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Marcia J. Citron

When Opera Meets Film



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WHEN OPERA MEETS FILM

Opera can reveal something fundamental about a film, and film can do the same for an opera, argues Marcia J. Citron. Structured by the categories of Style, Subjectivity, and Desire, this volume advances our understanding of the aesthetics of the opera/film encounter. Case studies of a diverse array of important repertoire including mainstream film, opera-film, and postmodernist pastiche are presented. Citron uses Werner Wolf's theory of intermediality to probe the roles of opera and film when they combine. The book also refines and expands film-music functions, and details the impact of an opera's musical style on the meaning of a film. Drawing on cinematic traditions of Hollywood, France, and Britain, the study explores Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, Jewison's *Moonstruck*, Nichols's *Closer*, Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*, Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, Boyd's *Aria*, and Ponnelle's opera-films.

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For Liny and Edith,
with love and gratitude

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Introduction

The study of the intersection of opera and film is relatively new. It began two decades ago with Jeremy Tambling's influential volume *Opera, Ideology and Film* (1987), which stresses opera's political role when it appears in filmic form.¹ Musicology turned to opera and film a bit later, and the area has flourished amid the field's embrace of interdisciplinary topics and music for film. Three books have laid a foundation and formed a critical first stage. *Opera on Screen*, my study from 2000, offers a preliminary framework for interpreting full-length screen versions of opera.² In an exploration of key repertoire, it addresses medial differences among cinema, television, and video and suggests ways of thinking about the relationship between live and filmed opera. Two years later a vibrant collection extends the conversation. *Between Opera and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa, juxtaposes diverse approaches to a wide swath of repertoire.³ In addition to studies of full-length opera treatments, many essays discuss opera's role in mainstream films or non-Western traditions. The third book is Michal Grover-Friedlander's *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (2005).⁴ Through readings of selected films, this innovative study explores the spectral implications of the voice in operatic encounters with visual and aural media. Meanwhile, major articles have appeared in journals and edited volumes.⁵

I see the present study as part of a second generation of scholarship, joining recent publications such as the collection *Wagner and Cinema*.⁶ Building on earlier work, *When Opera Meets Film* argues that opera can reveal something fundamental about a film, and film can do the same for an opera. In exploring this symbiotic relationship, the book refines and expands our approaches to opera and film, adds important repertoire to the scholarly purview, and advances our understanding of the aesthetics of the opera/film encounter. By aesthetics I mean

the sort of broad, inclusive concept that Jerrold Levinson lays out in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, and not some narrow focus on properties of beauty.⁷ In my study aesthetics takes in the fullness of the workings of the hybrid encounter, on the large level and the small, as well as the experiencing of the interaction, or what Levinson calls aesthetic experience. While this suggests a rather open-ended inquiry, the book thematizes a core of issues that unify the chapters and structure the whole.

STRUCTURE AND REPERTOIRE

When Opera Meets Film consists of case-studies of selected works. Most are mainstream films that involve opera and a few are full-length treatments of operas, or what are termed opera-films.⁸ Through analysis of key repertoire, the book takes us further into the fertile regions of the opera/film encounter and offers new ways of interpreting the combination. Certain criteria underlie the choice of films. One involves an emphasis on important works – films of recognized quality or influence that hold a distinctive place in film studies or opera/film studies. Another applies specifically to mainstream films, the bulk of the repertoire. In these movies, opera does not serve a merely decorative or incidental role but provides access to the very meaning of the film. This essentialness of opera in certain films forms the *raison d'être* of the book. In [Chapter 1](#), for example, a key argument in the exploration of the *Godfather* trilogy (1972–1990) holds that the operatic visual style is absolutely essential to the special aesthetic tone for which the set is praised. Or take the critical contribution of Mozart's trio "Soave sia il vento" from *Così fan tutte* to the rarefied depiction of desire in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) and its arrogant display in *Closer* (2004), both explored in [Chapter 6](#). In other words, in the featured works the taut interdependence of opera and film plays a vital role in shaping the basic character of the film, and without opera the film would become quite a different work and arguably be less successful. [Chapter 3](#)'s study of opera-films presents a different situation because opera serves as the obvious starting point for an opera-film.

But it demonstrates the other part of the book's argument – that film has something fundamental to contribute to our understanding of an opera. This is also borne out in the other chapters.

The main lens into interpretation comes by way of the headings that structure the book: Style (Part I), Subjectivity (Part II), and Desire (Part III). The three categories engage narrative, representation, and meaning, and furnish ways of identifying what is important in a film. “Style” opens a window on large-scale aesthetic issues as it emphasizes relationships between the workings of opera and film as genres. It also affords insight into the wide range of films in which opera can make a difference. “Subjectivity” places the center of gravity on identity and the individual, both inside and outside the fiction, and homes in on human and cultural elements that guide the director's approach. “Desire” deals with the fascinating interplay between expectations on the part of characters and viewers and the affirmation or denial of those expectations inside or outside the fiction. Subjectivity and desire open up important lines of inquiry because they target the sorts of dynamic processes that are central to the workings and the understanding of the hybrid encounter that is opera and film.

Each section consists of two chapters and begins with a study that is grand in scale and approach. Acting as a kind of anchor, these initial chapters tend to be longer than their partners, apply a broader brushstroke to the material, and involve landmark repertoire. They provide a larger context for the shared focus and lay a foundation for the more targeted study to follow.

“Style” opens with a spacious study of the ways in which operatic style crafts an iconic set of American films, Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy. It also explores the implications of a climactic visit to an opera house that forms the backdrop to a blowout montage of music and murder. The grandeur of the epic in [Chapter 1](#) is followed by a very different sort of aesthetic: the brevity of the fragment. In [Chapter 2](#) we explore its role in the 1987 film *Aria*, in which short segments from ten operas receive MTV-like visualizations from ten different directors.

“Subjectivity” begins with an examination of the strong subjective viewpoint in the opera-films of international opera director Jean-Pierre

Ponnelle. Like Coppola, Ponnelle shapes operatic qualities through his control of image, but he applies strong subjective techniques by way of certain narrative devices. The next chapter deals with Claude Chabrol's masterpiece *La Cérémonie* (1995) and his complex subjective stance in connection with *Don Giovanni*. It occurs by way of an opera telecast at the movie's climax that accompanies gruesome murders in the filmic plot. Subjectivity operates in tandem with class as Chabrol takes aim at elitist meanings of art and the bourgeois degradations of watching television.

"Desire," the theme of Part III, is launched with a broad inquiry into another iconic American film, *Moonstruck* (1987). Desire permeates the layers of the movie and forges striking connections with opera and operatic qualities. While most of the discussions involve desires inside the fiction, desire spills over to viewers and their identification with the narrative and their relationship to kitsch. Chapter 6 explores filmic desires in connection with the musical desires of "Soave sia il vento" in two interesting films: the British movie *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* and the recent American film *Closer*. Through individual and comparative analysis, we see how Mozart's music contains the seeds of ironic desire that play out in fascinating ways in the films.

The volume concludes with an Epilogue on operaticness. This important but elusive quality circulates through the chapters, sometimes as a featured topic and more often as something left unsaid. My hope is that the brief remarks will help to pull the study together and leave readers with something specific to think about when they next encounter opera and film.

As seen in the overview of the interpretive core, the book covers a wide range of filmic repertoire and operatic disposition. Four of the six chapters focus on opera in mainstream film, while one treats full-length opera-film and another explores postmodernist pastiche that falls outside generic boundaries. The films span some thirty-three years, from 1971 to 2004, and cover several national traditions. Many prominent directors are represented – Coppola and Mike Nichols from America, John Schlesinger and Ken Russell from Britain, Chabrol from France, and Ponnelle from the international opera stage. The

relationship of the operatic part to the filmic whole also showcases variety. [Chapters 1](#) and [3](#), for instance, each examine multiple films by one director that share similar operatic behavior. [Chapter 6](#), in contrast, starts with one piece of music and shows how it functions in two films. Or take the chapter on *Aria* ([Chapter 2](#)), where adjacent fragments by different directors on different operatic pieces receive attention. [Chapter 4](#) contributes to our understanding of medium as it investigates television's role as the conveyor of opera within a film – a rare, possibly unique instance of this sort of encounter. And the broad-based study of *Moonstruck* in [Chapter 5](#) reveals a rich trove of opera and operaticness that is seldom found in any one movie.

MUSIC

Music plays a major role in *When Opera Meets Film* and emerges as a key theme across the chapters. It takes shape in a variety of concerns. One involves film-music functions and their application to opera and film. Film-music scholarship has developed standard categories that are defined in terms of their relationship to the story, or diegesis: diegetic music (music that is inside the story) and nondiegetic music (music that is outside the story). Claudia Gorbman helpfully added the term metadiegetic twenty years ago to account for situations beyond the standard binary.⁹ Ever since, scholars have noted the need for fine-tuning so that the categories better reflect the workings of narrative, agency, and spectatorship.¹⁰ I also feel this need, and a major aim of the case-studies is to tease out the subtleties of how the operatic music functions in the film. While diegetic and nondiegetic functions still constitute the base in the book, many places change function and display special relationships with the story or the source opera. In other words, seldom is diegetic or nondiegetic status straightforward. The study breaks ground through the application of terminology that further refines the categories of diegesis. I frequently use the concept of psychodiegetic music, a term proffered in an unpublished paper by Alexis Witt,¹¹ to indicate a psychological function for the music. Many discussions distinguish between this function and

Gorbman's metadiegetic status, a larger term that enfolds all sorts of extradiegetic situations.

Beyond these details, the treatment of operatic music in terms of film-music categories presents a special set of circumstances: a pre-existing type of music that has its own accumulated meaning, and (typically) a vocal idiom that includes a text.¹² These factors play a role in determining which types of film-music functioning are applicable. Occasionally some model beyond diegesis fits the situation, as in the interpretation of Roddam's "Liebestod" segment in *Aria*, discussed in [Chapter 2](#). I coin the term interactive soundtrack to describe how the music functions in this self-consciously operatic venture. For other films, however, the retention of standard categories and expanding on them as needed makes better sense. It places films that use opera within the purview of cinema and promotes study alongside conventional film music.

The book also pays a great deal of attention to the operatic music, particularly in the context of its source opera. This can range from large issues such as the opera's reputation and reception, to small details of musical style. For example, the bigger musical picture informs the exploration of *Aria* ([Chapter 2](#)), where the genesis and afterlife of *Turandot* are linked to Russell's methods of visualizing "Nessun dorma." In [Chapter 5](#) the reputation of *La Bohème* as a kitsch work prompts observations on what *Moonstruck* accomplishes for the opera. On the smaller level, many chapters feature close readings of the music. [Chapter 6](#), for example, examines salient elements of harmony, texture, and orchestration in "Soave sia il vento" and the significance of these features for image and filmic plot. [Chapter 4](#), with the *Don Giovanni* sequence in *La Cérémonie*, also deals with a limited operatic component and provides a detailed analysis of the music's relationship with story and image. Larger interpretive categories, particularly class and power, inform the discussion of the numbers Chabrol chooses for his subjective critique. Although the study of Ponnelle's work ([Chapter 3](#)) engages music more generally, in key numbers I demonstrate how certain elements relate to the director's subjective methods. Indeed, the discussions thematize the idea that

Ponnelle's visual techniques "choreograph the score" in their close relationship with musical behavior.

A special musical perspective figures in the study of the *Godfather* set. In addition to a music-image analysis of *Cavalleria rusticana* in the montage at the end, the chapter discusses Nino Rota's scored music for the films. While it is not literal opera, its operatic quality works alongside filmic elements to create the trilogy's operatic tone, especially in the first two installments. Elsewhere in the book, especially [Chapters 4 and 5](#), I mention other soundtrack music and occasionally tie it to the actual opera music. But only in [Chapter 1](#) does it rise to prominence.

