination of electronics and strings – the score's electronic parts were recorded first, tracked into a cassette from a variety of synthesizers, and then orchestral parts were written to compliment the pre-existing electronic loops and sequences. *Videodrome* was Shore's first experiment with using a computer – the electronic elements of the score were created with an early version of the Synclavier, a workstation and synthesizer created as a student project at Dartmouth College in the 1970s. The early iterations of the Synclavier consisted of a computer and FM synthesis modules, with no keyboard controller, and thus programming and writing was a challenge for Shore – he composed the majority of *Videodrome* using only one tone-color, a sort of organ/cello chorale tone, which was a pre-programmed stock tone in the early Synclavier, and ended up becoming a defining tone-color of the film.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ The largely synthesizer-dominated score is supplemented by Shore's characteristic string orchestra.

Videodrome's score is noteworthy for being one of Shore's most profoundly color-driven Cronenberg scores. The music has more harmonic and contrapuntal intricacy than Shore's score a decade and a half later for *eXistenZ* – a score also driven by color and texture, and, coincidentally, Cronenberg's second major exploration into the philosophy and psychology of media. Nevertheless, Shore's greatest experimental flourishes on the *Videodrome* score concern his unique approach to instrumental colors, and the manner in which this evolves over the course

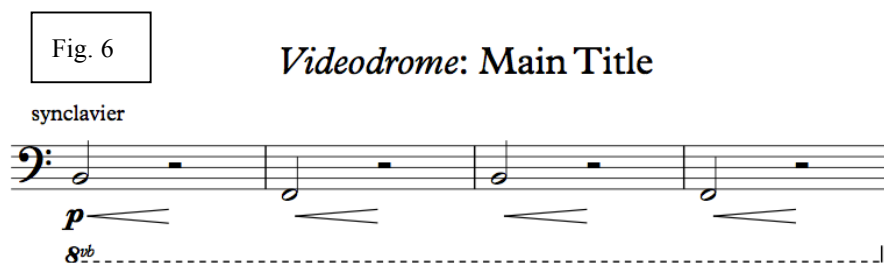
⁴⁵ Schelle, *The Score*, 326-327

⁴⁶ "1978 New England Digital Synclavier," *MixOnline*, September 1, 2006, <http://www.mixonline.com/news/news-products/1978-new-england-digital-synclavier/383609>

of the film. The essential technique of *Videodrome*'s score is the blurring of color distinctions and the gradual blend of organic string textures and the Synclavier's synth sound, in a move that closely parallels the central themes of the film; as Renn loses the ability to distinguish between the real world and his Videodrome-fueled hallucinations, so too does the viewer lose the ability to distinguish between the "sound worlds" of synthesizer and string ensemble.

Harmonically, Shore's music for *Videodrome* can perhaps best be described as determined by a sort of "intervallic" logic. In other words, the guiding principle behind the harmonic language of the score, and even the moments that come the closest to melodic, thematic ideas, are determined not by conceptions of melody, chord sequences, or motivic development so much as they are determined by intervals both viewed horizontally and vertically. Shore describes this intervallically driven approach, in particular the use of sevenths and other "open" sonorities (major seconds, perfect fourths, etc) as providing the score with a kind of "austere" aesthetic quality.⁴⁷ The emphasis on the intervallic is present from the onset of the film: the main titles

(fig. 6) are scored not by any particular melodic ideas, but rather a repeated alternation of two drawn-



out pitches related by a tritone. Shore therefore establishes from the outset a kind of non-melodic approach to scoring, one that he maintains with consistency even in the most expressive string writing of the score. The pitches are articulated on a futuristic sounding Synclavier drone, establishing the tone of the film as being one in the realm of, as phrased by Daniel Dinello, the

⁴⁷ Schelle, *The Score*, 328

“techno-surrealist.”⁴⁸ The organ/cello tone color of the Synclavier sound immediately establishes a synthetic, technological atmosphere (in contrast to the aesthetic effect of introducing a film with a string ensemble playing the same musical idea), despite the fact that the first shot of the film after the main titles is a mundane sequence of Renn in his bedroom in the morning. Shore therefore establishes a surreal tone for the entire film in a similar manner to his establishing of the horror aesthetic as the tone of *The Brood* with its main title theme.

In order for Shore to aurally confuse the viewer over the course of the film by breaking down a dichotomy between string ensemble/reality and synthesizer/hallucination, Shore first has to establish this opposition. He does so in his scoring of the “love scene,” a strange sequence in which Renn plays a videotape of Videodrome to radio host Nicki Brand (Deborah Harry), which arouses Brand and leads her to coax Renn into a sexual encounter while the tape of graphic violence plays on the television. Shore begins by scoring the scene with an expressive passage in the strings (fig. 7). The opening figures, played by solo cello, articulate intervals horizontally in pairs of pitches in a similar fashion to the main title music, before concluding the phrase on a minor seventh (F# to E) – the minor seventh, and its inversional counterpart the major second, eventually becomes one of the characteristic harmonic sounds of the score. In the second system, the celli and basses play a series of vertical minor sevenths (E/F# on beat one of the first measure, F# and G# on beat two), with the celli playing a rhythmically compressed version of the initial solo line.

⁴⁸ Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 153

Videodrome: Love Scene Fig. 7

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 76$

ppp

Strings

solo cello

p expressive

celli

mp

basses

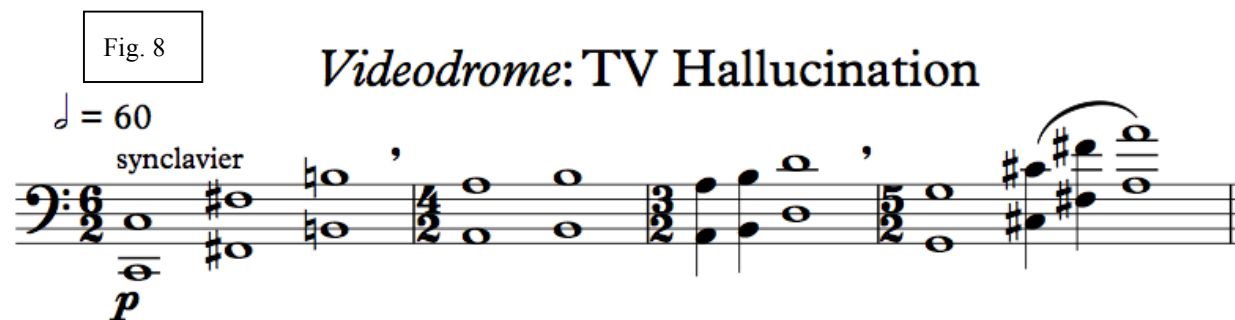
full strings

The music here is perhaps the most harmonically driven scoring of the entire film; as the full strings enter, the harmonies wander in a freely atonal sequence, which aesthetically serves to underscore the unsettling nature of the love scene in question. The harmonies in the bottom system of the example show Shore's preference for "open" vertical sonorities, including major and minor triads (C#-E#-G#, E-G-B), open fifths with a suspended fourth (F-Bb-C), and a phrase resolution to a minor seventh chord (D-F-C). As the scene progresses, the point-of-view shifts, and eventually Renn and Brand are no longer making love in Renn's bedroom, but rather on the floor of the Videodrome studio. As the scene shifts from a clearly real scene to a clearly

hallucinated one, the lush string ensemble writing is replaced by synthesizer tones that eventually culminate on a simple extended low B pedal tone as the hallucinated scene is established.

Shore's use of color in this scene is a particularly clear and obvious one, working in perfect synchronization with the image rather than in counterpoint – but such clarity of purpose is necessary to establish the dichotomy which he will work to erode as the film progresses.

Renn's grip over reality loosens further and further as the film progresses. In one scene, Renn is viewing a pre-recorded videotape by Dr. Brian O'Blivion (Jack Creley), a pop culture philosopher and recluse. The scene begins innocuously as O'Blivion begins by stating in the video that Videodrome is a kind of arena for a battle for control of society, but takes a turn for



the bizarre as O'Blivion suddenly addresses Renn by name. As the scene turns surreal, the Synclavier enters, playing a drawn-out homophonic line (fig. 8). The logic here once more is intervallic, beginning with a tritone and fourth and then articulating a pattern of repeated major seconds beginning on A that is reprised at later points in the film. A later (and more bizarre) hallucination is scored in a similar fashion. Renn experiences a graphic hallucination in which a strange hole appears in his chest into which he inserts a VCR tape – during this, a pair of synth voices articulate three open intervals – a minor seventh, an octave, and then another seventh, before the homophonic synth bass line reappears (fig. 9). The homophonic line first restates the repeated A/B figure before ascending up in whole steps and leaping down a minor seventh.

Fig. 9

Videodrome: "VCR Chest"

high synth

p

Synclavier

p

synth noise

p

mp

♩ = 76

synclavier

The intervals here should be familiar: minor sevenths (E-F#, Bb-C), major sevenths (E-F), ninths (D-D#, G-Gb) and tritones (G#-D, G-Db). Scenes such as these provide the clearest illustration of the intervallic logic that drives *Videodrome*'s most powerful hallucinatory moments, with a surreal effect created by both the tone of the instrument itself and the way that the instrument simply spells out intervals in a way that provides the viewer with neither harmonic nor melodic grounding.

For the first hour of the film, Shore's score maintains a relatively discrete distinction between the "music of reality" and the "music of hallucinations." Renn's world has descended into that of complete confusion, where his hallucinations are so frequent and so vivid that he has lost grip on reality, but a division is still maintained between the world of reality and the world of Renn's hallucinations. As Renn's hallucinations start to have real-world effects, however, the distinction between the real and unreal – and the corresponding instrumental dichotomy between strings and synthesizer – begin to break down. In one such scene, Renn is confronted by Barry

Convex (Leslie Carlson), the CEO of an optics and weapons manufacturer who has been conspiring to expose Renn to Videodrome to encourage him to broadcast it on his station and help purge the country of the moral lowlifes who would watch such material. In a bizarre sequence, Convex “programs” Renn to murder his colleagues at his TV station by inserting a VCR tape into a hole in his stomach. This is the first significant moment in the film in which one of Renn’s hallucinations involves other real-world characters participating in the surrealism of the grotesque imagery of his delirium, and the first time that such a hallucination inspires him to act in such a dramatic way in the real world. Shore marks this moment by having strings and synthesizer merge and play together for the first time in the score – the distinction between string and synth textures is blurred just as the distinction between the real world and the hallucinatory world breaks down in the narrative. The presence of strings in what appear to be obviously hallucinated scenes erodes the viewer’s ability to distinguish for themselves whether what occurs on screen is real or hallucinated – as Shore ceases to clearly telegraph Renn’s mental state through instrumental tone colors, the viewer is left questioning whether the image on screen is entirely real, entirely a product of Renn’s hallucinations, or somewhere in the middle.

The final, and most profoundly disorienting, blurring of tone color in the *Videodrome* score occurs in the film’s climax, where Renn commits suicide after he views a videotape of himself doing so in order to “kill the old flesh” and transcend his earthly, physical body. The

Fig. 10

Videodrome: Killing The "Old Flesh"

The musical score is for a section of the film *Videodrome*, specifically the climax titled "Killing The 'Old Flesh'". It is marked with a tempo of $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 76$. The score features two staves: a top staff for strings and a bottom staff for synclavier. The time signature is 4/2. The strings part begins with a rest, then enters with a series of notes, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The synclavier part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing a series of notes. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with some measures containing multiple notes beamed together.

music behind this deeply dramatic scene involves a synthesis of two textures: the Synclavier sustains a drone on A while the string ensemble plays an ascending A minor scale in octaves (fig. 10). Shore's blending of the two tone colors, however, has been so gradual and subtle throughout the course of the film that, during this scene, it is difficult for the viewer to distinguish between what line is played by the string section and what is Synclavier-produced. The disorientation is complete – the viewer's inability to discern between strings and synth (and what representational meaning, if any, the two tone colors hold) is as profound as Renn's inability to prevent his hallucinations from controlling his actions.