INTERMEDIALITY

Devising suitable ways to categorize the relationship between the two media presents a challenge to anyone working in opera and film. A certain amount of anecdotal description supplies needed information, and like most work in the area this study makes use of the practice. But one would like to have a framework that can lead to larger observations and encourage comparative discussion. In fact, such a system already exists: the theory of intermediality. To date it has not made major inroads into musicological work on opera and film,¹³ but it holds a prominent place in a study on the topic by a scholar of Italian studies, Bernhard Kuhn. In *Die Oper im italienischen Film* (2005), Kuhn provides a detailed survey of theories of intermediality and applies them to selected films.¹⁴ Among the theoretical works he discusses is Werner Wolf's *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*.¹⁵ Wolf's semiotic study offers a simple and elegant system to categorize the relative importance of media when they combine – of all media, not merely the two in the title. *When Opera Meets Film* adopts Wolf's enormously useful framework. Intermediality becomes a major theme of the book and promotes conversation across diverse repertoire that makes up the study.

Wolf's system features two categories that capture the relative importance of the components in the medial combination. An

encounter qualifies as overt intermediality if “both media are directly present with their typical or conventional signifiers and if consequently each medium remains distinct and is in principle ‘quotable’ separately” (40). The other category is covert intermediality: “the participation of (at least) two conventionally distinct media in the signification of an artifact in which, however, only **one** of the media appears directly with its typical or conventional signifiers and hence may be called the dominant medium, while another one (the non-dominant medium) is indirectly present ‘within’ the first medium” (41, boldface in the original). Wolf goes on to discuss factors in actual situations that affect how hybrid situations are analyzed. These include, among others, the intensity of the intermedial relation and the fact that one or more of the media may themselves be hybrid – the situation for both opera and film. I take these elements and more into account, and the beauty of Wolf’s system is that its simplicity leaves room for all the pertinent factors that characterize a given situation. Its openness and flexibility make it extremely valuable for my purposes.¹⁶

The discussions of intermediality in *When Opera Meets Film* yield fascinating insights. In the first two *Godfather* films, for example, the operatic tone that is crafted by image, pacing, and ritual creates covert intermediality, for opera’s signifiers are subordinate and they join the medial realm of film. With the diegetic performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* the situation changes. The first part of the sequence constitutes overt intermediality, but in the second half the status is ambiguous as the camera cuts away often. Does overt status continue when opera is not literally seen? The answer depends on the viewer and the extent to which opera stays in memory or is attended to with only some of its signifiers present. This also describes the situation in Chabrol’s staging of *Don Giovanni* in *La Cérémonie* (Chapter 4), where the televised opera is often heard but not actually seen. In a similar way, fluctuations in volume of the “Soave” cues (Chapter 6) complicate the determination of intermedial status because opera’s presence varies with the sound level.

Another suggestive intermedial encounter appears in the *Godfather* films. At the very end an instrumental piece from the opera, the

Intermezzo, intones on the soundtrack. Only the operatic-savvy viewer will recognize the source and experience the encounter as overt intermediality. For everyone else, which means the overwhelming majority of viewers, the scene represents covert intermediality because the music resembles a film score and seems to be part of film. In [Chapter 2](#) a similar situation unfolds in the instrumental music that precedes the aria “Nessun dorma.” Here, however, the explicit operatic purpose of *Aria* may keep opera’s signifiers dominant. As these examples show, the experiencing of the opera/film encounter as well as a viewer’s knowledge and predilections have a tremendous impact on how the intermedial relationship is characterized.

A particularly intriguing intermedial situation arises with respect to opera-film. One would assume that the genre represents a clear-cut intermedial situation – that it is overt status because opera and film are each foregrounded as its components. Yet in [Chapter 3](#) we see how a particular device of Ponnelle’s challenges the certainty of overt status. A key subjective technique involves “interior singing,” an arrangement whereby vocal music is heard but no moving lips are seen. The heard music becomes less tethered to the operatic realm and the music can imply something else as its source, such as a film score or even a literary genre. In my view opera is not weakened in these situations, but strengthened as we see its ability to capitalize on film’s potential. The Chabrol chapter also advances the understanding of intermediality and genre. Televised opera, not just opera, interacts with film, a situation that shows how a hybrid medium, in this case opera, can become even more hybrid, as it were, in certain circumstances. While we must be careful to distinguish between medial qualities and means of presentation – the phonograph, for instance, usually functions as a means of presentation and not as a medium (see [Chapters 5 and 6](#)) – in the Chabrol the significance of the telecast renders television a medium that must be considered in the medial landscape.

A further spin on the illuminating powers of intermediality occurs in connection with *Moonstruck*. One of the important cues involves the lead couple hearing an important part of *La Bohème* on a phonograph.

While the situation constitutes overt intermediality, the music counts as psychodiegetic for Ronny the operaphile – this is music he knows well – while merely diegetic for the operatically ignorant Loretta. This place shows how intermediality can combine with film-music functions to analyze the dramatic implications of an operatic encounter, and how intermedial status can mean different things to different characters who engage with the music.

OTHER THEMES

In addition to the larger structure of the volume and the unifying themes of the whole, some ideas circulate more modestly, appearing in only a few chapters. One group involves medium and technology. Opera on television assumes a prominent role in [Chapters 3 and 4](#). In the study of Ponnelle, we discuss how his opera-films for television fit the intimacy of the domestic medium and the small screen. Arguably his subjective methods would not work as comfortably on the large screen, although the director might take exception to the distinction. In the following chapter, telecast opera forms the focus in the filmic story of *La Cérémonie*, and the cultural implications of the relay production become a major concern of the director.

With respect to medium, I would like to clarify a basic term in the book. The field of film studies deploys the word “film” in a variety of ways. While it sometimes denotes cinema only, the term is usually more inclusive and takes in works that are produced on film stock, videotape, or digital equipment and can be presented in various venues, such as television. The present study adopts this inclusive definition. Thus the “film” of the book’s title accommodates Ponnelle’s treatments of opera for television. They appear in *When Opera Meets Film* because they function as real films, round out the range of the repertoire, and contribute something important to the aesthetic aims of the project.

To return to recurring ideas, the phonograph receives considerable attention in [Chapters 5 and 6](#). In *Moonstruck* and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, the device assumes a ritualistic function as it launches opera in

the story and helps to define the individual who sets the needle on the disk. In the American comedy it is associated with an obsessed opera fan, a gruff baker who waxes poetic in the presence of opera. The second time we see the device it shapes the film's climax as Loretta is operastruck. In the British drama it has ties to an upper-middle-class physician whose refined tastes are captured by the ritual. In both films, this visually expressive act on old technology conveys a sense of class, character, and operatic affiliation. Another dated form of technology, the tape recorder, appears in [Chapter 4](#). Chabrol's use of the device to efface visual media represents the final prong in his critique of the harmful effects of television, that pervasive (and invasive) visual medium.

Another element that figures in multiple chapters involves the visit to the opera house. Countless films feature this plot device, for example Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mister Ripley* (1999), and the recent James Bond movie *Quantum of Solace* (2008).¹⁷ Here it appears in connection with *Godfather Part III* ([Chapter 1](#)), *Moonstruck* ([Chapter 5](#)), and *Closer* ([Chapter 6](#)). In all three the event serves as the climax or turning-point of the film. In the first two the characters literally attend inside the hall – what we might call a diegetic encounter – while in *Closer* they stay in the lobby and avoid contact with the performance: a distance that is telling for the role of opera in the film. In *Moonstruck* the experience is transformative for a character, while nothing similar occurs in the others. The three instances foreground the cultural meaning of opera as signified by the opera house. Is this important for the film? In *Godfather Part III* and *Moonstruck* the opera visit represents the culmination of the operatic elements in the set or film. In *Closer*, however, the opera house acts as little more than a marker of sophistication as the music of *Così fan tutte* overheard from the lobby accompanies a filmic couple's break-up. Opera means almost nothing to the characters, however, and operaticness is rejected in the film. But the staging of their indifference in opera's home illustrates the strongly ironic tone of Nichols's unforgettably disturbing film.

THE OPERAS

Thus far I have not listed the operas of *When Opera Meets Film*. This is not an oversight. Filmic works serve as the main focus, and the hybrid combination of film and opera occupies the heart and soul of the study. As noted, the filmic repertoire was chosen mainly because of important aesthetic elements in the opera/film encounter, the essentialness of opera to the filmic work, the stature and significance of the film, and my interest in treating a range of issues across a variety of films. But the nine operas of the films are important in their own right. Mozart's works make a strong showing in the volume, and the extraordinary Da Ponte operas participate in four films by as many directors. In [Chapter 4](#) *Don Giovanni* functions as the ongoing event that accompanies the chilling murders of a family who are watching it on television. As explored in [Chapter 6](#), *Così fan tutte* appears in two films by different directors who use the trio "Soave sia il vento" on the soundtrack. And the other Da Ponte opera, *Le nozze di Figaro*, is the basis of one of the three opera-films of Ponnelle that appear in [Chapter 3](#).

The operas of Puccini receive attention in three films. The study of *Moonstruck* ([Chapter 5](#)) spends considerable time on *La Bohème*: its many musical cues in the film, the parallels between the opera and the plot, and the diegetic performance at the Metropolitan Opera. In [Chapter 2](#), one of the two fragments of *Aria* that are explored uses a famous portion of *Turandot*, namely "Nessun dorma" and the preceding instrumental music. And Ponnelle's film of *Madama Butterfly* receives extended treatment in [Chapter 3](#). The mention of post-Romantic Italian repertoire brings to mind another opera that is featured in the book: Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, which is discussed in the context of the *Godfather* set.

Two icons of operatic literature round off the volume. Wagner's "Liebestod" from *Tristan und Isolde*, which is discussed as a fragment in *Aria*, receives a stunning visualization by filmmaker Franc Roddam. And *Rigoletto* comes to life in Ponnelle's opera-film of the conflicted jester, a major focus of [Chapter 3](#). Compared to the chapter's other

Ponnelle films, which are earlier, *Rigoletto* (1983) homes in on fewer subjective devices and makes them thematic, especially narrative doubling and visual point-of-view. I suspect that the abundant effects of *Madama Butterfly* (1973) and *Le nozze di Figaro* (1976) reflect the director's inexperience with film at that point in his career. *Rigoletto*, which was later screened at the Cannes Film Festival, displays a more mature approach to the filming of opera. Beyond the significance of the film to Ponnelle's output, the book's inclusion of an opera by Verdi affords great satisfaction.

THEORY

An eclectic approach to theory characterizes the volume. Even though intermedial theory is thematic, it represents one of many theoretical perspectives that are applied to the opera/film encounter. Theory follows practice in the interpretations, not the other way around, and the circumstances of a particular situation generate the theory and categories that fit the work. Indeed, *When Opera Meets Film* is fundamentally a "perspectives" study and shies away from any sort of unitary viewpoint. This makes sense in light of the diversity of the repertoire, the multiple technologies that come into play, and the richness and sheer number of factors that produce meaning.

It also follows the practices of the still-young field. Except for Tambling's ideological monograph (1987), no study has woven a unitary thread through opera and film. The hybrid material resists any single theoretical stance, as demonstrated by the field's affinity for edited collections: Joe and Theresa's *Between Opera and Film* (2002), Tambling's *A Night in at the Opera* (1994), and Joe and Gilman's *Wagner and Cinema* (2010).¹⁸ Even single-authored volumes indicate a preference for eclecticism. My 2000 study *Opera on Screen* ranges widely as it attempts to establish a framework for opera-films. As in the present volume, individual examples suggest the appropriate theory. Even Grover-Friedlander's monograph *Vocal Apparitions* (2005), which is more narrowly focused than most opera/film studies, opts for theoretical flexibility and recognizes that the complexities of the medial

combination require an eclectic approach. The same applies to my study.

The eclecticism of *When Opera Meets Film* surfaces in a sampling of its theory. For example, the assumptions and practices of MTV play a major role in [Chapter 2](#)'s inquiry into *Aria*. Several aspects of the populist genre influence the style of the film, including fantasy, disjunction, and fragmentation, although none of the scenes mimics MTV's foregrounding of a performer's star power. The "Nessun dorma" segment in particular follows MTV in its ambiguous arrangement of time and space. Cultural theory also informs discussions. We see in [Chapter 1](#) how the *Godfather* films are attracted to "Old World Culture" and how this acts as a key operatic quality of the set. In another take on culture, Russell's "Nessun dorma" in *Aria* deploys an exotic style to criticize Orientalism and the harmful effects of Othering in Western culture.

A theoretical cluster revolves around aural elements. Hearing takes center stage in the second scene at the phonograph in *Moonstruck*, where the recorded music under Ronny's control transfers to Loretta in a distant location. As she "hears" the music in what becomes the climactic moment of the film, Michel Chion's notion of the *acous-mètre* (heard sound without a visible source) provides perspective on the fascinating arrangement of sound and image.¹⁹ Roddam's "Liebestod" in *Aria* also offers a compelling disposition of hearing. When the text turns to hearing in the second half, the characters seem to hear Wagner's music and break the wall between music and film. In this sexually explicit visualization, the characters appear to be in tune with the music they hear and also performing it: an enactment of Lawrence Kramer's idea that the "Liebestod" progresses towards performativity.²⁰ Another variation on hearing comes by way of Grover-Friedlander's concept of "aural remains," which is discussed in [Chapter 4](#).²¹ In Chabrol's film an aural device, a tape recorder, represents the broadcast opera and the murders. It supplies the all-important trace of incriminating evidence at the end and in the process triumphs over the visual, especially the medium of television. A third aural element arises in [Chapter 1](#) – the implications of the cry,

that striking vocal explosion with fascinating consequences in opera. A concept theorized by Michel Poizat and others,²² the cry provides catharsis at the climax of the *Godfather* set as Michael's shriek enfolds the horrors of the past and portends a scrolling back to origins. It becomes even more interesting in the context of a silent scream that precedes it, and the interplay of silence and presence captures many of the operatic qualities of the saga.

Visual elements obviously occupy an important place in a study such as this. The notion of the gaze, a key concern of film studies, figures prominently in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, one of the two films of [Chapter 6](#). The gaze in Schlesinger's film works alongside Mozart's sensuous Trio to define the paths of desire and the shifting entanglements among the characters. It materializes the link between visual desire and the aural desire emanating from the soundtrack's iterations of "Soave sia il vento." [Chapter 3](#) delves into another major element of cinematic visual theory. The technique of point-of-view, a device in which a shot is focalized from an individual's perspective, forms a significant part of Ponnelle's subjective emphasis. For example, in the first part of Cio-Cio San's aria "Un bel dì" we do not see her, but only what she sees. The camera scans the hazy horizon of the harbor as she sings of the return of Pinkerton's ship "one fine day." Through the dreamy projection we learn a lot about Butterfly's inability to face the reality of her situation.

Finally, theories associated with time inform several discussions. The filmic flashback, theorized by Maureen Turim,²³ plays a key narrative role in Ponnelle's opera-films. In *Rigoletto* it creates a "frame-tale" that puts into question the temporal relationships of the story – which portions take place in the present, which in the past. Although a flashback also connects the beginning and ending of *Madama Butterfly*, none of the temporal ambiguity of the later film occurs – just Pinkerton bursting through the paper wall in a desperate attempt to escape the prison of his mind. [Chapter 2](#)'s study of Roddam's "Liebestod" segment also discusses flashback as a structural element. Here, though, the past figures as part of the story, as the present re-establishes itself about halfway along. Since viewers

might easily miss the switch of tense at the beginning, one wonders about the rationale for the device. Perhaps it devolves to the practices of MTV and its quick succession of images. When all is said and done, however, this may be a case where a flashback is incidental – it is nice if you notice it, but nothing is lost if you don't.

At the other end of the temporal spectrum, the slow pacing that is often characteristic of opera forms a major focus in the *Godfather* films. And in a further braking of time, one number in Ponnelle's *Figaro* freezes time altogether. In the Count's aria "Vedrò mentr'io sospiro," the combination of interior singing and strong point-of-view creates a scene in which minimal movement, internal thinking, and intense looking effectively stop time. This dramatic tour de force, which recoups Beaumarchais's courtroom setting that Da Ponte eliminated, has changed the way I think of the aria. In the bigger picture, it shows how film can reveal something fundamental about an opera, a major goal of the book.

When Opera Meets Film is meant to be suggestive – to open up perspectives on filmic and operatic repertoire and lay out methods that can be applied to other films. But as we have seen, these filmic interpretations contribute a great deal to our understanding of opera. Furthermore, opera moves into closer contact with the public through a focus on its involvement with mass media. Perhaps a book like this can serve as a corollary to the popular broadcasts the Metropolitan Opera is bringing to the local cineplex.²⁴ Regardless of how we experience the opera/film encounter – through HD cinecasts, Netflix rentals, computer downloads, telecast opera, or new motion pictures – the hybrid appears to be alive and well and making its mark in contemporary culture.

PART I

Style

The *Godfather* trilogy of Francis Ford Coppola is an icon of American culture and international cinema. Released over a span of eighteen years, the group includes *The Godfather* (1972), *The Godfather Part II* (1974), and *The Godfather Part III* (1990). *Godfather I* set box-office records and became that rare film that achieved both commercial and artistic success.¹ While not as popular with audiences, *Godfather II* earned high praise from critics and like *Godfather I* received the Oscar for Best Picture. The final installment inspired much less enthusiasm, and many reviews thought the series had outrun its time.² There was no plan at the outset for sequels, but they evolved because Paramount was eager to profit from the success of the predecessor.

The films have attracted considerable critical attention. In reviews and scholarly studies alike, operatic features are often ascribed to the films. Literary critic Paul Giles, for instance, writes that “Whereas Puzo’s novel emphasizes plot and fast action, Coppola’s films emphasize lavish, operatic ritual,” and he mentions “the hyperbolic and operatic elements in the films – the decapitated horses, the ritual slaughters, and so on ...”³ For film critic Pauline Kael, “Coppola is the inheritor of the traditions of the novel, the theater, and – especially – opera and movies.” She contends that *Godfather II* has “the same mythic and operatic visual scheme as the first ...”⁴ Part I, she observes two years earlier, is characterized by a “dark-and-light contrast [that] is so operatic and so openly symbolic that it perfectly expresses the basic nature of the material.”⁵ While these qualities are praised by Kael, a *Cinéaste* reviewer of another gangster film, Scorsese’s *Goodfellas*, criticizes the saga’s operatic qualities: “Coppola’s *Godfather* epic may have had a richer *mise-en-scène* and grander ambitions – the depiction of the immigrant, tribal Mafia’s evolution into a multinational corporation as a metaphor for the saga of Americanization – but the

film's operatic style aggrandizes and distorts the daily reality of that ethos."⁶ Film scholar Kent Jones offers an interesting operatic reference in his essay for a retrospective of Coppola's films: "The arc of Coppola's great films is uncomplicated, in the way that the arc of a Verdi opera is uncomplicated ..."⁷ The Bonus Disk in the DVD set presents another operatic reference, when a voice-over for an outtake from *Godfather I* describes the sequence as "quite powerful, even operatic."⁸ Comic opera is even invoked, as in Jonathan Rosenbaum's description of "the figure of Fanucci (Gaston Moschin), a white-suited villain straight out of comic opera and Victorian melodrama" (in Part II).⁹ And from the director himself, as he approached Part III: "how far to go with the tragedy and the operatic aspect. That the family had become myth, become opera, and how could I do that without it becoming too big?"¹⁰

These operatic allusions are fascinating. But none goes into detail on what is meant by operatic, and it is left to the reader to fill in the blanks. The problem is that "operatic" is capable of many meanings, and these meanings can lead to different interpretations. Operatic can refer to a range of elements, such as genre, structure, expression, style, music, or tone. Operatic can pertain to the comic antics of *opera buffa* or the grandeur of serious opera. Operatic can imply a theatrical approach, one that recalls the stage techniques of live opera. It can describe expressive content that displays opera's exaggeration, whether emotional, aesthetic, thematic, or structural. It can imply similarities with certain operas or their cultural context. Operatic can suggest a certain formal organization found in opera, be it a division into set numbers, tableaux, or larger units, or a characteristic pacing or texture. Of course, the ways in which music is used in a film can be operatic, in structure, function, tone, affect, or style. The possibilities are many.

In this chapter I would like to flesh out the operatic character of the *Godfather* trilogy, focusing on the operatic elements that involve style, broadly defined. Some operatic qualities carry through the three films, while others occur in one or two of the installments or change character from one film to the next. The visual workings of camera,

image, and film style figure prominently in the operatic apparatus and assume much of the role that music plays in opera. The music for the films, most of it composed by Nino Rota, shares elements with opera. Opera itself makes an appearance near the end of *Godfather III* – a diegetic staging of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* – and actualizes the operatic quality of the series. This restores to the trilogy the rarefied tone, itself operatic, that made *Godfather I* and *Godfather II* so successful. Yet a striking injection of pure sound and instrumental music after *Cavalleria* moves the operatic into the wordless realm and reminds us that much of the operatic quality of the trilogy is located beyond speech, an area that readily invokes nostalgia. Indeed, Coppola's operatic mission may be considered at heart an idealization of the past, and this looking backward taps into cinema's affinity for regressive desires. Story, structure, and style conspire to bring out the nostalgic theme, and their saturation by operatic qualities leads to some of the richest filmmaking in American cinema.

EPIC STRUCTURE

How many screen artists get the chance to work in the epic form, and who's been able to seize the power to compose a modern American epic? Pauline Kael¹¹

The *Godfather* trilogy exudes the breadth and grandeur of the epic. It is long and spacious, and the breathing places are evident and welcome. It displays a Classic simplicity in which elevated themes are played out, slowly and deliberately. In structure, tone, and content it feels like grand opera.

The three films add up to about nine-and-a-half hours' playing time. While this is not as long as Wagner's *Ring* tetralogy, it means that each film averages over three hours and resembles opera more than it does the typical film. It also has an extended narrative span that covers almost eighty years. *Godfather I* begins in 1946, just after the end of the War, and ends in the mid 1950s. *Godfather II* alternates young-Vito segments from 1901 to 1920 with the current story of the late 1950s.¹² *Godfather III* takes place in the late 1970s and marks a break with the narrow passing of time between *Godfather I* and *Godfather II*. For

a 1977 television version of Parts I and II Coppola re-edited the films to produce a consecutive chronology. This sequencing had obvious advantages, but it diminished the special quality of *Godfather II* that contrasts Michael's coldness with the warmth of his father's youth.¹³

Lofty themes fill the vast canvas, and the trilogy has invited diverse interpretation. For instance, some British and French critics see it as a metaphor for America and a critique of American capitalism.¹⁴ For others it represents a multi-generational immigrant saga about making it in the New World. It also concerns power, and how power corrupts an individual and leads to his downfall. In *Godfather III* it is about the attempt of that individual to redeem himself from his degraded state, with tragic consequences. Coppola likens *Godfather III* to Shakespearean tragedy and says that he had Lear in mind when depicting the fate of the aging Michael Corleone.¹⁵ He mentions other Classical connections. For example, in *Godfather II* when Michael returns home in winter to Lake Tahoe and sees his wife at the sewing machine, the image of continuous spinning recalls Penelope in *The Odyssey*. And in *Godfather III* the horrific executions on the steps outside the opera house tap into Classical drama's affinity for staging murders on the steps of important buildings.¹⁶

The trilogy exploits themes commonly found in nineteenth-century Italian opera: honor, loyalty, betrayal, and revenge. As typical features of Sicilian culture, they find their culmination, appropriately enough, in the third film's performed opera, *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890), which concerns Sicilian folk justice. *Cavalleria* is generally considered a *verismo* opera, although the term is not without problems when applied to the work.¹⁷ We can extend the label to Coppola's set and call it a kind of cinematic *verismo* in a grand-opera framework. Themes of honor and revenge appear in other Italian operas, for example in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and many Verdi works. Think of the curse, a father's honor, and revenge in *Rigoletto*; Amneris's thirst for revenge in *Aida*; or Iago's treachery in undoing his enemies in *Otello*.¹⁸ All these works resemble *Godfather* in their violence, their strong emotional contrasts, and their sharply drawn lines of right and wrong.