Importantly, as the film works towards its grim conclusion, the viewer is also rendered unable to determine what events onscreen occur "in the real world." In the first chapters of the narrative, the distinction is obvious – the viewer takes at face value that Renn and Brand do not actually teleport to the studio of Videodrome during their love scene, for instance. But later events in the film that take place in the actual, physical world also have elements of surrealism that seem to be more akin to Renn's hallucinations than the real world. The gun, with which he murders his partners, Convex (after being "reprogrammed" by Dr. O'Blivion's daughter), and himself, is strangely organic and seems to be attached to his hand in an obviously unrealistic fashion. In a dramatic scene towards the conclusion of the film, Renn murders the employee who introduced Videodrome to him initially (at the orders of Convex, as we learn). The employee attempts to program Renn by inserting a VCR tape into his hallucinated stomach cavity, but Renn, recently reprogrammed, manages to sever the employee's arm inside his chest. Such an event does not seem like the workings of the real world, although the murders themselves are plainly real-life events. Dr. Simon Riches, addressing Cronenberg's treatment of fact and fiction in his films, writes about *Videodrome* that, as the film progresses, we are unable to determine

“how much of what he perceives is genuine and how much is generated by the mysterious... force of Videodrome... The distinction between ordinary perceptual experiences and hallucination is unclear, [as Cronenberg blurs] the distinction between fiction and reality.”⁴⁹ If the endgame of *Videodrome* as a film is to disorient the viewer in such a way that our ability to distinguish between reality and fiction is blurred just as Renn’s is, then Shore’s score effectively does the same with our ability to distinguish between organic and synthetic instrumentation.

In closing, it is worth pointing out that there is one category of music that Shore does not blur by the course of the film: diegetic sound. *Videodrome* makes extensive use of diegetic music, including Middle-Eastern music in a café, and a sequence of period music in a convention scene that includes authentic Renaissance instrumentation such as lutes, crumhorns and sackbuts.⁵⁰ While synthesizer music’s association with the world of fiction is dismantled by the conclusion of the film, diegetic music consistently represents the world of reality. Even towards the conclusion of the film, diegetic sound is used strictly in non-surreal “real” scenarios that serves to provide at least one element of narrative grounding for the listener. As I will illustrate later in this paper, Shore abandons this last aspect of grounding in his scoring of Cronenberg’s adaptation of William S. Burrough’s *Naked Lunch*, as Cronenberg’s film work progresses even further in the art of narrative confusion.

⁴⁹ Simon Riches, “Deception and Disorder,” in *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*, ed. Simon Riches (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012) 95

⁵⁰ Schelle, *The Score*, 327

BREAKING THROUGH TO THE MAINSTREAM: *The Fly*

For the films following *Videodrome*'s release, Cronenberg turned his attention away from writing wholly original stories, focusing instead on creating colorful and creative adaptations of pre-existing source material. Included in this series of films are *The Dead Zone* (1983), based on a story by Stephen King, which remains to date Cronenberg's only collaboration since 1979 with a composer other than Howard Shore, the aforementioned *Naked Lunch* (1991), and an adaptation of J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1996). The most popular of Cronenberg's adaptations, however, and the film that has endured as the director's most significant commercial success, is his remake of *The Fly* (1986), loosely based on a 1958 Kurt Neumann film of the same name (which was in turn based on a 1957 short story by George Langelaan). Telling the story of scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) and his horrific disintegration from attractive human to grotesque insectoid due to a teleportation experiment gone drastically wrong, the film was the top-grossing film in the United States for two weeks upon its release, and would later be ranked as one of the best films of its era by critics such as Gene Siskel, Richard Corliss, Richard Schickel, and by independent polls conducted by *Premiere* and *American Film* magazines.^{51 52}

Much of the critical praise towards the film was directed towards Goldblum's performance and the visual effects, especially Chris Walas's makeup and prosthetics work, with the latter winning an Academy Award for his efforts. However, *The Fly*'s vast commercial success is perhaps better explained by Cronenberg's own descriptions of what lies at the heart of the story. Reflecting upon the film's success, Cronenberg states that the essence of the film is not technology, science-fiction, or horror, but rather a "triangle love story... [dealing with themes

⁵¹ "Gene Siskel's Lists," *Caltech Alumni* <http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~ejohnson/critics/siskel.html>

⁵² "All Time 100 Movies," *Time Magazine*, October 3, 2011
<http://entertainment.time.com/2005/02/12/all-time-100-movies/>

such as] loss... aging, and death.”⁵³ In other words, the story of Brundle merging with a housefly in his telepod and the resulting anguish between him and his girlfriend (Veronica Quaife, played by Geena Davis – Goldblum’s real-life partner) as he suffers physical degradation resonates with viewers because we see our own human realities of aging and disease in Brundle’s suffering. “All human life is metamorphosis,” writes philosophy professor Colin McGinn, and therefore “in the creature Brundlefly we see our own lives speeded up, caricatured, but not falsely represented.” According to McGinn, *The Fly* resonates with viewers because it depicts the human condition: Brundle is the unconsenting victim of a physical transformation that he is both fully aware of and is powerless to prevent, not unlike our own status as “transcendent egos, organic shells” marching towards an inevitable mortality.⁵⁴ In another interview, Cronenberg draws a parallel not with aging, but more specifically with disease, describing the essential plot of *The Fly* as being one where “two attractive people fall in love, the man contracts an incurable disease, and he goes downhill in a horrible way as his mate watches and then he asks her to kill him.” The emotional bleakness of the film, of course, is slightly tempered by the nature of the genre, as the science-fiction/horror perspective allows for a certain amount of distance between viewer and narrative – but at the film’s core nonetheless is a story of profound tragedy, a very real tale of human loss rather than an abstracted tale of science gone wrong.⁵⁵

It is fitting, therefore, that Howard Shore’s score for *The Fly*, an ambitious score for full orchestra performed by the London Philharmonic, is aesthetically noteworthy for being a score defined not by typical “horror music” devices like atonal dissonance (though such music is

⁵³ Jeffery Iverson, “David Cronenberg Tries Opera,” *Time Magazine*, September 4, 2008 <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1838909,00.html>

⁵⁴ Colin McGinn, “The Fly and the Human” in *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*, ed. Simon Riches (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012) 15-18

⁵⁵ Bette Gordon, “David Cronenberg,” *Bomb Magazine* <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1160/david-cronenberg>

certainly present in the film), but rather by what Shore identifies as an “operatic” aesthetic. Shore describes scores such as *The Fly* and his later triumph *Silence of the Lambs* as operatic not because of classical singing soloists or even the leitmotivic technique he would later masterfully employ on the *Lord of the Rings* scores, but rather a more nebulous compositional aesthetic that emphasizes deeply profound emotional affect. When Shore states that he “wrote *The Fly* as an opera,” he is referring to the idea of writing what he calls “dramatically rich” music, music like that of the last act of Puccini’s opera *Tosca*, which Shore describes as being “emotionally devastating.” Most tellingly, he states that music such as the dramatic final act of *Tosca* “is not thriller music; it’s about feelings.”⁵⁶ This final point exemplifies what is so fascinating about *The Fly* as a horror score. *The Fly* is, by most estimations, a visually graphic and arresting film – recently, The AV Club named *The Fly* as being an essential film in the “Nine Circles of Gore,” exemplifying visually disturbing body horror.⁵⁷ However, Shore’s music, to co-opt his own words about *Tosca*, “is not horror music; it’s about feelings.” *The Fly* is perhaps the best example of Shore’s willingness to adopt an overall aesthetic of counterpoint, to use Buhler’s terminology, and write music “against the grain” rather than parallel exactly what is portrayed in the image. Mundane scenes are scored like Shakespearean romance, innocuous shots are scored apocalyptically, and deeply disturbing visual imagery is scored with beauty and *pathos*. In doing so, Shore was inspired by Takemitsu’s scores, in particular scores such as *Ran*, whose infamous lengthy samurai battle sequence is scored with gorgeously Mahlerian, emotionally wrought lyrical music rather than what Shore describes as a “mickey-mouse shoot-‘em-up” score.⁵⁸ While *The Fly* contains its share of atonal, harmonically sophisticated music, such language is used

⁵⁶ Schelle, *The Score*, 341-348

⁵⁷ “Welcome to the Nine Circles of Cinematic Gore, *The AV Club*, March 15, 2017

⁵⁸ Schelle, *The Score*, 338

sparingly, and the overwhelming aesthetic feeling is that of profound tragedy, underscoring the latent emotionality of the story in its barest form as conceived by Cronenberg.

The main title music of *The Fly* (fig. 11) is noteworthy in terms of Shore's compositional argument for a few reasons. Firstly, in contrast to the sparse approach of the *Videodrome* main title, the main title of *The Fly*, which lasts nearly two minutes, has the effect of being an overture

♩ = c. 108

The Fly: Main Title

Fig. 11

full orch. *ff* *p* *subito pp* harp, celesta

winds *simile* flutes - atonal harmonics

solo winds, strings *lyrical* strings

flutes - atonal harmonics

oboes, strings *sfz* *p* strings solo clarinet solo horn *ppp*

ppp - full orch cluster brass, strings *f* *rit.* *pppp* harp celesta

of sorts for Shore's "opera." A dramatic, yet not dissonant or particularly foreboding, figure in the full orchestra is followed by a frequently recurring figure, a two-note descending figure harmonized in parallel thirds which Michael Schelle labels "the Fly motive," although the motive

is not treated with the narrative literalism that leitmotivic technique would entail.⁵⁹ Taken in its entirety, the four-measure figure can be seen as spelling out a major-key tonality with a lowered sixth and seventh. The triadic motion from E major to C major is another characteristic tonal movement of the score, and the lyrical scalar melody in the key of E major beginning in the second system in solo winds and high strings is another characteristic recurring melody in the score. In this “overture,” Shore establishes some key compositional ideas that will define the score, but, importantly, he only presents those ideas that might, in a Gorbman-esque “style topic” analysis, convey ideas of the “romantic” (from the lyricism of the strings and the major-key-flat-sixth tonality) as well as traces of the “fantastical” in the choice of harp and celesta to articulate the tonalities. Sweeping lyrical romanticism can also be heard in the soaring, expressive melodic line on the second page of the example, which, with its tonal chromaticism, evokes Wagner and Mahler’s most stirring moments more than the stark horror aesthetic of Herrmann’s *Psycho* score. Rather than foreshadow the extraordinarily graphic drama that is to come, Shore introduces the viewer to the concept of romance, setting the stage for a love drama rather than a science-fiction horror picture.

Secondly, Shore introduces the principle of superimposition of elements to subtly color the emotional affect of his themes. A prime example of this is the presentation of the lyrical melody in the second system of the first page of the example, where the lyrical main melody is supplemented with faint atonal flute harmonics in the upper register of the instrument. The effect is barely discernable, especially on first viewing, but for those viewers who perceive its presence, the atonal device colors the presentation of the romantic melody, complicating its aesthetic effect. The conclusion of the phrase is punctuated with a subtle atonal cluster articulated throughout the full orchestra that achieves a similar aesthetic effect, as does the harp

⁵⁹ Schelle, *The Score*, 328

sonority superimposed upon the same musical material towards the end of the excerpt. Shore could be compositionally foreshadowing the fact that the romantic relationship between Brundle and Quaipe is doomed to tragedy, but it is unlikely that a viewer experiencing the film for the first time could read such a specific level of meaning into a cluster chord – the more likely effect upon the viewer is the simple implication that *something* will complicate the love drama that is to follow, encouraging the viewer to consider the fact that the innocuous scenes that open the film belie the horrific nature of the drama while doing so in a much more subtle way than the effect achieved by the main title music of *Videodrome*.