An intellectual director with keen self-awareness, Coppola planned structure and detail carefully in each film. He has said that the trilogy resembles a symphony in its structure, a kind of ABA form,¹⁹ and perhaps he is referring to the symmetry in tempo found in outer movements of a symphony. Although *Godfather III* as a recapitulation of the first film makes some sense – it resembles *Godfather I* in narrative structure and eliciting our good feelings towards the lead character – parallelisms cut across all three films. Each features an extended party scene near the start, with the Godfather holding court inside while guests frolic outside (or outside that room). Each film has a powerhouse montage near the end in which family business is taken care of with gruesome violence. Multiple murders are intercut with scenes of normalcy, whether it be a baby's baptism (Part I), Michael in his boathouse (Part II), or a performance at an opera house (Part III). Each film returns to Sicily, the family's homeland, and each time Italian folk culture is portrayed with exaggerated warmth. Not only do these similarities create an epic feeling and provide unity, but they create tableaux that are operatic.

Besides the substantial length that renders them operatic, these cinematic tableaux function dramatically like opera tableaux. Consider the initial party scenes. Sarah Spencer offers a lively description of the operatic workings of the scene in *Godfather I*:

This entire scene [the wedding of Vito Corleone's daughter] is quintessentially operatic: moments of drama and intrigue enacted during a large celebration. This is an archetypal First Act with all the appropriate elements: a narrator to provide background to the story (Michael); the reigning monarch holding court, benevolently granting all requests (Don Vito Corleone); the trusted councilor (Tom); the predictable tension from the adversaries (FBI); the seduction of the bridesmaid (Sonny); and even the comic basso (Luca Brasi). Connie capers about as carefree as any Zerlina ...²⁰

The early party scene in *Godfather II* (after the flashback to the young Vito) works in a similar way. Now it is late-1950s Lake Tahoe, and the ethnic flavor yields to a WASP-ish sensibility. But both tableaux introduce the main elements and characters, the main conflicts and

positions, and highlight what Kael calls the operatic contrasts between the dark interiors where business is conducted and the sunny exteriors where celebrations take place.²¹ Furthermore, the party scenes (also in *Godfather III*) are organized around a string of festive musical numbers that provide a continuous background for the dramatic threads of plot and character counterpointed against it. The scene's full texture becomes an exposition for the entire work.

This organization closely resembles the way introductory party scenes work in operas. *Rigoletto* immediately comes to mind. Embedded within the dance numbers played by the *banda* in that opera's *Introduzione* are contrapuntal asides, tense exchanges, and even an aria that reveals character (the Duke's "Questa o quella"). These introduce us to the players and tensions and propel the drama forward. The continuous music in both Coppola's film tableaux and Verdi's opera is like a stream that carries us, in a carefully controlled way, past a lively landscape into new territory. This technique appears in other Verdi operas, notably in the opening party scene of *La traviata*. In the operas much, but not all, of the music is diegetic – entertainment music from within the story. In the *Godfather* films, virtually all the music is diegetic entertainment music, consisting of crooned songs, ethnic tunes, and dance numbers.

The climaxes in the Coppola are also operatic – vast tableaux, with the saga's culmination in *Godfather III* the most massive of all. Here it is literal opera, a performance of *Cavalleria rusticana*, that provides the continuous stream analogous to the opening scenes. In the climax in *Godfather I*, the continuous stream consists of a combination of Latin liturgy and organ music for a baptism ceremony in church. In this brilliant montage sequence, mob executions are intercut with Catholic ritual. The contrasts between religion and slaughter, holiness and brutality, and righteousness and sin elicit shock, especially from first-time viewers. In this brutal juxtaposition of extremes we sense an operatic sensibility, perhaps along the lines of Verdi's 1853 statement that he wanted "subjects that are novel, big, beautiful, varied, and bold – as bold as can be."²² The sequence is also operatic in its overlapping entrances – a kind of dramatic *stretto* in which events

and visual cuts follow each other much more quickly than in the rest of the film. It resembles an operatic finale in the coming together of dramatic strands, and in the tension from the accelerated pace and the heightened emotional level of the collective acts in proximity.²³ In *Godfather II* the continuous stream operates with greater nuance. Here a pastiche of Nino Rota's themes underscores an alternation of scenes of normal life (Michael in the boathouse) with stark executions, including a Jack Ruby-style murder of gangster Hyman Roth and the shooting of Michael's surviving brother, Fredo. The restraint may make the sequence less veristic or exaggerated than its counterpart in *Godfather I*, but the cumulative horror is no less gruesome.

Godfather II sports a transparent tableau structure in its alternation of sequences set in the present and in the distant past.²⁴ Although *Godfather I* proceeds chronologically, its tableau structure is no less apparent. Literary theorist William Simon sees the work "divided roughly into 4 'acts,' each building slowly to a heightened climax. Many scenes are set within family religious rituals and/or holidays (2 weddings, a baptism, Christmas), thus expanding the meaning of these scenes in an epic direction as well."²⁵ Sociologist Norman Silverstein applies a six-fold structure to *Godfather I*: the party scene, the Hollywood visit (including the infamous horse's head in the bed), various murders that lead to Michael's exile, the aftermath and the *Citizen Kane*-like unscrolling of time in lap dissolves and newspaper headlines, Michael in Sicily, and the final executions that settle the score.²⁶ Regardless of the exact location of the boundaries, however, Coppola clearly thinks in broad dramatic units that are operatic. He punctuates boundaries with blackouts that are similar to a falling curtain in the theater,²⁷ or evocative dissolves (especially in *Godfather II*) that resemble musical transitions.

EPIC STYLE

The willingness to be basic and the attempt to understand the basic, to look at it without the usual preconceptions, are what give this picture its strength.

Pauline Kael²⁸

Violence and murder are documented in a realistic style, but are at the same time made beautiful. Roger Corman²⁹

The trilogy features a Classical shooting style, what John Kane calls an “old-fashioned movie style.” Coppola describes it as an approach “with no tricks.”³⁰ This means a stable camera, a style that favors *mise-en-scène* over montage, and a rhythm that is slow and deliberate. Kael sees an open approach to the movie frame and likens it to the work of pioneer filmmaker Jean Renoir. “Like Renoir, Coppola lets the spectator roam around in the images, lets a movie breathe ...”³¹ This “cinema of time,” to use Gilles Deleuze’s term, focuses attention on people and objects rather than film techniques such as rapid cutting and fancy camera angles. As in the work of Orson Welles, a “Wunderkind” to whom Coppola has been compared numerous times, this stability leads to a nobility that is perfectly suited to epic themes and forms.³² It also suggests the spaciousness and elegance of grand opera.

Cinematographer Gordon Willis, a recognized giant in the field and die-hard classicist, had a major role in creating this style, which favors symmetry and beauty over function and cinematic style.³³ Composition and framing are more photographic than cinematic and fulfill André Bazin’s call for a film practice anchored in the photograph.³⁴ Many examples of photographic symmetry occur in Coppola’s trilogy. They include establishing shots of the hospital in Part I – an exterior view with the main door and steps perfectly in the middle, and an interior view with hallway cutting the center of the frame. In Part III the outside of the opera house appears in a symmetrical arrangement with stairs and door similarly centered. When *consigliere* Tom Hagen goes to Woltz’s studios in Hollywood in Part I, a fixed camera watches his back as he walks down the alley towards the back of the frame, positioned exactly midway between two buildings. No tracking shot, no cuts: only the prolongation of time as we take in the mundane action in an objectified setting. This illustrates Coppola’s ideal that actors move freely within and into fixed shots, and Bazin’s influential theory that an emphasis on *mise-en-scène* allows the spectator to reflect rather than be shown what to think through



Fig. 1.1 Don Corleone (Marlon Brando) and Bonasera (Salvatore Corsitto) in the opening scene of *The Godfather*.

montage.³⁵ This urge towards reflection might be likened to opera's ability to encourage reflection through the unfolding of music in time.

Coppola also follows the Bazinian ideal with his long takes, another way of building long scenes and creating tableaux. A famous example appears at the start of the saga. With the immortal words "I believe in America," supplicant Bonasera is seen in close-up against a black background. We have no sense of time or place, who is present, who this person is, and what is going on.³⁶ As he utters his words, the camera tracks back ever so slowly, over a span of three minutes, and if we look hard, we slowly see a shadowy outline of the back of a person's head emerge in the front. It is only after this four-minute take that a cut appears, and we finally see the person he's been talking to – the Godfather – from the front (see Fig. 1.1). In *Godfather II*, the scene between Tom and Frank Pentangeli in the prison yard also features a long take. In this sequence, about five minutes in length, no cuts occur. First there is a fixed shot (medium close-up) showing Tom and Frank in profile as they talk. Then the camera tracks them as they walk to our left along the fence. After a few minutes the camera resumes a fixed position as they conclude their conversation and say goodbye (incidentally, creating an ABA visual structure).

The continuous visual flow creates a grandeur that suits the topic of their conversation, which is about how condemned men in ancient Rome did the honorable thing for family and reputation by slitting their wrists. This ritual in fact comes to pass and serves as a prelude to the horrific ritual murders that Michael visits upon enemies and family. In any event, the studied, continuous camera movement of the sequence renders the scene a tableau. Ordinarily it would have been composed as a series of shot/reverse-shot patterns, Hollywood's typical way of showing conversations. The continuity nudges the scene towards the grand and the epic, and in Bazinian terms creates time that encourages reflection.³⁷ In operatic terms the studied flow is not too different from what Verdi did to build a scene complex.

Another aspect of the studied flow in Coppola's work is the measured pacing of events. Once again Kael has something perceptive to say: "*The Godfather* [I] goes by evenly, so we don't feel rushed, or restless either; there's classic grandeur to the narrative flow." David Denby expresses the pace in Part I as a "marvelous amplitude and evenness of flow."³⁸ This taking of time is a basic trait of opera – one of the reasons, in fact, why opera has had a difficult time being transferred to the screen. While opera is said to be slow, cinema – at least conventional cinema – is deemed fast.³⁹ How ironic that one of the key elements contributing towards the success of the *Godfather* films – their operatic pacing – becomes the very element that complicates opera's own representation in film.

In Coppola's trilogy, characters speak slowly and to the point. Palpable silence fills the spaces between words and statements. Conversations are leisurely and extended. Todd Gitlin describes them as long stretches of boring and comparatively ordinary conversation, with a melodramatic plot.⁴⁰ Bonasera's halting and theatrical supplication at the start of *Godfather I* sets the style, along with Don Corleone's laconic and widely spaced responses to his request. In *Godfather II*, conversations between Vito as the rising Don and other persons are also spacious. In one sequence a widow asks Vito for help in preventing her landlord from evicting her from her apartment. The phrases, in Sicilian, are short and slow. Vito's brief response comes

after a long silence, and the camera takes up much of the downtime as it focuses on Vito and his facial reaction. In opera that space might be taken up with instrumental music supplying tone and mood. And of course there is the famous silence at the end of *Godfather II* – what was to be Coppola's last word on Michael Corleone's fate when that film was shot – as the camera tracks in slowly, absent any sound, to show the empty human being he has become.

Everyday actions are also accorded ample space. One of my favorites takes place in the climactic restaurant scene in *Godfather I*. Huge suspense has already been built up, and the audience expects a violent outburst at any moment, possibly leading to Michael's death. Yet the dinner cannot be rushed – food is a major theme in the saga – and so events come to a dead halt as the camera watches the waiter slowly uncork and pour a bottle of wine. Nothing is said, and the only event is the sound of wine poured in a glass, in real time. Might not this mannered attention to detail recall the effect of some musical detail in an opera, be it a cadenza, an instrumental gesture, or a parenthetical progression?

Coppola's attention to detail is even more apparent and powerful in his use of ritual and symbol. Specialists in ethnic studies have explored the uses of Catholic ritual in the trilogy, and a full airing lies beyond the scope of this chapter. As a sample I mention Leo Braudy's thesis that Coppola's use of ritual shows "a Catholic way of regarding the visible world."⁴¹ Religious ritual acts structurally, as in its nesting with violent acts at the end of *Godfather I*, and emotionally providing strong, even operatic contrasts with the evil that is taking place within the film. Its operation at such a basic level in the films provides a major impetus towards creating an epic tone.

Objects assume symbolic meaning in the trilogy, and some become leitmotifs through repetition. Oranges appear frequently: according to Coppola they are symbols associated with death.⁴² We see them in *Godfather I* at the meeting with Solazzo at the Don's office, directly before the assassination attempt on the Don, and just before the Don dies in the garden. In *Godfather II* we see an orange when enemy messenger Johnny Ola visits Michael near the start and when Michael

holds a serious discussion later about how he can kill off Hyman Roth. In *Godfather III* the orange shows up several times, and its most poignant appearance occurs at the very end of the saga when one falls from Michael's hand as he keels over dead. Judith Vogelsang identifies many other leitmotifs in the first film, including fish, automobiles, water, wine, and the sound of thunder.⁴³ These leitmotifs function like Wagnerian leitmotifs. Even if one is unaware of them, especially on first viewing, they provide unity and add a psychological dimension to the action.

Coppola also organizes the trilogy through ritualistic gestures and acts. For example, *Godfather I* ends with Michael's underlings recognizing him as the new Godfather by kissing his hand. The emotional gesture opens the next film, even before the title appears, providing a link with the earlier film. Other poignant uses of ritual include the simultaneous opening of a line of car doors at Don Corleone's funeral in *Godfather I*, or Fanucci's fussy handling of a demi-tasse and slamming his hat down on the bribe money in *Godfather II*. And a gesture that has become iconic is the hand-to-the-chin gesture first seen with Marlon Brando in *Godfather I* (see Fig. 1.1) and later duplicated by Robert De Niro as the young Vito in *Godfather II*, as in his talks with the fruit vendor (see Fig. 1.2). Coppola underscores similarities among such conversational scenes by placing the camera behind the head of the Don in power: a visual leitmotif achieved through a camera angle. These ceremonial touches tend towards the theatrical, and in their melodramatic context they feel operatic.

Ceremonial music in the trilogy also expresses opera's affinity for ritual. Whether in Sicily (all three) or in Little Italy in New York (Parts II and III), outdoor ceremonial music punctuates holidays and occasions.⁴⁴ It is played by amateur brass bands, usually with newly composed music by Nino Rota or Carmine Coppola (the director's father). In *Godfather I* this type of music appears in the parade through the streets of Corleone, Sicily, that follows Michael's marriage to Apollonia. In *Godfather II* it occurs in the young-Vito segments: as funeral music outside Corleone for his father's funeral procession, street music in the parade marking the San Gennaro



Fig. 1.2 Vito (Robert De Niro) c. 1920 in *The Godfather Part II*.

Festival in Little Italy, and welcome music at the train station as the prosperous Vito returns to Sicily with his family. In *Godfather III* an amateur brass group greets Michael the tycoon at a villa outside Corleone, but here they play literal opera: an instrumental version of Verdi's famous "Va pensiero" from *Nabucco*.⁴⁵ The brass groups bring to mind the *bande* that appear often in works by Verdi and others. A device that itself draws from popular Italian traditions and appears in opera for dramatic reasons and local color, the *banda* has a prominent role, for example, in the opening scene of *Rigoletto*, as shown earlier. In Coppola's trilogy we might say that the operatic practice is returned to its roots in folk culture. For an operatically knowledgeable viewer, however, and also because of the melodramatic way it is often used (especially the funeral music and San Gennaro music), it imparts a specifically operatic tone. In the San Gennaro scene, for instance, the parade music becomes fraught with meaning as it takes on a second, nondiegetic function accompanying Vito as he hops across roofs on the way to kill Fanucci. As in Verdi's structural use of the *banda* dances in *Rigoletto*, here the *banda* supplies the fear and suspense that we experience in anticipation of what is to come. In other words, its function as a continuous stream in which dramatic strands are embedded and counterpointed is thoroughly Verdian. The grand nature of the occasion, which includes Catholic icons and ritual as

well as crowds and general spectacle, recalls the *concertato* scenes of Verdi.

The dark visual tone also acts as a ritualistic element in the trilogy. Willis created a stunning chiaroscuro, with dark backgrounds and half-lit faces – a prime element in Kael’s observation about “operatic contrasts” between dark and light in the films. Darkness also assumes a thematic role. It characterizes the interior scenes, where business is conducted, while the outdoor scenes, especially celebrations, are light-filled places where women and children operate. The darkness is often so extreme that it threatens visual comprehension, as in the family’s hallway when Michael leaves for the restaurant.⁴⁶ Yet it has a stunning impact and creates a wonderful intimacy with the characters – to my senses, an emotional draw comparable to that of opera. The dark tonality is also beautiful, and its aesthetic appeal lifts it beyond mass media into a more consciously beautiful realm, such as opera. Cinematically the tonality shows the influence of *film noir*.⁴⁷ This makes sense given the period setting – *Godfather I* begins in the 1940s – and the saga’s genre as a gangster film, which was a major type of *film noir*.⁴⁸ A different tonal scheme appears in the early-Vito flashbacks in *Godfather II*, with sepia tints and soft focus. In *Godfather III* a Titian-like palette of rich maroon replaces darkness in many scenes, such as when Michael conducts business in his study during the opening party scene. The change reflects Michael’s turn towards redemption and is meant to impart his nobility and historical connectedness. Beyond these local inflections, the studied tonal arrangement in the trilogy gives a feeling of artfulness. This itself is operatic.

QUALITY OF FEELING

In his landmark study *Opera as Drama*, Joseph Kerman describes music’s ability to shape drama through the ways it defines the “quality of feeling.”⁴⁹ In Coppola’s trilogy stylized image and pacing assume that function. Just as music is the main discourse in opera, so here visual language articulates the emotional content of the work. It does not do so in a musical vacuum, however, for well-placed passages

of nondiegetic music punctuate the discourse. The concept of the continuous stream is again helpful. We might think of the ongoing visual tone as the equivalent of a stream of continuous music, as in late Verdi or in Wagner, with the soundtrack riffs as added vocal lines or brief ariosos that work in tandem with the visual style.

The main quality of feeling in the trilogy is exaggeration. The exaggerated emotions created by the visual and ritualistic elements approach those of *verismo*; the indulgent way of structuring time resembles the epic. Rather than being contradictory impulses, the two go hand-in-hand as they veer off from the quotidian and raise the content to the symbolic level. *Godfather I* and *II* are notable in the way their dialogue avoids daily matters.⁵⁰ This changes in *Godfather III*, however, where everyday matters are prominent and the drama loses much of its epic quality. Sometimes there is even humor. These elements make *Godfather III* more realistic and modern than *Godfather I* and *Godfather II*, and hence less removed, less theatrical, and less operatic. As we will discuss later, opera may be needed at the end of *Godfather III* to compensate for the quotidian tone of the film and pull the saga back to its proper level, that of the epic and the grand.

On the matter of speech, an interesting parallel arises between the Old World phrases of some characters and the poetic language of operatic librettos. For example, in the opening sequence of *Godfather I* the Godfather responds to Bonasera's request that the rapists be murdered, with the words, "That I cannot do." A charming immigrant phrase, that one, and it re-appears in the mouth of the Americanized Michael in *Godfather III* when he turns down a request by the crime families with "This I cannot do." One is tempted to ascribe it to ethnic unfamiliarity with English, but that is not the case with Michael. Given the operatic elements already mentioned, we can make a connection between the artificial syntax of the immigrant and the artificial or elevated syntax of opera librettos. In other words, the mannered phrases of dialogue operate at a theatrical level and display operatic loftiness. The presentation of many conversations in the saga in Italian or Sicilian dialogue (with English subtitles) further contributes to the operatic quality, as the sound of these languages moves us closer to our notion of opera.⁵¹

Nostalgia

Old World phrases impart a feeling of nostalgia, and this quality permeates Coppola's saga. Strong yearnings are instilled in the viewer, and the films become a fantasy of origins and family security. Coppola's style plays up the closeness of the family unit. As James Monaco observes, "What Puzo understood – what Coppola wisely heightened – was the attraction of the family aspect of the film."⁵² Subconsciously we crave this kind of warmth and closeness, and it gives us a sense of security. This focus on family, influenced by Coppola's views of his own family and their literal roles in the saga, makes the trilogy different from the typical gangster film.⁵³

The fantasy of nostalgia is most evident in the Sicily scenes. We first encounter this in *Godfather I*, after the restaurant climax and the Mafia wars that follow. When the Godfather finds out it was Michael who avenged the attempt on his life, son Fredo stares pensively out of the window and a lap dissolve takes us to Sicily. And what a Sicily it is: romanticized as a place of purity and innocence, with Michael roaming the hillsides with his comrades (see [Fig. 1.3](#)).⁵⁴ The exalting of nature and ethnic authenticity, in full sunlight, is quite different from the portrayal of the crime world in New York. The idealization continues with a love-at-first-sight encounter: Michael meets a Sicilian woman, courts her in accordance with strict folk custom, eats with her family *al fresco*, and marries her in local traditions. That she is killed (an attempt aimed at Michael) makes narrative sense, enabling the film to continue. This pure love exists on an artificial level and is meant to show Michael's conversion to his ethnic roots – what Thomas Ferraro characterizes as Michael being "symbolically rebaptized a Sicilian" – perhaps the realization of longings he himself did not know he had. With a sustained about-face into ethnic idealism the film could not have continued. But through this Sicilian episode, "Michael's fundamental reconnection to old ways is meant to give him the vitality and perspective his brothers have lacked."⁵⁵ In *Godfather II* Sicily is a major location, first for Vito as a boy, showing how he becomes an orphan and escapes to America by himself, and



Fig. 1.3 In left rear, Michael (Al Pacino) and bodyguards in Sicily in *The Godfather*.

later when Vito returns and avenges the murder of his birth family by stabbing Don Ciccio. In *Godfather III* Sicily becomes the main location for the final portion of the film, marking a return to roots as the saga concludes in the primal place of its origins.

Idealization of the past looms large in *Godfather II* through the rondo-like flashbacks to earlier times. The first main scene is in 1901, in the Sicilian fields as a funeral procession takes place. It introduces us to a golden tonality of natural beauty and purity that will return in the flashbacks. In Little Italy the hustle-and-bustle is also idealized, and the purity of ethnic life and customs is made appealing. Nostalgic sepia tones and soft focus lyricize the content and instill longings in us for the past. Coppola makes sure that the transitions to and from these scenes are smooth, and he softens them through lap dissolves or an emotional link with the modern story. Taken as a whole, the flashbacks romanticize the American immigrant saga and show how New World Culture is built on a fantasy of the authenticity of Old World ethnicity.⁵⁶

But the idealized past is manifest in more general terms. It saturates the very fabric of the saga through the prominence of period culture, very strong in *Godfather I* and *Godfather II* and again in the conclusion of *Godfather III*. Even when modernity reigns in *Godfather*

III, which means most of the film, period culture and what it represents for Michael and his family underpin their modern-day actions. Coppola's obsessive articulation of historical detail, which Kael finds extraordinary given the revealing style of camerawork, goes a long way towards expressing the films' emotional content.⁵⁷ This affective location in the past is not unlike opera's affective signature in the past. Experiencing opera is like taking an aesthetic journey into a stylized representation of past culture.⁵⁸ This quality, I believe, lies at the heart of the *Godfather* trilogy and elicits a strong emotional response. For American viewers there is added resonance because both opera and the trilogy tap into European culture – a foreignness that evokes ancestry to create nostalgia for our ethnic origins.