The film begins by introducing Brundle and Quaipe, the couple whose relationship will be torn apart by the same invention that brings them together. Quaipe is a journalist whose skepticism gradually turns to awe as the lovably headstrong Brundle brings her to his warehouse apartment to demonstrate the invention that he assures her will change the world. The two begin a relationship, commencing with romantic scenes that are perhaps overbearing in their earnestness as well as their emotional honesty (“Is this a romance we’re having?” asks Brundle, in a frank and almost hilarious display of nerdish naiveté). Shore’s score in these scenes, too,

Fig. 12

The Fly: Love Scene

♩ = c. 58

eng. horn

pp

piano

add strings

harp

violins

ppp

displays a level of romantic earnestness perhaps more fitting of a romantic comedy than a Cronenberg horror picture. The cue for the couple’s first real love scene together, for instance, takes the tropes of romance music to the extreme, with its intimate

arpeggiated piano, English horn solo, and tender harp (fig. 12). The major seconds littered throughout the cue, of course, recall the “Fly motive” from the main title (see, for instance, the major second as part of the piano figuration in the first two bars, and recurring D-E motive in the

Fig. 13

The Fly - Love Motif

harp towards the close of the cue). In an almost

saccharine thematic fragment (fig. 13) that recurs a few times during the scenes of Brundle’s and Quaife’s

blossoming romance (typically played by the English horn), the characteristic whole-step motive can be discerned as the guiding logic behind the first phrase, with the A-G motion decorated by a simple expressive Bb escape tone.

Shore’s choice to score the romantic first chapter of *The Fly* in such an earnest way is noteworthy. We have already seen instances of Shore coloring love scenes to imbue them with darker meaning – for instance, the winding chromatics and austere open harmonies of the *Videodrome* love scene. Here, it may appear that Shore is simply working off of the imagery of the film and writing simple romantic music for romantic scenes. However, read more creatively, Shore’s exaggeratedly-romantic writing here, which is so earnest as to feel almost Shakespearean in its heartfelt emotionality, can be seen as imbuing the scenes with a *gravitas* that they otherwise lack. The chemistry between Brundle and Quaife is charmingly honest and realistic in its awkwardness, but the passion of Shore’s scoring gives their interactions a mythic quality. What appears to be the mundane awkward encounters of a new couple is transformed by Shore’s score into the clear foundations of a tragic tale about no lesser topic than the human condition itself. Shore’s scoring of the early romantic scenes of *The Fly* are therefore a subtle example of writing in counterpoint with the picture not by writing music in a dramatically opposed aesthetic

to the picture, but rather achieving profound extra layers of meaning by what simply amounts to an aesthetic degree of difference.

In order to preserve the tenor of the first chapter of the film as being one of relative emotional innocence, Shore has to score certain moments in surprisingly unconventional ways. The most significant such scene is the infamous “Baboon Teleportation” scene, in which Brundle, attempting to teleport flesh with Quaipe watching, turns a pet baboon inside out in a horrific accident. The shot of the inside-out baboon is undeniably grisly, arguably one of Cronenberg’s grisliest shots, particularly because of its unexpected nature occurring in the first

Fig. 14

The Fly: Baboon Teleportation

♩ = c. 60

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system features strings playing a *ppp* (pianissimo) chord, with a tempo marking of ♩ = c. 60. The second system includes strings (*sfp*), harp, and oboe. The third system features a solo violin playing a rapid, expressive scale (*p expressive*) and basses (*pp*) playing a sustained chord. The key signature is C minor, and the time signature is common time.

act of the film. Nevertheless, Shore scores the scene with restraint (fig. 14), choosing to emphasize the *pathos* of the incident rather than its horror with such devices as an ascending, lyrical solo violin line that clearly evokes a kind of mournful emotionality. Of particular note in this cue is the figure in the second system, articulated by the harp and oboe, which heavily emphasizes D

and Eb – scale degrees 2 and 3 in the key of C minor. This kind of sonority, a minor triad with emphasized half steps (the second and third of the chord, or the fifth and lowered sixth), becomes one of Shore’s primary devices for emphasizing tragedy in *The Fly*.

The film's arc is forever altered when Brundle, intoxicated and angry because he believes Quaife is in love with her ex-boyfriend and magazine editor Stathis Borans (John Getz), rashly decides to teleport himself before verifying conclusively if the procedure is safe. The procedure appears to be a success, but unbeknownst to Brundle, a common housefly was also present in his teleportation pod. Shore's beautifully vivid writing here evokes the primary musical ideas from the main title sequence, developing them and pushing their dramatic content to the extreme (fig. 15).

Fig. 15

The Fly: Seth's Teleportation

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 104$

winds, celesta
pp

celli
mp *sfz* *p* *sfz p*

winds

strings
p

First system of musical notation for piano. It consists of three staves: Treble, Grand (Treble and Bass), and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first measure contains a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The second measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The third measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The fourth measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The system ends with a double bar line.

Second system of musical notation for piano. It consists of three staves: Treble, Grand (Treble and Bass), and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first measure contains a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The second measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The third measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The fourth measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The system ends with a double bar line.

Third system of musical notation for piano. It consists of three staves: Treble, Grand (Treble and Bass), and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first measure contains a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The second measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The third measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The fourth measure has a treble staff with eighth notes, a grand staff with a half note chord, and a bass staff with a half note. The system ends with a double bar line.

celli

horns

rit.

The musical score is written for a symphony orchestra. It begins with a piano introduction marked **rit.** (ritardando). The first system includes staves for strings, brass, and violins. The strings play a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef, while the brass and violins play in the treble clef. The second system features a full orchestral entry. The winds play a melodic line in the treble clef, while the solo trumpet, celesta, harp, and solo horn play in the bass clef. The third system continues the orchestral texture, with the celesta playing a melodic line in the treble clef and the low strings playing in the bass clef.

strings
brass
violins
gtr
sfz pp
sfz
p
solo horn

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 104$

violin
ppp winds
solo trumpet
ppp
celesta
harp
solo horn
pppp

celesta
low strings

The cue begins with an accelerating figure in the celli, the first time such urgently music has been employed in the film – although the significance of the scene has not yet been revealed, the tone of the film is immediately altered by this sudden appearance of a rhythmically driving figure. The music immediately slips, however, back into calm and measured pulse, with the winds and celesta playing an altered version of the “Fly motive” that now consists of a pair of tritones a half-step apart. In the second system of the cue, the strings play a lyrical and lush sequence in A minor while the parallel tritones are superimposed above the texture in the winds. The harmonic language abruptly changes in the second system of the second page of the cue – as the viewer sees a close-up shot of the house fly, the strings articulate a dissonant chord made up of a cluster of three half-steps (G#/A/Bb) while the high woodwinds and low strings combine to produce another half-step tension (D#/E). This is the first noteworthy instance of atonal music driven by half-step dissonances in the film. In a representational sense, half-step logic can be seen to represent the fly - a choice that makes sense if one considers the fact that in such music as Bartok’s piano piece “From the Diary of a Fly,” the buzzing sound of a fly is often represented by half-step dissonances. The texture turns consonant as the teleportation becomes imminent, and then increases in harmonic tension until a massive D augmented chord (first system of the third page of the example) is struck as Seth’s teleportation occurs.

As the smoke clears and Seth steps out of the pod, Shore’s score is careful to signal ambiguity, indicating neither conclusive success nor conclusive failure with a suspended A augmented triad, under which a solo horn plays a melody that is framed by A, yet includes a prominent pair of half-steps (E/F and A/Bb) that complicate the aesthetic effect. The final two systems of the cue consist of a quotation of the primary lyrical theme from the main titles, and occur as Goldblum (and the viewer) are led to believe that the teleportation was uneventful. Over

a relatively straightforward reiteration of the Fly motive (harmonized consonantly once more in parallel thirds) and the E major-C major harmonic motion, Shore first superimposes a prolonged Bb in the violins, which harmonically complicates the sonority and implies a Lydian-dominant tonality when taken with the rest of the ensemble. In the next bar, a celesta implies F# major, a triad distanced from the C major harmony by a tritone. The final system of the cue contains more subtle dissonances, such as an implied F minor tonality in the low strings and a few unrelated parallel triads in the celesta, before the dissonances evaporate to close the cue. Unlike Shore's similar superimpositions in the close of the main title sequence, the harmonic superimpositions here are clearly perceivable to the viewer, and therefore provide a subtext absent from the image: Brundle believes his teleportation was a success, and visually he seems to be correct, but the music's subtle distortion of the theme indicates to the viewer that all is not well.

Shore continues to work with subtext and write in counterpoint to the scene as the film progresses. Brundle's initial response to the teleportation is not degradation: rather, he begins to exhibit remarkable strength, which he demonstrates in an impressive display of gymnastics in his warehouse for an awed Quaife. As she walks up to him and embraces him following his display of

Fig. 16

The Fly - Seth, The Gymnast (Closing Fig.)

strength, Quaife clearly appears to be impressed (and perhaps even turned on) by his hypermasculinity, but Shore's score colors the moment with a passage

in G# minor, including a haunting closing figure articulated by harp that emphasizes in particular two pairs of half-steps: D#/E and Fx/G# (fig. 16). Shore's score here is not only foreboding, but emphasizes the half-steps first notably introduced during the teleportation sequence; as the

teleportation with the fly begins to take effect, half-step sonorities begin to take over the musical language.

The relationship between Quaife and Brundle becomes strained as Quaife notices more and more abnormalities with Brundle – he begins to experience strangely strong sugar cravings, possesses atypical sexual stamina, and has peculiarly coarse hairs growing out of a small wound in his back. Brundle’s behavior turns more and more frenetic, until he asks Quaife to go through the teleportation herself, believing that the teleportation process, which disassembles and reassembles its subjects at the molecular level, somehow purified him and “created him anew.” Quaife refuses, stating her belief that something went wrong in the teleportation – their resulting argument leads to Brundle angrily abandoning her and proceeding to a bar to pick up a woman who is willing to “dive into the plasma pool” with him. Shore’s music here introduces what I have

Fig. 17

The Fly: "Tragic" Theme

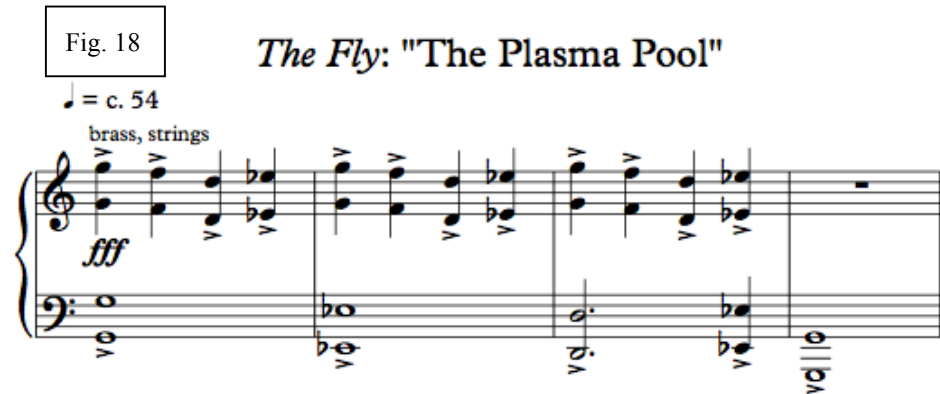


labeled the “tragic theme” of the film (fig. 17) – it is defined by a bass line in the key of G minor and a lyrical, impassioned melodic figure that contains an Eb

appoggiatura before the D, in a motion that both evokes the “sigh motive” used to evoke *pathos* in much classical-era music, and that contains an integral half-step, a musical decision that surely is no coincidence given the increased prevalence of the half-step as Brundle transforms.