The regressive impulses in opera and in Coppola's trilogy are pleasurable, even if the desired utopian state is ultimately unattainable. Film theorists, notably Kaja Silverman, have described cinema as a passive experience that encourages nostalgic desires toward a pre-Symbolic stage of development, before the intrusion of culture. Nostalgic desires instilled by Coppola's trilogy propel the viewer readily into this state. Furthermore, as Claudia Gorbman and Caryl Flinn have shown, film music can contribute to the regressive aspects of film viewing.⁵⁹ In the *Godfather* set Nino Rota's scores do a magnificent job of expressing the nostalgia.⁶⁰ In this light it is interesting that Coppola asked Rota to compose a score inspired by opera, and specifically by *Cavalleria rusticana*. The director was familiar with *Cavalleria* since childhood, and its themes resonated strongly with his ethnic upbringing. What is also significant is that Coppola acknowledges the profound influence that opera exerted in general on the trilogy.⁶¹

Nino Rota's music

According to Royal Brown, Nino Rota (1911–1979) is one of the few film composers who is associated mainly with a single filmmaker.⁶² The collaborator on sixteen films with Federico Fellini, Rota created evocative scores that brought out Fellini's surrealistic and autobiographical themes. Rota also scored Franco Zeffirelli's two popular

Shakespearean films, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). The famous Love Theme of *Romeo and Juliet* encodes longing for the past through devices used in the Coppola films, including descending tetrachords and modal harmonies. Although Paramount apparently did not want Rota for the *Godfather* films, the composer went on to win an Oscar (along with Carmine Coppola) for *Godfather II*. The director identifies several ties with earlier Rota scores.⁶³ For example, the general style in the *Godfather* set is similar to Rota's score for Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969). Moreover, the Love Theme in *Godfather I* appeared previously in a comedy, *Fortunella* (1957), in an upbeat tempo and achieving a very different effect.⁶⁴

Regardless of these similarities, it is hard to imagine Coppola's trilogy without Rota's haunting music. Basically, the *Godfather* films involve a minimum of background music – as previously mentioned, the visual style serves as the main expressive device, along with silences and terse dialogue. Nondiegetic music is reserved mainly for strong emotional situations – at climaxes, to build suspense, or to set the tone when the location changes. *Godfather I* follows this scheme most closely. *Godfather II* and *Godfather III* progressively loosen the plan and use background music more often.

Although Rota's *Godfather* music is neither drawn from opera nor explicitly operatic in style, a discussion of its characteristics raises suggestive possibilities.⁶⁵ Like many a classical Hollywood score, the music is organized through the use of recurring leitmotifs. A relatively small number, perhaps four or five, form the basic material in the trilogy. The motives are remarkably similar, to the point where they sound like variations of each other.⁶⁶ Common elements include the minor mode (all the motives are in a minor key), folk-like rhythms and melodic turns, modal harmonies, and an affinity for the Neapolitan flattened-second degree. Except for the melodic Love Theme – the tune that became a hit on the pop charts, with added words ("Speak Softly Love") – Rota's ideas resemble motives more than themes and sport characteristic elements that are sequenced or repeated instead of being developed into full-fledged melody. Each idea is made up of segments that can be extended, re-arranged, or excluded. As with Wagner, it

makes sense to apply labels to the motives – thus the Trumpet Motive, the Fate Motive, the Love Theme, and the Ethnic Longing Motive. Their official names differ in published scores from the trilogy, which are aimed at a mass market, but I use these labels because they better describe how the ideas are used.⁶⁷

The Trumpet Motive begins each of the movies as a musical signature over the stylized title.⁶⁸ For Deborah Silverman “the trumpet suggests the ceremonial nature of the Godfather’s position within ‘the Family’.”⁶⁹ Monophonic and forlorn, the theme has a primitive quality that is like a clarion call of yore. Royal Brown comments that Rota’s score for *Satyricon*, which Coppola considers a source for *Godfather*, “obsessively evokes the primitive in its atmosphere and the modern in its musical style.”⁷⁰ While the Trumpet Motive is not especially modern, it too evokes the primitive. Its simple, bare-bones outline, colored by a diminished-third interval near the start, activates primal longing, so that each film begins with a regressive impulse on the part of the viewer. It reminds me of the Shepherd’s Call played on the English horn at the start of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde* – “die alte Weise” – which expresses Tristan’s memories of his ancient homeland and the death of his father when he was a boy. Similarly, the English horn solo at the start of Act IV of Verdi’s *Otello*, modal in flavor like the Trumpet Motive and Wagner’s Shepherd’s Call, sets up a recall of the past, here for Desdemona’s wistful memories of her mother and a happier time. In Coppola the gesture occurs at the beginning and thus acts differently. Nonetheless, it immediately transports the viewer to a remote place and sets the nostalgic tone for the whole. Its internal structure has a formality like a curtain-raiser in opera – something akin to the formality of the Curse at the start of *Rigoletto*, or the D minor chords that begin *Don Giovanni*.⁷¹

The Trumpet Motive seldom appears in its original timbre and single-line texture in the middle of the films. For example, at the end of *Godfather I*, when the door closes out Kay, we hear the trumpet tune in the strings turned into a waltz, with an oom-pah accompaniment that picks up steam and takes us to the end of the film. The most interesting use of the Trumpet Motive occurs in the horse’s-head scene at

Woltz's house. As the camera tracks in slowly to Woltz sleeping in bed, we hear the Trumpet Motive in a zany waltz with bitonal accompaniment worthy of Rota's surrealistic Fellini style. In *Godfather II* the theme becomes a Sicilian folk song with words sung to guitar on the steps of a Little Italy brownstone, as Vito embraces his family after the murder of Fanucci – a horrific juxtaposition worthy of Verdi or Puccini.

What I am calling the Fate Motive resembles fate motives found in opera, for example those in *Carmen* and the *Ring*. Coppola says it represents Michael stalked by Fate, which he could not escape.⁷² The majestic motive consists of two main ideas: a bass ostinato in even quarter-note timpani strokes that anchors a tonic pedal point, and a sustained melody that moves late in the measure. The resulting dirge, which features chromatic descending motion in the upper part, reminds me of "Siegfried's Funeral March" in *Götterdämmerung*. In *Godfather II* the combination is used to stunning effect. One devastating instance occurs when Michael confronts brother Fredo in the boathouse and gets him to admit he worked with the enemy. At that point Michael says, "Fredo, you're nothing to me now," and the Fate combination intones the death knell of their relationship (and of Michael's soul). At another point in *Godfather II* the Fate combination chimes as Michael returns to Lake Tahoe amid a frigid landscape, enters his house, stares wordlessly at his wife's back as she sews, and leaves. The combination also appears in *Godfather I*, perhaps most memorably in a lush version, a kind of thematic transformation, over the final credits.

The Love Theme unfolds as a full ABA form made up of three phrases of 8 + 4 + 8 measures. Its folk quality comes from the limited number of harmonies (mostly i and iv in the A sections), the stepwise melodic patterns, the diminished-third interval in B, and a feeling of repetition. Introduced in *Godfather I* during the lap dissolve that takes us to Sicily, the nostalgic tune conveys the warmth of the Old Country and will stand for Michael's and Apollonia's love. In *Godfather III* son Anthony, an opera singer, sings it as a nostalgic folk song in a Sicilian restaurant, with father Michael much moved.

The fourth leitmotif is the Ethnic Longing Motive, which is introduced in *Godfather II*. It consists of three four-measure sections that are unified by a common pickup pattern and a dotted-quarter, two-sixteenths rhythm. Both elements come from other leitmotifs – the pickup from the Love Theme, the rhythm from the Trumpet Motive – and undergo a Wagnerian kind of development that is heard in the *Ring* cycle from one opera to the next. Harmonic similarities are also found between the motive's second section and the Love Theme, both emphasizing i and iv. And the Neapolitan inflection with diminished third at the cadence reflects elements in the scores' other motives. Just as Coppola and reviewers have commented that the story of *Godfather II* fills in *Godfather I*, so does Rota's thematic arrangement amplify the music's motivic material.

The first use of the Ethnic Longing Motive is unforgettable. In the dissolve between young Vito's Sicily escape and the immigrant ship sailing past the Statue of Liberty, the motive emerges in an emotional swell on the strings and continues as Coppola tracks eager faces about to enter the promised land (see Fig. 1.4). Afterwards the Motive appears often in the Vito flashbacks and continues to be linked with nostalgic visuals. Coppola brings the two narratives of *Godfather II* closer together when he uses part of the motive in the modern story. Beginning when Michael talks intimately with his mother about what his father did for the family, it continues into the Vito segment as he buys an orange from a street vendor in 1920. Later the motive occurs entirely in the modern story at an emotional moment when Michael hugs Fredo at their mother's wake after having cut off relations (see Fig. 1.5). For Fredo the instant represents a longing for family and identity. We know it is deceptive, because Michael simultaneously signals henchman Al Neri that now there is no reason why Fredo cannot be killed.

One of the main functions of Rota's music is to mark climaxes. There is no better example than the restaurant scene in *Godfather I*, which integrates both music and sound in a sophisticated way. If a film's sound is not a purely operatic matter, it at least falls within the scope of cinematic opera and the way the hybrid genre musicalizes



Fig. 1.4 Young Vito (Oreste Baldini) and immigrants in *The Godfather Part II*.



Fig. 1.5 Michael (Al Pacino) hugging brother Fredo (John Cazale) at their mother's funeral in *The Godfather Part II*.

a noise track.⁷³ The sequence begins with an exterior shot of the restaurant, as the atmospheric variant of the Fate Motive is played. All becomes silent when we enter the restaurant, and Coppola gives us one of the few bird's-eye angles of the trilogy. No music occurs from the start of the meal through the murders. Walter Murch, the well-known sound editor, supplied a brilliant substitute in the rushing noise of outside subway trains in riff-like segments that chart Michael's rising angst as the time to shoot grows near. The last subway sound is

almost deafening; it is as if his head will explode. He finally commits the acts. Only after a theatrical staging of the murders and his dropping of the gun do we get music. And what music: a moment so melodramatic against the prevailing control that Kael is prompted to describe it as “a crescendo that is both Italian opera and pure-forties movie music.”⁷⁴ It is a brassy version of the Fate Motive, as melodramatic as the over-the-top moments of *Tosca* or *Cavalleria rusticana* – a real catharsis. As in a well-constructed opera, the musical climax closes off the dramatic strands developed thus far and is followed by a real change in tension level.

Wagnerian technique informs the musical construction of *Godfather III*. It features a *Götterdämmerung*-like reworking of the earlier motives into new guises, new combinations, and new psychological associations – all the while with heightened intensity. Coppola himself acknowledges similarities between the last installment of the *Ring* and *Godfather III*, an idea we will return to later.

Intermediality

We have seen how certain aesthetic elements of opera – slow pacing, ritual, exaggeration, Old World style, epic style and structure, and operatic soundtrack music – appear in Coppola’s trilogy. It is interesting to consider how these features position opera in the encounter between opera and film. This falls under the concept of intermediality, an analytic system devised by Werner Wolf and others that interprets multiple media when they combine. Wolf’s categories of overt and covert intermediality, which I describe in the Introduction, neatly summarize the operatic character of the *Godfather* films. Before the diegetic staging of *Cavalleria*, operatic elements of film create a special style that is key to Coppola’s set. Despite their significance, however, they do not establish opera as a distinct medium with its typical or conventional signifiers, nor is opera “quotable.” Film retains its dominant signifiers, and opera collapses into film. Thus the prevailing opera/film encounter constitutes covert intermediality as opera itself is absent despite the presence of operatic qualities. Of course,

in the scattered instances of brief diegetic performances of opera across the trilogy – “Non so più” near the start of Part I, and *banda* arrangements in all three films – the opera/film interface becomes explicit and creates overt intermediality. The other music in the films, which consists mainly of Rota's evocative score, sounds operatic, as we have seen, but does not qualify as opera. Hence literal opera is largely absent from the Corleones' world. This will change with the staging of *Cavalleria rusticana* at the end of the trilogy.