What follows are two of the most noteworthy moments of against-the-grain writing in the entire film. First, Shore accents a shot of an incensed Brundle jumping to touch a lamp in his warehouse (what might be otherwise read as an innocuously macho athletic feat) with a brooding

cluster chord, underscoring that what the viewer is seeing is not an innocuous display of athleticism, but rather a physical indication of the fateful transformation taking hold. Next, Shore scores a rather prosaic shot of Brundle walking down the street to a local bar with some of the most massive music of the entire film (fig. 18), a sequence that evokes Shore's score for *Lord of*



the Rings both tonally, with its fatalistic, tragic minor-key harmonic sequence, and aesthetically, with its arrangement dominated by prominent accented brass in a tone color that evokes some of *Lord of the Rings*'s most dramatic moments. Cronenberg reveals in the commentary track for a reissue of *The Fly* that, upon hearing Shore's score for this sequence, filmmaker and actor Mel Brooks remarked that Shore likely overscored the scene, with Brooks pointing out that "the guy is just walking down the street." Cronenberg responded that "no... the guy is about to meet his destiny."⁶⁰ Even though Brundle is merely walking to a bar to pick up a girl, Shore scores the subtext in radically dramatic fashion, conveying to the viewer the true magnitude of what has happened and what is about to happen to the character.

Brundle's decision to abandon Quaife marks a turning point tonally speaking in Shore's score. While emotionally wrought tonal music still plays a critical function in the narrative, Shore employs much more atonal music as Brundle's transformation becomes more vivid. Sharply

⁶⁰ Jeremy Kirk, "33 Things We Learned From David Cronenberg's *The Fly* Commentary," *Film School Rejects*, September 15, 2011 <https://filmschoolrejects.com/33-things-we-learned-from-david-cronenbergs-the-fly-commentary-ae5eb41f61de#.4dz1j0m6k>

dissonant, atonal music plays as Brundle's superhuman strength results in him fracturing the arm of an arm-wrestling opponent in the bar. As Brundle takes the woman he picks up from the bar to his warehouse home, the woman has difficulty climbing the many flights of stairs leading to his living quarters – Brundle picks her up and runs up the stairs holding her in his arms, a moment that visually seems like a playfully romantic interaction. Shore, however, scores the scene with eerie free-atonal flourishes played *staccato* in the strings, once more scoring the subtext of the abnormality of Brundle's physical prowess rather than the superficial charm of the events on screen.

As the narrative progresses, Brundle begins to realize that something went catastrophically wrong when he underwent teleportation. His first dramatic moment of realization is a grisly and unnerving sequence in which his body begins to exhibit dramatic physical alterations – in this case, his fingernails begin to peel off. It is at this point in the film when Shore introduces one of his most effective recurring techniques for dramatic tension in the score: atonal canons. Shore states that he emphasized canonic devices in the score of *The Fly* due to the fact that “the characters’ lives are so intertwined” – furthermore, winding atonal canons are an apt musical representation for the literal, physical intertwining of fly and Brundle that catalyzes all the drama of the film. Inspired by 20th century instances of canonic and fugal writing such as Hindemith's *Ludus Tonalis* and Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Shore increasingly incorporates free-atonal canonic and contrapuntal writing over the course of the film to represent the combination of Brundle and housefly that becomes more and more apparent (and more and more horrifying) as events progress.⁶¹

⁶¹ Schelle, *The Score*, 329

Fig. 19

The Fly: "Fingernails" Canon

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system is for strings, marked with a tempo of 80 and a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a treble and bass staff with a complex, chromatic melody. The second system continues the canon, showing a more developed texture with multiple voices. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests, indicating a highly chromatic and rhythmically intricate piece.

The canon (fig. 19) that plays as Brundle, examining his grotesquely peeling fingernails, realizes that the teleportation has had drastic effects, is articulated at a measured pace in the strings, and consists of three lines – a alto and tenor line working in *stretto* with the alto voice imitating the tenor at the eighth note, and a bass voice that precedes the tenor by three eighth notes. In the second system, a soprano voice enters and the string texture expands to a four-voice canon. The compressed rhythm of the top voice results in an even more disorienting effect, as it results in an irregular rhythmic spacing of the voices. The head motive of the canon is largely dominated by pairs of ascending half-steps, which could be seen as a chromatic alteration of the pairs of whole-steps dominant in the main theme of the film. A similar, denser atonal canon appears during the moment where Brundle consults his teleporter computer and finds out that the computer merged his DNA with that of a housefly at the molecular level. This time, the head motive consists of pairs of descending half-steps, making explicit the connection between this

canonic material and the descending whole-step motive from the main titles. Effectively, Shore has managed to intertwine the half-step logic of the fly with the whole-step motive of the main titles, mirroring the intertwining of Brundle and fly by the teleportation device.

As the drama works towards its horrific conclusion, Shore is careful to resist the temptation of scoring the actual graphic horror of Brundle's metamorphosis into Brundlefly with atonal music. Rather, each cut to Brundle's progressively more deformed visage is treated to no music whatsoever, including a startling moment in which Quaife returns to Brundle's warehouse to find him clinging to the walls and ceilings of the room. While there is plenty of aesthetically horrifying visual imagery in these interactions, Shore chooses instead to score the emotional drama that unfolds as the pair of lovers realize that their world is falling apart. In perhaps the most emotionally crippling scene of the entire film, Brundle tells a distraught Quaife that she has to stay away from him, because he realizes that he is losing his humanity and is liable to hurt her as his human nature gives way to "insect politics." The entire cue is scored over a funereal G minor pedal point, as a sequence of descending triads (fig. 20) give way to a *fortissimo* statement of the "tragic theme" in horns and strings (fig. 21).

Fig. 20

The Fly: The Last Visit

The musical score for "The Fly: The Last Visit" is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is for strings, marked with a tempo of approximately 52 (♩ = c. 52) and a dynamic of *ppp*. The middle staff is for a horn, featuring a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is for timpani, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The key signature is G minor (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

Fig. 21

The musical score for Figure 21 is written for strings, horns, horn, and eng. horn. It consists of two measures. The first measure is marked *ff* and features a descending melodic line in the strings and horns. The second measure is marked *pp* and features a similar melodic line, but with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) for the horn and eng. horn parts. The bass line consists of sustained chords in the strings and winds.

This breathtakingly heartbreaking cue serves an essential dramatic function in Cronenberg's and Shore's telling of the narrative: as Brundlefly becomes more and more grotesque, Shore's music is a crucial element to ensuring that the viewer does not let their visceral disgust overwhelm their response to the emotional essence of the narrative.

The final chapter of *The Fly* is stunning for its starkly graphic violence and suspenseful drama, perhaps to a degree unprecedented in Cronenberg's films. Winding atonal canons play first as Stathis Borens, armed with a shotgun, enters Brundle's warehouse, and then as Brundle attacks him, disfiguring his limbs by the repulsive means of his insect-like corrosive vomit. The motivic logic here is once again driven by pairs of half-steps, this time articulated at the dotted half-note in three voices (fig. 22).

As Brundle attempts to execute his last desperate plan to regain some semblance of humanity (forcibly teleporting himself, Quaife, and their unborn child together to merge their DNA into

Fig. 22

The Fly: Corrosive Vomit

The musical score for Figure 22 is titled "The Fly: Corrosive Vomit" and is in 3/4 time. It features a dramatic shift from fortissimo (*ff*) to pianissimo (*pp*) dynamics. The score includes parts for strings, horns, trombones, and strings/brass. The melodic line is characterized by a series of half-steps, articulated at the dotted half-note in three voices. The tempo is marked as *♩ = c. 132*.

“the ultimate family”), the half-step-driven canons spiral forth, musically mirroring the genetic intertwining that Brundle seeks to achieve. The tonal language abruptly changes, however, as a blast from Borens’s shotgun results in Brundlefly being graphically fused with the telepod itself and emerging from the pod as a bizarre fusion of entities obviously doomed to suffering. As the new creature silently begs for Quaife to end its suffering, the “tragic theme” returns in its home key of G minor, underscoring the true tragedy of the narrative. Despite the graphic and bizarre nature of this final scene, the ultimate emotional effect of Shore’s score here delivers the *pathos* that Cronenberg states is the driving force behind the story – a tale of romance doomed to tragedy by forces beyond the couple’s control.

The Fly is a curious case in Howard Shore’s filmography with David Cronenberg, in that Shore’s personal experimentation does not manifest itself in a particularly novel sonic aesthetic or a new approach to texture. His experimentation with contrapuntal and imitative devices in the score for *The Fly* certainly pushes his facility with the techniques to greater heights, and his use of imitative techniques not only achieves an aesthetic effect but also imbues the technique itself with a sort of compositional meaning that works in tandem with central themes of the film. Shore’s greatest experimentation with *The Fly*, however, is his bold approach to scoring scenes in counterpoint with the visual image, by scoring an extremely graphic and disturbing picture in a profoundly “operatic” (to use Shore’s own language) manner. It is no surprise that, given the emotional essence of the plot of *The Fly* as interpreted by both Cronenberg and Shore, Shore would choose this story as the narrative basis for his first, and to date, only full-length opera.

SCORING THE UNFILMABLE: *Naked Lunch*

After Cronenberg released what would come to be his final “monster movie” in *The Fly*, and 1988’s *Dead Ringers*, an adaptation of the real-life story of a pair of twin gynecologists, the director, seeking new challenges, agreed to film the unfilmable. *Naked Lunch*, the 1959 postmodernist classic by beat author William S. Burroughs, was instantly controversial upon its release. Banned in cities in the United States for its obscenity and graphic subject matter, the book was acknowledged by its author as being extremely unfit for the filmic medium. “The novel does not obviously lend itself to adaptation for the screen,” stated Burroughs, due to its fragmentary structural logic, lack of traditional character development, and indeed lack of a traditionally forward-moving “plot.” After a failed attempt to turn the novel into a full-length feature film in the 1970s, *Naked Lunch* would finally meet its match in Cronenberg. Cronenberg, however, acknowledged that a literal rendition of the novel would “cost a hundred million dollars and be banned in every country in the world.” Instead, Cronenberg created a metatextual work that interacts both with *Naked Lunch* as well as biographical events in Burroughs’ own colorful life.⁶² In a sense, Cronenberg’s adaptation of *Naked Lunch* is less of a filmic adaptation of the novel and more of a Burroughs biopic, with its primary character William Lee being a clear stand-in for Burroughs himself, and certain plot elements being driven by real events in Burroughs’ life, such as Burroughs’ accidental shooting of his wife Joan in 1951 in a drunken re-enactment of “William Tell.” Characters from Burroughs’ life also appear as central characters in the film, such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg, and the scenic contrast between the undefined urban center and the North African imaginary city of Interzone mirrors the many places Burroughs spent his life, from New York, London and Paris to Tangier, Morocco. In

⁶² David Wills, “Naked Lunch on Screen: Filming the Unfilmable,” *Beatdom*, January 11, 2010, <http://www.beatdom.com/naked-lunch-on-film-filming-bthe-unfilmable/>

doing so, Cronenberg takes the central force of Burroughs' novel, which is also semi-autobiographical, and amplifies the biographical element of the story such that *Naked Lunch* becomes chiefly a representation of the hazy, drug-induced hallucinatory nature of Burroughs' reality.⁶³

Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* can perhaps best be described as a work of surrealist *noir*. Events in the story are fueled by exterminator William Lee (Peter Weller) and his drug-induced hallucinations, including imagined characters such as an insectoid typewriter and a strange alien character dubbed a "Mugwump" (both characters from Burroughs' novel). The narrative world of *Naked Lunch* is labyrinthine, involving secret agents, a secret narcotics operation, and underworld politics. The sheer surrealist absurdity of the events portrayed on screen is difficult to describe: *Naked Lunch* is a film in which an exterminator-writer kills his wife under the subconscious orders of a secret-service beetle who commissions reports from Lee to be typed on a typewriter with an insectoid body and a talking anus, while Lee is ordered by his typewriter to seduce a doppelganger of his wife (who shares the same name), whom he will later shoot in a bizarre re-enactment of his initial "William Tell" routine to (inexplicably) prove to border control guards of the totalitarian nation-state Annexia that he is a writer, while simultaneously discovering a narcotics operation fueled by the trafficking of a drug derived from the internal organs of giant centipedes and the semen of Mugwump aliens. The "plot" of the film is nonsensical – by design. As Lee states in the film his artistic goal to "exterminate all rational thought," one gets the sense that the film's unrelenting emphasis on the surreal, illogical and bizarre aims to achieve the same. *Naked Lunch* is a depiction of mental states fueled by drugs, and perhaps by trauma. The film's project is to create a world in which the use of drugs

⁶³ Peter Schjeldal, "The Outlaw: The Extraordinary Life of William S. Burroughs," *New Yorker*, February 3, 2014 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/02/03/the-outlaw-2>

drastically distorts Lee's perception of reality (as it did for a writer like Burroughs) and therefore blur the distinction between reality and hallucination to such a degree that, according to Simon Riches, the viewer is never sure whether what they witness is "real or a hallucination brought on by a combination of drugs and [trauma]." ⁶⁴ Instead of telling a narrative where the *protagonist* experiences a transformation from reality to hallucination, as in *Videodrome*, *Naked Lunch* aims to disorient the *viewer* alongside the protagonist, and does so not in a gradual transformation but rather by presenting disorientation at the outset and exacerbating the effect in creative ways throughout the film.

The intriguing character of Shore's score for *Naked Lunch* results from the unique lineup of musicians the composer assembled for the project, and the resulting combination of tone colors. Shore's lush orchestral writing, recorded once more by the London Philharmonic, is complemented by the fiery playing of free-jazz icon Ornette Coleman – the two artists first met during Shore's tenure as the Saturday Night Live bandleader, where Shore booked Coleman to perform his idiosyncratic music on network television. Shore's decision to collaborate with Coleman for the *Naked Lunch* score stemmed from his desire to fuse the language of jazz with Moroccan music to reflect the combination of North African and urban noir aesthetics that defines the film. Shore's reference point for this aesthetic was Coleman's track "Midnight Sunrise" from his 1977 release *Dancing in Your Head*, a track that was recorded in Tangier by Coleman and the Master Musicians of Jajouka, an ancient ensemble of traditional Moroccan musicians. The synthesis of traditional Moroccan aesthetics with Coleman's playing rooted in the language of Charlie Parker proved to be inspirational for both Shore and Cronenberg. ⁶⁵ In Shore's own words: "Cronenberg thought ["Midnight Sunrise"] sounded like the Interzone

⁶⁴ Simon Riches, "Deception and Disorder," 95

⁶⁵ Schelle, *The Score*, 335

national anthem... I was trying to find a connection between New York and Tangier and that music led us right to Ornette.”⁶⁶ By coincidence, William S. Burroughs himself was present during the recording of “Midnight Sunrise” in Tangier, and was friends with Coleman – thus, the influence of the recording on the score of *Naked Lunch* has biographical resonance.⁶⁷

Fig. 23

Naked Lunch: Main Title

The musical score for the main title of *Naked Lunch* is presented in two systems. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 84$. The top system features Ornette Coleman on tenor saxophone, with the instruction "free - soloistic - with energy". The saxophone part is a complex, melodic line. Below it, the string ensemble (labeled "strings") plays a sustained, low-register chord, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The woodwinds (labeled "woodwinds") and saxophones (labeled "saxophones") are also indicated. The bottom system continues the saxophone and string parts, with the strings maintaining their sustained chord.

⁶⁶ Joel Wicklund, “Oscar-Winning Composer Howard Shore Talks Scoring LOTR, ‘Naked Lunch’ And More,” *Chicagoist*, October 21, 2015

http://chicagoist.com/2015/10/21/the_shore_score_an_interview_with_o.php

⁶⁷ Lee Ranaldo, “Interview with William S. Burroughs,” in *Cut-Ups, Cut-Ins, Cut Outs* eds. Colin Fallows, Synne Genzmer (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2012), 48

First system of a musical score for piano. The right hand features a complex, rapid melodic line with many accidentals. The left hand plays a series of chords and single notes, including a long, low note in the bass.

Second system of the musical score. The right hand continues with a complex melodic line. The left hand plays a series of chords and single notes. A text annotation "Coleman continues in this vein throughout the cue" is placed above the right hand. A text annotation "strings, winds" is placed above the right hand. A dynamic marking **f** is placed below the right hand.

Third system of the musical score. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes. The left hand plays a series of chords and single notes. A text annotation "strings, vibraphone" is placed above the right hand. Dynamic markings **p**, **pp**, and **ppp** are placed below the right hand.

Fourth system of the musical score. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes. The left hand plays a series of chords and single notes. A text annotation "full orch" is placed above the right hand. A dynamic marking **p** is placed below the right hand.

Due to the narrative complexity of the film, and the plot's intentional lack of clarity, I will not trace the score's progression through the narrative as I have for my previous case studies, and instead will examine specific scoring effects employed by Shore and the way they are used at various points in the film. Shore describes the essential character of the score as being akin to "a very slow accompaniment with Charlie Parker playing very fast on top."⁶⁸ This kind of discrepancy between the aesthetic of Coleman's saxophone playing and that of the orchestral scoring can be observed in Shore's gorgeous main title sequence (fig. 23). Shore's scoring for the London Philharmonic can perhaps be described as "glacial" in terms of its harmonic rhythm and overall level of rhythmic density. The orchestra suspends lush, harmonically rich sonorities in tied whole notes, while Coleman unleashes a flurry of chromatic bebop-infused lead playing on top of the orchestral texture. Shore's strategy for achieving this drastic aesthetic discrepancy was a fascinating one; the composer had the London Philharmonic and Coleman record together, but sound-isolated Coleman in a separate booth. Rather than having Coleman play along with the orchestra's drawn-out harmonies, Shore fed Coleman an audio feed of his son Denardo playing double-time and triple-time swing patterns on drums.⁶⁹ Coleman, therefore, plays blazingly fast swung bebop licks over the orchestra's extremely slow harmonic pads, paralleling the way that Coleman and the Master Musicians of Jajouka play together on Coleman's recording of "Midnight Sunrise."

Shore's writing for the orchestra here is, by and large, representative of the way the London Philharmonic is used on *Naked Lunch*. With very few exceptions, *Naked Lunch*'s score is non-melodic, relying not on themes or even motives so much as harmonic progressions – in this way, the London Philharmonic acts more as an elaborate rhythm section for Coleman's lead

⁶⁸ Schelle, *The Score*, 335

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 337

playing. Harmonies are lush, and often have jazz resonances, such as the voicing that begins the main title, an F# suspended voicing (F#/B/C#/E/G#) with inner lines adding the sixth, fourth and flatted ninth of the chord. The first minute of the main title is written exclusively over an F# pedal point, and the harmonies range from suspended voicings to minor seventh chords (A/B/D/F#), minor/major sevenths (F#/A/C#/E#) and F# dorian (F#/A/C#/D#), all common parlance in bebop vocabulary. Similarly jazz-inflected harmonic logic can be found in the subtle orchestral music that plays as Lee speaks with the beetle that address him as a special agent and