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

Godfather III marks a break with the earlier films in the way it takes place in the modern world and deals in everyday concerns much more than its predecessors. The film starts with a voice-over of Michael writing a letter to his children entreating them to attend a ceremony in his honour and persuade their mother (now remarried) to come. This is sentimental stuff, and the epic is collapsed with a thud. Michael's attempt to redeem himself from his degraded moral state is predicated on his return to normal relations with his family and with life itself. Yet dramatically this spells his doom – this is not who he is and how he has thrived – and only a return to another plane has a chance of elevating his soul. The use of an opera to end the saga is a brilliant way of lifting the narrative out of the mundane and returning it to its proper level, that of the epic. Michael is not saved, but his aspiring toward redemption is at least made to seem possible through the elevating powers of opera.

The use of *Cavalleria* restores both period culture and the nostalgia and idealism that are associated with opera. By this point in the trilogy we are ready to be immersed in an aesthetic world and let feeling take over. By choosing this particular opera, set in Sicily, and performed in this place, the main opera house in Palermo, Sicily, Coppola reinforces the ethnic-origins theme of the saga and brings it home to the literal place of origin. It is also appropriate that the operatic nature of the saga, along the lines explored in this chapter, is actualized and formalized in the trilogy's culmination. Opera, Sicily, and familial succession



Fig. 1.6 Anthony Corleone (Franc D'Ambrosio), left, as Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* in *The Godfather Part III*.

merge in Michael's son, Anthony, who is an opera singer – as Karen Jaehne puts it, he shuns capos for opera capes⁷⁵ – making a major debut in this performance of *Cavalleria* (sung and acted by tenor Franc D'Ambrosio; see Fig. 1.6). The performer replaces the criminal and art replaces murder – just as Coppola's masterful trilogy transforms the gangster movie into great art.

The opening of the film introduces us to a landscape with operatic resonance. Right after the title we see Michael's previous house(s) in New York and Lake Tahoe in shambles, and their desolation shows Michael's distance from those times of his life as well as his loneliness. There is a strong sense of decay and the passing of time that recalls Wagner. The start of Act III of *Parsifal*, for example, exudes the same quality. Or one might conjure images of a post-*Götterdämmerung* wasteland in which all is lost. Out of that comes Michael's voice-over to his children. Perhaps this sense of operatic desolation lays the ground for the redemptive power of *Cavalleria* that is to come at the end – a structural and narrative symmetry that Coppola revels in.

Royal Brown notes how the opera house in *Godfather III* replaces the church of *Godfather I* in the final montage sequence of each film.⁷⁶ In fact, the opera house suggests that Coppola is replacing one kind of ritual with another: that the religious ritual that figures prominently in the rest of the saga yields to a secularism that is expressed through

opera. By doing so, the narrative gains the potential for transcendence and creating catharsis for the viewer. But religion is still present in the operatic context. Not only is *Cavalleria* set on Easter Sunday, and imbued with Catholic ceremony, but the film's outside plot involves the Vatican and the highest leaders of the Church. Perhaps the only way for Coppola to bring off a blowout of top Church leaders is to use the genre that can embrace that level of grandeur and invest it with suitable emotion. Of course, Italian Romantic opera regularly places Catholicism next to opera's usual themes of love, jealousy, treachery, and revenge, be it Verdi's *Don Carlo* or *Otello*, Puccini's *Tosca*, or Mascagni's *Cavalleria*.

Cavalleria summarizes many of the themes of the previous films and serves as a kind of recapitulation of the whole. The bare-bones rustic justice and codes of the opera are also found in *Godfather I* and *Godfather II* – a similarity noted by the director, who claims (retrospectively) that *Cavalleria*'s codes were in his mind when he did the earlier pictures.⁷⁷ But there are differences between the opera and the trilogy. In the opera female promiscuity comes in for communal dishonor and excommunication, and the role of the mother is highly idealized.⁷⁸ Nothing like this occurs in the film's story, where the feminine sphere and female sexuality are ignored. A maudlin ethnic theater piece, "Senza mamma," watched by the young Vito in *Godfather II*, idealizes motherhood, and its appearance in a stage work makes it an obvious parallel to *Cavalleria* in the final installment.

Coppola directed the performance of *Cavalleria* and opted for a traditional staging. In fact, the costumes and scenery are similar to those in one of the earliest productions (see Fig. 1.7).⁷⁹ Coppola also wanted elements that would echo the other films. So he has the singers imitate the gestures of the saga's characters, for example when Turiddu hikes up his pants just as Sonny did in *Godfather I*.⁸⁰ Events in the main fiction of *Godfather III* also imitate the opera. For instance, early in *Godfather III* Vince bites the ear of Joey Zasa, while in *Cavalleria* Turiddu bites the ear of Alfio to signal a challenge to a duel. Or consider Connie's affective gesture lowering a shawl over her head as a sign of grief after Mary's death, and the similar action minutes earlier by Santuzza after



Fig. 1.7 Final applause for *Cavalleria rusticana* in *The Godfather Part III*.

the death of Turiddu. *Cavalleria* also features elements of Catholic ritual that relate to the films. Besides the Easter setting and the music from inside the church, the opera includes a concerted number with the spectacle of penitents carrying a large crucifix (Coppola even adds an actor portraying Christ who appears in the crowd). This recalls the outdoor Catholic ceremonies seen many times before, for example the famous San Gennaro sequence in *Godfather II* in which Fanucci is killed, which is replicated in *Godfather III* at the same festival with Vince's murder of Joey Zasa. Coppola underscores the similarities by the way he shoots the ritual in the opera.

Another wonderful parallel between the opera and the films comes from a key line in the opera. Mascagni has the duel and death take place offstage, and we find out the result when a woman yells out twice, "Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!" ("They've killed our neighbor Turiddu!"). This is the last text intoned in the opera, as the work concludes with a lurid, fate-like descending motive blared out by the full orchestra. Similar words are shrieked by a woman peasant at the start of *Godfather II* when Vito's brother Paolo is gunned down at the funeral procession for their father in the hills outside Corleone. Shortly after, Don Ciccio's men call out "ammazzatelo" – "kill him" – as Vito runs for his life after his mother is slaughtered. Then in *Godfather III*, intercut with the opera, there is a faint cry of

"hanno ammazzatolo" by the nun who discovers the dead Pope. The final utterance, also faint, comes after Mary is killed on the opera-house steps, as we hear a distant female cry with the word "ammazzato": an eerie echo of the drama played out onstage.

Coppola does not stage a complete *Cavalleria rusticana* but instead chooses certain numbers and intercuts the performance with violent events in the opera house and beyond. The director calls it "a kind of Pirandello idea, where the drama of *Cavalleria rusticana* is intermingled with the real story – no big deal."⁸¹ It is a blowout montage of some thirty minutes that ratchets up the stakes from the gruesome baptism sequence at the end of *Godfather I*. Edmond Grant, who is critical of the montage in *Godfather III*, thinks Coppola directed the main story "as if it were high opera, with gestures emphasized and grand emotions trotted out."⁸² Before we consider the grand mixture, it is useful to describe briefly how the opera proceeds.

Grant's point about the operatic style makes sense in light of the ritualistic way that the entire sequence begins. The opera's instrumental Prelude serves as nondiegetic music, a kind of curtain-raiser, for a nighttime view of the walled gate of Palermo and the outside of the Teatro Massimo, the city's famous opera house. It continues in the background as people mingle inside the house, and then fades as Connie offers Don Altabello a cannoli (poisoned) in the ante-room. Onstage the performance includes some or all of five numbers, among them several sections of the Finale, a composite number. The drama opens with the first vocal number in the opera, Turiddu's Siciliana, performed offstage. After a cutaway the next piece is no. 3, Alfio's famous aria "Il cavallo scalpita."⁸³ Several numbers are skipped, and then the setup and very end of the Drinking Song, no. 7 ("Viva il vino spumeggiante"), are used. After a series of outside events the opera continues with the confrontation between Turiddu and Alfio in the Finale (No. 8). Memorable progressions of diminished-seventh arpeggios build tension as Turiddu bites Alfio's ear (eliciting a knowing smile from Vince in the Corleones' box). Shortly after there is the saccharine phrase of Turiddu to his mother as he laments Santuzza's fate: "Resta abbandonata, povera Santa." Coppola does this with

a sustained close-up of Anthony's face, and the agony foreshadows Michael's abandonment after Mary is killed. The singers leave the stage, which is stained with blood, and as the audience applauds we assume this is the end of the performance.

But there is more. We hear choral music of the Easter festivities, part of no. 4 and out of sequence, against outside violence, and then we are back to the performance proper and the Easter procession. This onstage religious parade recalls the San Gennaro parade in *Godfather II* and becomes a way of operaticizing Carmine Coppola's music retrospectively – of formalizing the operatic tone of his evocative march. Meanwhile, the outside violence intensifies and mixes with the operatic music in novel ways (more on this below). But on the opera stage we jump to almost the end of the Finale, see Turiddu and Lucia embrace before he goes to the duel, jump away for more gruesome violence, and return a last time for the woman's climactic "Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!" and the crowd's horrified screams. *Cavalleria*'s melodramatic Fate Motive punctuates the deaths onstage and off, while quick images of gruesome corpses are intercut with the stage action. Final applause. Then congratulations and hugs, awareness that Michael's bodyguards have been killed, mingling on the steps outside, and the death of daughter Mary (the bullet was meant for Michael). The last thing we will hear from *Cavalleria* – the stunning Intermezzo, functioning nondiegetically – takes us from there to the end of the film.

As in the baptism scene in *Godfather I*, this montage sequence has a continuous stream that is intercut with outside intrigue and violence. This is more complicated than the baptism because the continuous strand has two elements: the opera performance, and the Corleones' watching the performance (see Fig. 1.8). The sequence is longer and contains more cutaways and sites for violence. The suspense is greater because some violence comes very close to the Corleones, and only through chance is Michael not assassinated in his opera box. Tension is carefully controlled through parallel editing and through events and music in the opera. But a brilliant thing happens as the sequence builds: Rota's music is combined with Mascagni's to effect a super-musical climax of the saga. This mixture of diegetic and nondiegetic



Fig. 1.8 From left, Mary (Sofia Coppola), Kay (Diane Keaton), Michael (Al Pacino), and Connie (Talia Shire) in an opera box in *The Godfather Part III*.

roles takes place during the Easter procession and the assassination of Vatican officials and finance leaders. Against sung opera music, Rota's Fate Motive (ostinato plus melody) intones ominously. The assassin leaves the theater, and the Pope is discovered dead. Then the choral processional sounds over Rota's ostinato as the dead Christ is paraded (an obvious reference to the dead Pope). After that a bass-clarinete version of the Trumpet Motive is heard, and the *Cavalleria* procession returns. Meanwhile spectator Don Altabello is seen gasping for breath in his box as he dies from the poisoned cannoli (we watch Connie as she watches him through opera glasses). Another round of the Rota Fate Motive alternates with Mascagni's choral music, Lucchese and the Archbishop are brutally slaughtered, and the Fate Motive returns. All in all, the operatic potential of Rota's theme is actualized as it nests easily within the music and drama of Mascagni's opera. The powerful mix of fate, death, and epic closing a saga recalls *Götterdämmerung*. So does the way in which the opera montage is permeated with skillful combinations of music to achieve new dramatic ends.⁸⁴

The intermedial landscape in the *Cavalleria* sequence is complicated, although at first glance it seems straightforward. The presentation of opera in an opera house renders opera a distinct medium with dominant signifiers that match the dominance of those of film. Opera

is also “quotable.” These characteristics make the opera/film encounter overt intermediality. In the first half of the opera sequence, before the audience applauds and the singers are shown leaving the stage, the film centers on the opera performance and cutaways are brief. The opera performance remains the heart of the action, and there is no question that overt status pertains to the situation. But in the second part, studded with complex montage, opera competes with other stories and locations, and the nature of the intermedial interface becomes less certain. The question becomes to what extent the opera performance and Mascagni’s music remain dominant (alongside film) amid the extensive parallel editing and the incorporation of Rota’s music. This impression may vary from viewer to viewer – some may pay a lot of attention to the opera even if it is not actually in view, while others may focus only on what is actually before them. In my opinion opera holds its own even when not literally present, and it retains its distinctness as a medium: in other words, overt status is maintained. The performance in the opera house has had a while to be established in viewers’ minds, and even amid the complex cutaways we know that the opera performance is taking place and the Corleones are watching it. Mascagni’s music is often heard in the cutaways, and when Rota’s music joins in it becomes a signifier of opera. Nevertheless, I can appreciate the fact that viewers might find film a stronger medial presence in some places, and these would function as covert intermediality.