Fig. 24

Naked Lunch: The Beetle

The musical score for 'Naked Lunch: The Beetle' is presented in a grand staff format. The tempo is marked as '♩ = c. 76' and the harp part is marked 'pp'. The harp melody consists of a series of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F#7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F#8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F#9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F#10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F#11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F#12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F#13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F#14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F#15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F#16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F#17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F#18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F#19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F#20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F#21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F#22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F#23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F#24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F#25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F#26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F#27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F#28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F#29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F#30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F#31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F#32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F#33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F#34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F#35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F#36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F#37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F#38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F#39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F#40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F#41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F#42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F#43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F#44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F#45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F#46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F#47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F#48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F#49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F#50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F#51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F#52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F#53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F#54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F#55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F#56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F#57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F#58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F#59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F#60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F#61, G61, A61, B61, C62, D62, E62, F#62, G62, A62, B62, C63, D63, E63, F#63, G63, A63, B63, C64, D64, E64, F#64, G64, A64, B64, C65, D65, E65, F#65, G65, A65, B65, C66, D66, E66, F#66, G66, A66, B66, C67, D67, E67, F#67, G67, A67, B67, C68, D68, E68, F#68, G68, A68, B68, C69, D69, E69, F#69, G69, A69, B69, C70, D70, E70, F#70, G70, A70, B70, C71, D71, E71, F#71, G71, A71, B71, C72, D72, E72, F#72, G72, A72, B72, C73, D73, E73, F#73, G73, A73, B73, C74, D74, E74, F#74, G74, A74, B74, C75, D75, E75, F#75, G75, A75, B75, C76, D76, E76, F#76, G76, A76, B76, C77, D77, E77, F#77, G77, A77, B77, C78, D78, E78, F#78, G78, A78, B78, C79, D79, E79, F#79, G79, A79, B79, C80, D80, E80, F#80, G80, A80, B80, C81, D81, E81, F#81, G81, A81, B81, C82, D82, E82, F#82, G82, A82, B82, C83, D83, E83, F#83, G83, A83, B83, C84, D84, E84, F#84, G84, A84, B84, C85, D85, E85, F#85, G85, A85, B85, C86, D86, E86, F#86, G86, A86, B86, C87, D87, E87, F#87, G87, A87, B87, C88, D88, E88, F#88, G88, A88, B88, C89, D89, E89, F#89, G89, A89, B89, C90, D90, E90, F#90, G90, A90, B90, C91, D91, E91, F#91, G91, A91, B91, C92, D92, E92, F#92, G92, A92, B92, C93, D93, E93, F#93, G93, A93, B93, C94, D94, E94, F#94, G94, A94, B94, C95, D95, E95, F#95, G95, A95, B95, C96, D96, E96, F#96, G96, A96, B96, C97, D97, E97, F#97, G97, A97, B97, C98, D98, E98, F#98, G98, A98, B98, C99, D99, E99, F#99, G99, A99, B99, C100, D100, E100, F#100, G100, A100, B100, C101, D101, E101, F#101, G101, A101, B101, C102, D102, E102, F#102, G102, A102, B102, C103, D103, E103, F#103, G103, A103, B103, C104, D104, E104, F#104, G104, A104, B104, C105, D105, E105, F#105, G105, A105, B105, C106, D106, E106, F#106, G106, A106, B106, C107, D107, E107, F#107, G107, A107, B107, C108, D108, E108, F#108, G108, A108, B108, C109, D109, E109, F#109, G109, A109, B109, C110, D110, E110, F#110, G110, A110, B110, C111, D111, E111, F#111, G111, A111, B111, C112, D112, E112, F#112, G112, A112, B112, C113, D113, E113, F#113, G113, A113, B113, C114, D114, E114, F#114, G114, A114, B114, C115, D115, E115, F#115, G115, A115, B115, C116, D116, E116, F#116, G116, A116, B116, C117, D117, E117, F#117, G117, A117, B117, C118, D118, E118, F#118, G118, A118, B118, C119, D119, E119, F#119, G119, A119, B119, C120, D120, E120, F#120, G120, A120, B120, C121, D121, E121, F#121, G121, A121, B121, C122, D122, E122, F#122, G122, A122, B122, C123, D123, E123, F#123, G123, A123, B123, C124, D124, E124, F#124, G124, A124, B124, C125, D125, E125, F#125, G125, A125, B125, C126, D126, E126, F#126, G126, A126, B126, C127, D127, E127, F#127, G127, A127, B127, C128, D128, E128, F#128, G128, A128, B128, C129, D129, E129, F#129, G129, A129, B129, C130, D130, E130, F#130, G130, A130, B130, C131, D131, E131, F#131, G131, A131, B131, C132, D132, E132, F#132, G132, A132, B132, C133, D133, E133, F#133, G133, A133, B133, C134, D134, E134, F#134, G134, A134, B134, C135, D135, E135, F#135, G135, A135, B135, C136, D136, E136, F#136, G136, A136, B136, C137, D137, E137, F#137, G137, A137, B137, C138, D138, E138, F#138, G138, A138, B138, C139, D139, E139, F#139, G139, A139, B139, C140, D140, E140, F#140, G140, A140, B140, C141, D141, E141, F#141, G141, A141, B141, C142, D142, E142, F#142, G142, A142, B142, C143, D143, E143, F#143, G143, A143, B143, C144, D144, E144, F#144, G144, A144, B144, C145, D145, E145, F#145, G145, A145, B145, C146, D146, E146, F#146, G146, A146, B146, C147, D147, E147, F#147, G147, A147, B147, C148, D148, E148, F#148, G148, A148, B148, C149, D149, E149, F#149, G149, A149, B149, C150, D150, E150, F#150, G150, A150, B150, C151, D151, E151, F#151, G151, A151, B151, C152, D152, E152, F#152, G152, A152, B152, C153, D153, E153, F#153, G153, A153, B153, C154, D154, E154, F#154, G154, A154, B154, C155, D155, E155, F#155, G155, A155, B155, C156, D156, E156, F#156, G156, A156, B156, C157, D157, E157, F#157, G157, A157, B157, C158, D158, E158, F#158, G158, A158, B158, C159, D159, E159, F#159, G159, A159, B159, C160, D160, E160, F#160, G160, A160, B160, C161, D161, E161, F#161, G161, A161, B161, C162, D162, E162, F#162, G162, A162, B162, C163, D163, E163, F#163, G163, A163, B163, C164, D164, E164, F#164, G164, A164, B164, C165, D165, E165, F#165, G165, A165, B165, C166, D166, E166, F#166, G166, A166, B166, C167, D167, E167, F#167, G167, A167, B167, C168, D168, E168, F#168, G168, A168, B168, C169, D169, E169, F#169, G169, A169, B169, C170, D170, E170, F#170, G170, A170, B170, C171, D171, E171, F#171, G171, A171, B171, C172, D172, E172, F#172, G172, A172, B172, C173, D173, E173, F#173, G173, A173, B173, C174, D174, E174, F#174, G174, A174, B174, C175, D175, E175, F#175, G175, A175, B175, C176, D176, E176, F#176, G176, A176, B176, C177, D177, E177, F#177, G177, A177, B177, C178, D178, E178, F#178, G178, A178, B178, C179, D179, E179, F#179, G179, A179, B179, C180, D180, E180, F#180, G180, A180, B180, C181, D181, E181, F#181, G181, A181, B181, C182, D182, E182, F#182, G182, A182, B182, C183, D183, E183, F#183, G183, A183, B183, C184, D184, E184, F#184, G184, A184, B184, C185, D185, E185, F#185, G185, A185, B185, C186, D186, E186, F#186, G186, A186, B186, C187, D187, E187, F#187, G187, A187, B187, C188, D188, E188, F#188, G188, A188, B188, C189, D189, E189, F#189, G189, A189, B189, C190, D190, E190, F#190, G190, A190, B190, C191, D191, E191, F#191, G191, A191, B191, C192, D192, E192, F#192, G192, A192, B192, C193, D193, E193, F#193, G193, A193, B193, C194, D194, E194, F#194, G194, A194, B194, C195, D195, E195, F#195, G195, A195, B195, C196, D196, E196, F#196, G196, A196, B196, C197, D197, E197, F#197, G197, A197, B197, C198, D198, E198, F#198, G198, A198, B198, C199, D199, E199, F#199, G199, A199, B199, C200, D200, E200, F#200, G200, A200, B200, C201, D201, E201, F#201, G201, A201, B201, C202, D202, E202, F#202, G202, A202, B202, C203, D203, E203, F#203, G203, A203, B203, C204, D204, E204, F#204, G204, A204, B204, C205, D205, E205, F#205, G205, A205, B205, C206, D206, E206, F#206, G206, A206, B206, C207, D207, E207, F#207, G207, A207, B207, C208, D208, E208, F#208, G208, A208, B208, C209, D209, E209, F#209, G209, A209, B209, C210, D210, E210, F#210, G210, A210, B210, C211, D211, E211, F#211, G211, A211, B211, C212, D212, E212, F#212, G212, A212, B212, C213, D213, E213, F#213, G213, A213, B213, C214, D214, E214, F#214, G214, A214, B214, C215, D215, E215, F#215, G215, A215, B215, C216, D216, E216, F#216, G216, A216, B216, C217, D217, E217, F#217, G217, A217, B217, C218, D218, E218, F#218, G218, A218, B218, C219, D219, E219, F#219, G219, A219, B219, C220, D220, E220, F#220, G220, A220, B220, C221, D221, E221, F#221, G221, A221, B221, C222, D222, E222, F#222, G222, A222, B222, C223, D223, E223, F#223, G223, A223, B223, C224, D224, E224, F#224, G224, A224, B224, C225, D225, E225, F#225, G225, A225, B225, C226, D226, E226, F#226, G226, A226, B226, C227, D227, E227, F#227, G227, A227, B227, C228, D228, E228, F#228, G228, A228, B228, C229, D229, E229, F#229, G229, A229, B229, C230, D230, E230, F#230, G230, A230, B230, C231, D231, E231, F#231, G231, A231, B231, C232, D232, E232, F#232, G232, A232, B232, C233, D233, E233, F#233, G233, A233, B233, C234, D234, E234, F#234, G234, A234, B234, C235, D235, E235, F#235, G235, A235, B235, C236, D236, E236, F#236, G236, A236, B236, C237, D237, E237, F#237, G237, A237, B237, C238, D238, E238, F#238, G238, A238, B238, C239, D239, E239, F#239, G239, A239, B239, C240, D240, E240, F#240, G240, A240, B240, C241, D241, E241, F#241, G241, A241, B241, C242, D242, E242, F#242, G242, A242, B242, C243, D243, E243, F#243, G243, A243, B243, C244, D244, E244, F#244, G244, A244, B244, C245, D245, E245, F#245, G245, A245, B245, C246, D246, E246, F#246, G246, A246, B246, C247, D247, E247, F#247, G247, A247, B247, C248, D248, E248, F#248, G248, A248, B248, C249, D249, E249, F#249, G249, A249, B249, C250, D250, E250, F#250, G250, A250, B250, C251, D251, E251, F#251, G251, A251, B251, C252, D252, E252, F#252, G252, A252, B252, C253, D253, E253, F#253, G253, A253, B253, C254, D254, E254, F#254, G254, A254, B254, C255, D255, E255, F#255, G255, A255, B255, C256, D256, E256, F#256, G256, A256, B256, C257, D257, E257, F#257, G257, A257, B257, C258, D258, E258, F#258, G258, A258, B258, C259, D259, E259, F#259, G259, A259, B259, C260, D260, E260, F#260, G260, A260, B260, C261, D261, E261, F#261, G261, A261, B261, C262, D262, E262, F#262, G262, A262, B262, C263, D263, E263, F#263, G263, A263, B263, C264, D264, E264, F#264, G264, A264, B264, C265, D265, E265, F#265, G265, A265, B265, C266, D266, E266, F#266, G266, A266, B266, C267, D267, E267, F#267, G267, A267, B267, C268, D268, E268, F#268, G268, A268, B268, C269, D269, E269, F#269, G269, A269, B269, C270, D270, E270, F#270, G270, A270, B270, C271, D271, E271, F#271, G271, A271, B271, C272, D272, E272, F#272, G272, A272, B272, C273, D273, E273, F#273, G273, A273, B273, C274, D274, E274, F#274, G274, A274, B274, C275, D275, E275, F#275, G275, A275, B275, C276, D276, E276, F#276, G276, A276, B276, C277, D277, E277, F#277, G277, A277, B277, C278, D278, E278, F#278, G278, A278, B278, C279, D279, E279, F#279, G279, A279, B279, C280, D280, E280, F#280, G280, A280, B280, C281, D281, E281, F#281, G281, A281, B281, C282, D282, E282, F#282, G282, A282, B282, C283, D283, E283, F#283, G283, A283, B283, C284, D284, E284, F#284, G284, A284, B284, C285, D285, E285, F#285, G285, A285, B285, C286, D286, E286, F#286, G286, A286, B286, C287, D287, E287, F#287, G287, A287, B287, C288, D288, E288, F#288, G288, A288, B288, C289, D289, E289, F#289, G289, A289, B289, C290, D290, E290, F#290, G290, A290, B290, C291, D291, E291, F#291, G291, A291, B291, C292, D292, E292, F#292, G292, A292, B292, C293, D293, E293, F#293, G293, A293, B293, C294, D294, E294, F#294, G294, A294, B294, C295, D295, E295, F#295, G295, A295, B295, C296, D296, E296, F#296, G296, A296, B296, C297, D297, E297, F#297, G297, A297, B297, C298, D298, E298, F#298, G298, A298, B298, C299, D299, E299, F#299, G299, A299, B299, C300, D300, E300, F#300, G300, A300, B300, C301, D301, E301, F#301, G301, A301, B301, C302, D302, E302, F#302, G302, A302, B302, C303, D303, E303, F#303, G303, A303, B303, C304, D304, E304, F#304, G304, A304, B304, C305, D305, E305, F#305, G305, A305, B305, C306, D306, E306, F#306, G306, A306, B306, C307, D307, E307, F#307, G307, A307, B307, C308, D308, E308, F#308, G308, A308, B308, C309, D309, E309, F#309, G309, A309, B309, C310, D310, E310, F#310, G310, A310, B310, C311, D311, E311, F#311, G311, A311, B311, C312, D312, E312, F#312, G312, A312, B312, C313, D313, E313, F#313, G313, A313, B313, C314, D314, E314, F#314, G314, A314, B314, C315, D315, E315, F#315, G315, A315, B315, C316, D316, E316, F#316, G316, A316, B316, C317, D317, E317, F#317, G317, A317, B317, C318, D318, E318, F#318, G318, A318, B318, C319, D319, E319, F#319, G319, A319, B319, C320, D320, E320, F#320, G320, A320, B320, C321, D321, E321, F#321, G321, A321, B321, C322, D322, E322, F#322, G322, A322, B322, C323, D323, E323, F#323, G323, A323, B323, C324, D324, E324, F#324, G324, A324, B324, C325, D325, E325, F#325, G325, A325, B325, C326, D326, E326, F#326, G326, A326, B326, C327, D327, E327, F#327, G327, A327, B327, C328, D328, E328, F#328, G328, A328, B328, C329, D329, E329, F#329, G329, A329, B329, C330, D330, E330, F#330, G330, A330, B330, C331, D331, E331, F#331, G331, A331, B331, C332, D332, E332, F#332, G332, A332, B332, C333, D333, E333, F#333, G333, A333, B333, C334, D334, E334, F#334, G334, A334, B334, C335, D335, E335, F#335, G335, A335, B335, C336, D336, E336, F#336, G336, A336, B336, C337, D337, E337, F#337, G337, A337, B337, C338, D338, E338, F#338, G338, A338, B338, C339, D339, E339, F#339, G339, A339, B339, C340, D340, E340, F#340, G340, A340, B340, C341, D341, E341, F#341, G341, A341, B341, C342, D342, E342, F#342, G342, A342, B342, C343, D343, E343, F#343, G343, A343, B343, C344, D344, E344, F#344, G344, A344, B344, C345, D345, E345, F#345, G345, A345, B345, C346, D346, E346, F#346, G346, A346, B346, C347, D347, E347, F#347, G347, A347, B347, C348, D348, E348, F#348, G348, A348, B348, C349, D349, E349, F#349, G349, A349, B349, C350, D350, E350, F#350, G350, A350, B350, C351, D351, E351, F#351, G351, A351, B351, C352, D352, E352, F#352, G352, A352, B352, C353, D353, E353, F#353, G353, A353, B353, C354, D354, E354, F#354, G354, A354, B354, C355, D355, E355, F#355, G35

Fig. 25

Naked Lunch: Marketplace Hallucination

♩ = c. 76
strings

f lush

full orch

Here, a melodic figure is articulated over a single extended harmony in the full orchestra – taking the melodic figure into account, the overall harmony appears to be an E-flat Phrygian sonority above a D pedal tone, an approach that is reminiscent of the modal jazz movement spearheaded by John Coltrane and others in the early 1960s where passages of music were constructed over minimal modes (or a single one) to achieve a kind of “harmonic pedal point.”

One of the most interesting and effective cues of the entire score is a piece entitled “Centipedes” on the *Naked Lunch* soundtrack album, a piece that plays during a hallucination in which Lee watches a large centipede crawl around the bathroom of his flat in the North African city of Interzone (fig. 26).

Fig. 26

Naked Lunch: The Centipede

Very slowly - freely

Coleman - tenor saxophone

pp freely, molto rubato

strings, harmonics

ppp



First system of musical notation. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with various accidentals. The middle staff (treble clef) contains two chords: a triad of F#, C#, and G# in the first measure, and a triad of Bb, Ab, and Eb in the second measure. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains two whole notes: F in the first measure and C in the second measure.



Second system of musical notation. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with various accidentals. The middle staff (treble clef) contains three chords: a triad of Bb, Ab, and Eb in the first measure, a triad of Bb, Ab, and Eb in the second measure, and a triad of Bb, Ab, and Eb in the third measure. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains two whole notes: F in the first measure and C in the second measure.



Third system of musical notation. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with various accidentals. The middle staff (treble clef) contains one chord: a triad of Bb, Ab, and Eb. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains two whole notes: F in the first measure and C in the second measure.

The cue consists of a sequence of colorful harmonies articulated gently in higher strings, including muted colors and harmonics. The string section outlines an extremely slow-moving and free-time chord progression, above which Coleman solos, embellishing the harmony through chromaticisms and playing significantly quicker and denser phrases than the suspended harmonies of the string section. Coleman's saxophone is mixed curiously low in the sound mix, and is treated to a subtle reverb effect, that makes the saxophone almost sound like it is a diegetic element emanating from down the hall. This element of perspective, where the different instrument colors appear to not emanate from the same source, is one of the most profound ways that Shore achieves the effect of surrealism in the score. A surreal effect is already created when Coleman's saxophone and the London Philharmonic play in different "styles," with Coleman playing to a metronome tempo two or three times faster than that of the London Philharmonic, but in cues such as this one, the mixing work creates the effect of two different pieces of music being played together that happen to work together harmonically. Furthermore, the apparent blending of diegetic and non-diegetic music in a single piece of music leads the viewer to question what sound is "local" to the film's reality, and what sound is superimposed after the fact as non-diegetic music. Sonic reality, in other words, is just as complicated and ambiguous in the world of *Naked Lunch* as is the reality of Lee's experience.

Experiments with sound sources, the tension between diegetic and non-diegetic music, and other ways to manipulate the viewers' experience of sound are all frequently used devices in *Naked Lunch* to create a surreal, unnatural sensory experience for the viewer. In some cases, the same sound source is used alternately as non-diegetic and diegetic sound, as in the case of Coleman's saxophone, which is both used as an orchestral instrument (as in the main title) and as diegetic sound, as in such scenes as that of Joan Lee (Judy Davis) shooting up Lee's insecticide

as a drug, where Coleman's saxophone playing is mixed subtly to sound like it is playing from some sound source in the room while she injects the drug. As Joan admits to her husband that she has a drug problem, Coleman plays a rendition of Thelonius Monk's famous composition "Misterioso," mixed as to sound like diegetic sound, although it begins "unnaturally" in the scene (i.e. is never triggered by any action that would indicate a diegetic sound has been engaged, like a needle being lowered on a record player). (Coleman's rendition of "Misterioso" is also warped in such a way to sound surreal by musical devices, such as a reharmonization in the piano replacing all fifths with "flat five" harmonies, and the addition of an electronically processed vibraphone).

In some cases, non-diegetic music evolves into diegetic sound, such as the scene where the Master Musicians of Jajouka enter (on an introductory shot of Interzone) with Coleman freely soloing over them – the music of the Master Musicians eventually fades to become the background music of a café. In a similar example, a blazing free-jazz piece with Coleman and his son accompanying on drums plays as Lee and his wife's doppelganger drive towards the Annexian border – the sound is loud, mixed to be non-diegetic, but is revealed to be diegetic when Lee stops the sound by turning off his car radio. If diegetic music commonly underscores an experience that happens in the reality of the narrative (as Buhler writes, diegetic music is by definition "an object of the narrative"), blurring the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic forces the viewer to reconsider what exactly is the reality of the narrative.⁷⁰ A non-musical, yet particularly effective, manipulation of sound to achieve a surreal effect occurs in Interzone, where Lee meets a fellow ex-pat couple at a party – as the husband talks to Lee, his words go dramatically out of sync with the motion of his lips, creating a tremendously unnatural effect that

⁷⁰ Buhler, "Analytical and Interpretive Approaches II," 40

immediately makes the viewer question if this otherwise completely mundane interaction is in fact another hallucinatory experience.

There are further ways in which the nature and implementation of music in *Naked Lunch* distance the viewer's experience from the world of rationality and create a surreal effect. In some scenes, Shore's cues appear to press the "wrong" emotional buttons for the events on screen. Perhaps the most noteworthy instance of such writing is the first "William Tell" moment that results in the accidental death of Lee's wife. As Lee shoots his wife, and then gradually is overwhelmed by stunned horror at what he has done, the music emphasizes none of these emotions – Shore instead scores the scene with smooth jazzy harmonies, almost exclusively articulated in warm strings, even introducing a lyrical flute motif, set over a lush Db major chord with added sixth and ninth, that appears straight out of the playbook of the romantic style-topic. Unlike such examples of counterpoint in *The Fly*, Shore does not appear to be scoring narrative subtext, as there is no subtext of romance in the scene (it is unlikely that Shore is scoring a deep profound love lost between the two characters, since Lee has just witnessed his wife having a sexual encounter with one of his friends). Instead, it appears that Shore's score is deliberately incongruous – as the viewer witnesses an accidental murder that, if not a tragedy, is at least shocking and disturbing, Shore's music signals an entirely unrelated emotional aesthetic that greatly disorients the viewer.

In other scenes, Shore elects to leave key scenes completely unscored. These scenes include some of the strangest scenes of the film, including the first appearance of the "bugwriter" (the insectoid typewriter with a talking anus). The absence of music typically implies the realm of reality (to use Buhler's dichotomy, silent scenes are most often read as being real, while

scored scenes are more likely to take place in the ideal realm).⁷¹ Shore's decision to leave certain obviously hallucinated scenes unscored severely complicates this dynamic, and our understanding of what is filmic reality. In an even more puzzling scene, Lee seduces his wife's doppelganger and the two begin to make love as the film's main theme plays. The scene takes a (grotesque) turn for the surreal as a typewriter turns into a bizarre "sex blob" that joins the two in their erotic encounter. As the housekeeper bursts in and halts their encounter, the music abruptly cuts out – such a move would traditionally represent a "back to reality" moment for the viewer. However, the sex blob remains, and the remainder of the scene, as the housekeeper forces the blob to the window and then to fall to the street outside, is unscored. Here, Shore plays with our understanding of the nature of scored and unscored scenes – the music plays as the scene turns surreal, a musical semantic cue that viewers understand and expect, but the music's "back to reality" cue does not correspond to a return to narrative reality. The viewer is left so disoriented by the effect that they are unsure whether the utterly bizarre sex blob was in fact a product of Lee's hallucinations at all.

Shore's music for the final scene of the film (fig. 27) is noteworthy not just for being perhaps the most extravagant orchestral music of the film, but also for its utterly baffling rhetorical effect. In this scene, Lee and Joan (the doppelganger of his wife) are attempting to cross border control to enter the neighboring country of Annexia. The guards question Lee, asking him to state his occupation; when he produces a pen, they are unconvinced, asking for more proof. Bizarrely, Lee does so by re-enacting the "William Tell" routine that resulted in his wife's death in the first act of the film. Predictably, his re-enactment has the same effect – the border guards, completely unfazed by the accidental murder they just witnessed, cheerfully welcome Lee to Annexia, as Lee tearfully observes Joan's lifeless body. To say that such a scene

⁷¹ Ibid., 41

is emotionally confusing is an understatement. In fact, the scene appears to be completely devoid of any kind of moral charge whatsoever – the film portrays Joan’s death as little more than a random occurrence, rather than a tragedy or a morally objectionable action on the part of Lee. Quoting Mitch Tuchman, philosophy scholar Jones Irwin describes Cronenberg’s *Naked Lunch* as being a film of “bloodless agnosticism,” in contrast to Burroughs’s “impassioned moralism.” Irwin argues that Cronenberg’s vision in his adaptation of *Naked Lunch* is one of amorality, a world in which violence and horror occurs in an equivocal light rather than an ethical one. Writing specifically about the Joan’s shooting in the film, Irwin states that while Burroughs characterized the event as a fundamental tragedy whose “ugly spirit [overwhelmed] him,” Cronenberg portrays the action twice in an ethically ambiguous light. In fact, Lee’s shooting of his wife in the “Welcome to Annexia” scene is less tragic than it is productive, granting Lee access to the new country.⁷² And just as Joan’s death is ethically ambiguous, so too is it emotionally ambiguous – we see Lee shed a tear, but his motivations for re-enacting the “William Tell” routine in the first place seem completely absurd, and the cheery demeanor of the border guards as they allow Lee entry to Annexia signal positive emotions. The dialogue and image of the scene, therefore, communicate to the viewer incongruous sets of emotional messages.

⁷² Jones Irwin, “From ‘Impassioned Morality’ to ‘Bloodless Agnosticism’,” in *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg* ed. Simon Riches (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012) 203-204

Fig. 27

Naked Lunch: "Welcome to Annexia"

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a piano part and an orchestral part.

System 1: The piano part begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 56$ and a dynamic of *mf*. The orchestral part includes a harp, strings, muted brass (8vb), and full orchestra. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand.

System 2: The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The orchestral part includes strings, winds, and brass. The dynamic is *ff*.

System 3: The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The orchestral part includes strings, winds, and brass. The dynamic is *fff*, which then changes to *mp*.

System 4: The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The orchestral part includes strings, some celesta accents, and brass. The dynamic is *p*, which then changes to *pp* and finally *ppp*.

Shore's score for this scene is striking for his harmonic choices, and the progression in tonality as the cue develops. As the "William Tell" re-enactment begins, the harmonies are lush and romantic – the first two bars of the excerpt articulate first a diminished 7th chord and then a major seventh chord over a B pedal tone, implying a colorful dominant and then a suspended sonority respectively (in bebop or even romantic-era classical harmonic parlance). As Lee is about to fire the fateful shot, the harmony shifts to a Bb pedal, over which the full orchestra articulates a G major chord. Importantly, the fateful gunshot is not underscored by any particular musical device, and in fact occurs in the middle of the third bar of the excerpt – the music simply proceeds with its logic, unconcerned with the violent act on screen. The music achieves its climax with a protracted whole-tone chord, which resolves to a C dominant sonority in the final system of the cue. The ultimate emotional effect of this music, particularly its conclusion, is utter emotional ambiguity. The whole-tone sonority is arguably one that has the least emotional cultural coding (i.e. conveys the least concrete emotional message to most listeners, in comparison to major, minor, and diminished sonorities), except for perhaps the exact notion of ambiguity. And the tonality resolves to a C dominant seventh chord in second inversion, which here is divorced from its typical tonal functional context (there is no indication in the example that the chord should resolve to a tonic of F major). While still being a relatively more consonant sonority than a whole-tone chord, it still feels fundamentally unresolved, suspended in mid-air, conveying neither a feeling of emotional resolution nor a feeling of tragedy. The music, in other words, appears to be completely unconcerned with Joan's death, just as it is unconcerned with celebrating Lee's successful passage into Annexia. This is perhaps the ultimate narratively surreal effect – in this final scene, Shore and Cronenberg have so radically veered from the conventions of typical storytelling that they conclude the film by conveying to the viewer a

multitude of emotional meanings that end up conveying a kind of emotional meaninglessness that is completely bizarre to a viewer who expects a film to conclude with *some* kind of emotional message. Ultimately, it is relatively consonant tonal music, scored using the conventional forces of the London Philharmonic, which achieves the most surreal and bizarre effect of the entire film.

CONCLUSION

Howard Shore's scores for *The Brood*, *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, and *Naked Lunch* – and the other Cronenberg pictures he scored in this initial twelve year long phrase of his career – establish a pattern of personal experimentation, in which Shore consistently approaches new Cronenberg projects with the ambitions of trying radically new approaches to suit the individual character of each new project. Shore's working relationship with Cronenberg has extended through to the present day, and the composer has remained consistent in this artistic approach. His score for *Crash* (1996), Cronenberg's adaptation of the highly controversial 1973 novel by J. G. Ballard, is noteworthy for its novel approach to instrumentation; seeking to find a unique sound for the score, Shore eschewed his characteristic strings-heavy orchestral writing for an ensemble of six electric guitars, heavily processed electronically and creating a hypnotic, floating effect whose timbral coldness complements the bizarrely mechanical obsessive fetishes of the film's main characters. Shore's next Cronenberg collaboration, *eXistenZ* (1999), saw the composer return to the world of the symphony orchestra, but radically reimagined. His score creates alternative perspectives of the orchestra by recording each section separately and mixing the resulting sound in unconventional ways, such as recording *fortissimo* horns and mixing them quietly as a background color and bringing *pianissimo* accompaniment strings to the foreground, and supplementing orchestral timbres with unconventional instrumentation such as lyrical theremin playing. This subtle manipulation of "traditional" orchestral colors inspires the viewer of the film to reconsider the reality of orchestral sound, just as the film does to the way its main characters experience reality via VR videogame technology. More recently, Shore's latest Cronenberg score for the satirical drama *Maps to the Stars* (2014) is a dizzying kaleidoscope of unorthodox tone colors, with hypnotic, pulsating tabla, mrindangam and other "world"

percussion rhythms meeting moody and restrained electronic soundscapes, orchestral string textures, and menacing techno loops. The resulting aesthetic effect is both sensorily overwhelming and subtly ominous, equal parts glitzy and gloomy – the perfect sonic counterpart for what Peter Bradshaw described as an “exquisitely horrible movie about contemporary Hollywood.”⁷³

It is difficult to say exactly to what degree Shore’s aesthetic ethos in his Cronenberg collaborations should be seen as a guiding principle for aspiring composers in the field. By Shore’s own admission, his working relationship with the visionary director is a uniquely liberating one – he has stated that he “has worked with many different directors, but nothing quite matches [his relationship] with Cronenberg.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Shore’s Cronenberg scores illustrate the potential of film music composition to provide the modern composer with an additional venue for personal artistic experimentation aside from that of the art music concert hall. Even outside of such a relatively obscure world as Cronenberg’s signature brand of psychological body horror, there are examples of such personal experimentation driving palatable, mainstream scores. Shore’s scores for *Lord of the Rings*, while generally eschewing the radical dissonances and challenging aesthetics of his Cronenberg films, still represent a kind of personal experimentation: on *Rings*, Shore takes the “operatic” aesthetic of *The Fly* to a new level, creating a Wagnerian structure of leitmotivic development to structure an awe-inspiring ten hours of original music (and heavily utilizing Tolkien’s poems as a sort of libretto for his at times vocal-driven score). Such a technique is hardly unprecedented even in the film world, but

⁷³ Peter Bradshaw, “Cannes 2014 Review: Maps to the Stars,” *The Guardian*, May 18, 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/18/maps-to-the-stars-cannes-review-julianne-moore-robert-pattinson?CMP=tw_t_fd

⁷⁴ Philip Brophy, “Composing with a Very Wide Palette: Howard Shore in Conversation,” in *Celluloid Symphonies* ed. Julie Hubbard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) 468

the sheer scale of the project, and the inherent challenge of creating a cohesive musical argument in such a sprawling world, represented new rhetorical ground for the composer.^{75 76}

Shore's score for *Spotlight*, the 2015 biographical crime-drama film chronicling the efforts of Boston Globe's investigative journalism team to reveal systemic child abuse in the area's Catholic Church network, experiments with condensing leitmotivic logic from the sprawling world of the opera to an eclectic, intimate chamber ensemble involving such forces as accordion, electric guitar, keyboards and French horns. *Spotlight* sees Shore experiment with the overlaying of representative motives to create a "motivic web" of rhythmic interplay and counterpoint – the result is a unique structure in which the elements of the story, represented musically, create a kind of "puzzle" that comes into focus as the film progresses, paralleling the Spotlight team's efforts to uncover the puzzle of crime and abuse in the area.⁷⁷ Shore is certainly far from the only composer active in the industry today that strives to break new personal ground with each picture. Even Hans Zimmer, the German-born composer who arguably sits atop the throne of the modern mainstream film music world, is a noted personal experimenter – the root of the *Batman: The Dark Knight* (2008) score is a series of aleatoric experiments governed by a set of instructions (akin to the pieces contained in John Cage's *Number Pieces*), performed by violin, guitar and cello and then seamlessly integrated into Zimmer's signature hybrid electro-orchestral score.⁷⁸ Zimmer's penchant for personal experimentation is such that his elaborate and painstaking process of sound design, both electroacoustic and synthesizer-based, is conducted

⁷⁵ Rudy Koppl, "An Interview with Howard Shore and Peter Jackson," *Soundtrack Magazine*, vol. 20, no. 80, 2001

⁷⁶ Valceschini, "Locarno 2016 Interview: Howard Shore Talks His Career and Lifelong Collaborations"

⁷⁷ Sen, "Howard Shore: An Interview with Film Music Royalty"

⁷⁸ Levine, "Why Hans Zimmer Got The Job You Wanted,"

specifically for each individual score – for every new project, Zimmer forces himself to experiment in different ways to create new sound palettes for his scores.⁷⁹

In Shore's interview with Michael Schelle, the interview that catalyzed this entire project, the interviewer observes that there are critics and others in the field who "insist that... experimentalists like Penderecki, Ligeti, Cage, Babbitt, and Elliot Carter ruined the concert audience... [giving them] a bad reference for 'new music.'" Shore responds that such music is prevalent in tremendously popular film scores, to which Schelle notes that most who enjoy such aesthetically challenging film scores are disinclined to listen to such music in the concert hall. Shore wryly notes in response that, in the concert hall, "there's no serial killer to go with it."⁸⁰ Shore's perspective on the contemporary music climate is a jaded one – he affirms Leonard Bernstein's provocative statement that the concert orchestra is "a museum," stating that "most conductors avoid contemporary music like the plague."⁸¹ One could perhaps content that Shore's take on the state of modern art music is an unfairly pessimistic one, or at least could be contested. However, it is clear that films like the Cronenberg films (and bigger films with aesthetically similar scores, such as Shore's score for the Big Five Academy Award winning *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)) provide composers an opportunity to musically experiment in ways that are aesthetically impenetrable if presented to a mainstream listener in any other context. If one of the primary goals of "new [art] music" is to be artistically liberated to freely experiment with new techniques, aesthetics, and approaches, then Howard Shore's work with David Cronenberg illustrates that such a goal can be fulfilled in the realm of film music composition, with potentially monumentally commercial success.

⁷⁹ Hans Zimmer, *Hans Zimmer Teaches Film Scoring*, Lessons #7 and #8
<https://www.masterclass.com/classes/hans-zimmer-teaches-film-scoring>

⁸⁰ Schelle, *The Score*, 358

⁸¹ Ibid., 357

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NOSFERATU, A SYMPHONY OF HORROR: ORIGINAL SCORE

In addition to completing this research paper, I have written an original score for the final scene F.W. Murnau's expressionist horror classic *Nosferatu, A Symphony of Horror* (1922). I selected the film for its preeminence as one of the most noteworthy early classics of the horror genre, and because a film in the public domain presents no legal challenges to score. I have scored the final seven and a half minutes of the film, using the forces of a string orchestra (with some electronic processing). A video version of my score, with the picture synced to a digital mock-up of the score created using sample libraries, can be viewed on my YouTube channel ([YouTube.com/Obelix5150](https://www.youtube.com/Obelix5150)).

In scoring this scene, I have *not* endeavored to conduct an exercise of "becoming Howard Shore," trying to write what Shore would likely write for the scene. Doing so, of course, would be an impossible and meaningless exercise (not to mention the fact that this paper hopefully illustrates the vast range of compositional aesthetics that Shore has implemented throughout the course of his career). My score for the final scene of *Nosferatu* is very much representative of my personality as a composer, but is inspired by my intensive experience researching Shore's scores. Chiefly, I have been influenced by Shore's willingness to challenge aesthetic tropes and write music in unconventional styles for certain genres. In this case, I have endeavored to eschew tropes of action/suspense scene scoring by writing a lyrical cue with a slow tempo. My goal here is to capture the tense atmosphere of the scene with tense and dissonant harmonic language, rather than invoking textural tropes like staccato hits and rhythmic ostinati, while utilizing expressive, lyrical phraseology to underscore the underlying tragedy of the scene in addition to its horrific drama. My score begins with synthetically processed double bass drones (something that I felt emboldened to do after my experiences researching Shore's scores that bring in

electronic elements when necessary). The rest of the cue is performed by string orchestra, and revolves around a thematic idea: a chromatic trio of notes (for instance, F#-G-F#) followed by a leap up, which is representative of Count Orlok's terror, and is developed as the cue progresses until it is "eradicated" by "sun music" (a representative musical idea based on two harmonies repeated over an Eb pedal tone).

Inspired by Shore's against-the-grain rhetorical strategies in *The Fly* and *Naked Lunch*, I have elected to score a different emotional subtext to the close of the film than what is portrayed by the image. While the film presents a resolution to the drama of the story, where Count Orlok's death "as if by miracle" ushers in a new era of tranquility, I have scored the scene with emotional ambiguity, using colorful, dissonant harmonies and closing on a split-third tonality. While Count Orlok has passed on, the horror of the events of the film will leave a lasting heaviness on the lives of those in the film (not to mention Ellen Hutter's passing due to her fateful sacrifice, and the many who have died throughout the film's narrative). My score aims to capture this latent emotional heaviness to the conclusion of the film while not being explicitly tragic or funereal in character.

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I affirm that I adhered to the Oberlin College and Conservatory honor code in the completion of this honors project.