Regardless of the precise intermedial label, *Cavalleria* does important work in Coppola’s trilogy. We will see other opera performances later in this study, and the opera telecast folded into *La Cérémonie* (Chapter 4) is something special. But Coppola’s use of *Cavalleria* is exceptional by virtue of its length, intensity, and narrative sophistication. Its appearance at the climax of a nine-and-a-half-hour trilogy makes it unforgettable.

BEYOND REPRESENTATION

Opera constantly touches upon the edge or extremity of song, of something beyond song, be it cry or silence.

Michal Grover-Friedlander⁸⁵

To identify with the lost vocal object is to become loss oneself, to become supreme purification, to *be* silence; in other words, to die. Michel Poizat⁸⁶

After the opera performance there is a stripping down to pure sound, beyond semantic representation. It is staged brilliantly. As the family gathers on the steps outside the Teatro Massimo to congratulate their son, a gunman dressed as a priest – the same person who killed Michael's guards in the opera house – wounds Michael but kills Mary. Michael cradles her, realizes she is dead, and starts to scream. So do other family members, especially Kay. Then as Michael goes silent and ambient noise is muted almost to nil, the *Intermezzo* from *Cavalleria rusticana* begins. Within a few measures we see Michael's mouth open as he emits a silent scream.⁸⁷ Then it becomes a vocalized cry, primal, gut-wrenching, and raw. At the waltz-like second section of the *Intermezzo*, Coppola shows us flashbacks to happier times that are running through Michael's mind or that we are meant to insert: Michael dancing with Mary at the start of *Godfather III*, Michael dancing with Apollonia at their wedding in *Godfather I*, and Michael dancing with Kay at the start of *Godfather II*. It is very moving. As the waltz music continues we now see Michael as an old man, wrinkled and alone, sitting outside Don Tomassino's villa in Sicily, as he slowly puts on dark glasses. Perhaps he has just finished thinking back on these memories.⁸⁸ As the *Intermezzo* comes to a close, a medium-long shot shows him dropping an orange and keeling over dead – a real change from his father's death scene (in *Godfather I*), where Vito is playing with his grandson in the garden and dies among family. During the playing of the *Intermezzo* no other sounds are heard. This is visually accompanied instrumental music, pure and simple.

The cry

The cry has been theorized in opera studies as existing at the edge of the voice.⁸⁹ Here it acts at the edge of the voice, at the boundary with silence. It also operates at the edge of time. For Michael the cry becomes the unscrolling back to the past, to origins, to a baby's first utterance on entering the world. It is a kind of rebirth

backward – maybe a reverse baptism that relates to the baptism scene at the end of *Godfather I*, where the actual baby was Coppola's daughter Sofia, now murdered as Michael's daughter Mary. For Michel Poizat a cry represents the futility of the search for the utopia of the pre-Symbolic stage – the developmental stage before the acquisition of knowledge and the entrance into culture.⁹⁰ Michael Corleone has been searching throughout *Godfather III* for redemption and a restored state of grace – for the person he was before his conversion at the restaurant in *Godfather I*. With Mary's death his knowledge of the futility is expressed in that primal scream. His voiced cry is not too different from the primal cry found in several operas, for example at the end of the Love Duet in *Tristan und Isolde* when the lovers are discovered by King Marke, or Kundry's shriek when she first appears before Klingsor in Act II of *Parsifal*.⁹¹

Another temporal take on the *Godfather* sequence concerns the silent scream – the inability to vocalize, the blocking of expression. A review in *Cahiers du cinéma* describes Michael's scream thus:

The cry that Pacino emits without a sound from his mouth when his daughter dies on the steps of the theater recalls the painting by Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, about which Gilles Deleuze has written that "the visibility of the cry, the mouth opened like a shadow into the abyss, has a connection with invisible forces that are nothing other than those of the future." At the moment of the cry, the future of Pacino is behind him.⁹²

Indeed it is: the future is the past, and so the actual scream that comes after is located in the past, the distant past of the primal cry of the baby.

The unscrolling process embodied in Michael's scream relates to screams heard earlier in the saga. In *Godfather I*, for instance, Michael screamed a warning to Apollonia before the car blew up. Hollywood mogul Woltz emitted a horrific primal scream on discovering the bloody horse's head in his bed. More obviously operatic, Michael's cry echoes the cries just heard at the end of *Cavalleria rusticana* – the shrieks of "ammazzato" followed by a collective cry of "Ah" from

the chorus. This suggests that his cry acts as the “goal” of the opera performance, its real climax, a super-shriek that subsumes *Cavalleria* as well as the entire saga. The opera's Intermezzo starting right afterwards affirms this operatic path. The scream is a way of transcending the operatic voice that we heard in *Cavalleria*. It is also a way of transcending the operatic qualities of the entire saga. Thus not only does the scream serve as a personal culmination or catharsis for Michael, but dramatically it becomes the operatic end-point or limit. After that only instrumental music, or pure feeling, is left.

On the other hand, is Michael's scream a kind of “envoicing” of the instrumental music that follows? Is it perhaps *the* only proper envoicing to this music? Is the vocal silence during the instrumental music just another sign that the voice of opera is always related to muteness and silence? We'll attempt to answer these questions as we look at the Intermezzo.

Intermezzo

Coppola's use of the Intermezzo is stunning. Omitting it from the opera proper, he saves it for nondiegetic use later. The instrumental number concludes the saga and offers healing and catharsis to the viewer.

In *Cavalleria* the Intermezzo occurs about two-thirds into the opera, after two climactic duets: Turiddu's spurning of Santuzza, and Santuzza's telling Alfio of the adultery and his swearing of vengeance. According to Michele Girardi, “all the tension that has accumulated up to this point is channeled into the Intermezzo, a hymn in F based on the melody of the *Regina coeli* with which the service began ...”⁹³ The curtain stays up. Structurally the Intermezzo divides the opera into two parts, as the next number recapitulates the chorus that opened the stage action. In Coppola's film the *Regina coeli* hymn is omitted, and this severs an obvious link between the Intermezzo and the religious. Yet even without the texted antecedent the viewer senses a hymnlike quality in the Intermezzo because of its chordal part-writing, at least in the first section. It imparts a spiritual, even devotional feeling. The

second part of the Intermezzo is a waltz, which has no antecedent in the opera. Yet even this waltz, a secular topos, takes on a religious tone in Mascagni's instrumentation because of the inclusion of an onstage organ (in the church), which supplies the harmonic framework. In the film I can discern no organ sound, and that helps to keep the waltz secular and make it a suitable reverie to accompany the nostalgic flashbacks and flashforward. The exaggerated warmth comes from the scoring that remains: quadrupled melody in the strings (they all play the melody), and harmonic support solely in the harp.

The disposition of the Intermezzo in two film versions of Mascagni's opera makes for an interesting comparison. In Zeffirelli's 1982 film, the Intermezzo is secular and idealizing as it accompanies scenes of Santuzza wandering through golden-lit fields and ends with Turiddu and Lola interacting romantically in church. Von Karajan's earlier version, of 1968, begins with idealized nature shots – dew-drops, leaves, and the like in soft focus – and ends in church with the congregation, the organ support clearly audible.

As these *Cavalleria* films show, the Intermezzo has an ambiguous function, and film's visual capabilities can make it more specific. The *Godfather* treatment emphasizes the Germanic transcendent quality of the Intermezzo. Even in the Mascagni opera, a so-called work of *verismo*, the Intermezzo is Wagnerian in its effect: it creates a time for reflection and immersion into the realm of the aesthetic. This is not like the work of another practitioner of *verismo*, Puccini, where instrumental sections typically introduce or intervene rather than operate as independent numbers.⁹⁴ In spirit and style Mascagni's Intermezzo resembles a miniature tone poem or extended instrumental section in Wagner such as Siegfried's Rhine Journey or the Transformation Music in Acts I and III of *Parsifal*. The Intermezzo matches these numbers in their detachment from semantic meaning. Lacking specified action, the Intermezzo even surpasses them in its abstractness and its propensity for the purely aesthetic. Of course, the aesthetic purity is tempered in Mascagni's opera by the religious style and references. But Coppola's omission of these elements and the removal of the Intermezzo from the confines of the opera effect the realization of its

potential for transcendence in a German Romantic sense. And consider the images Coppola uses with the waltz: a nostalgic replaying of Michael dancing with beloved females from each of the films, and the sudden flashforward to the touching dying scene of a heartbroken old man in Sicily. This is the realm of pure feeling, and the music combines with image to transport us beyond semantic meaning. It marks a big change from the studied tone of the rest of the saga.

From a film-music perspective the music assumes a complicated function when it accompanies the dancing. On the one hand it seems to be the literal music they are dancing to, and that makes it diegetic. On the other hand, we know these are flashbacks and the music is not the original music but a new stream for this scene. We also see how the tempo does not match the dance steps. The sequence becomes a fascinating mix of diegetic and nondiegetic functions, and I sense the nondiegetic, superimposed quality as the main way this is unfolding. Nondiegetic status is also supported by the nonlinearity of the flashbacks, by the play of fantasy that removes what we are seeing and hearing from reality. This location in memory and fantasy contributes to the feeling that we are in the realm of the aesthetic rather than in usual semantic meaning. Indeed, when we see the aged Michael reminisce on these events, the music functions retrospectively as psychodiegetic music: music from his psychological perspective, running through his mind as current thoughts or as memory. The term falls under Claudia Gorbman's more general term "metadiegetic," which refers to situations beyond simply diegetic or nondiegetic.⁹⁵

With respect to intermediality, the *Intermezzo*'s attachment to opera becomes remote. It enters the medial domain of film, as a hybrid between diegetic, nondiegetic, and psychodiegetic functions. As part of the film's soundtrack, the *Intermezzo* sheds its signs as a work from an opera, opera becomes indistinct as a medium, and the interface functions as covert intermediality. Of course, the instrumental scoring of the *Intermezzo* makes it inherently less operatic, especially when heard separately from *Cavalleria*. And for those viewers who are unaware that the music comes from an opera, intermediality itself becomes irrelevant.

The final sequence with the Intermezzo encapsulates various elements from the saga. The pacing becomes very slow again, a braking that contrasts drastically with the quick speed of images in the *Cavalleria* montage. It brings us back, now with a heavy overlay of sentiment, to the slow pacing of the saga – or, put another way, it returns us to an operatic pacing, the spaciousness of grand opera. It also restores the trilogy’s affinity for silence and the way in which nonverbal discourses create meaning. Michael’s silent scream is an important marker in this body of allusions. The sequence shows how an operatic sensibility throughout is taken to the limits, the edge, of vocal representation through vocal silence.

Instrumental music takes over from the vocal, from the discourse that creates semantic meaning in film. The move approaches a Germanic triumph of instrumental music and its transcendent qualities, and taps into ideas of Hegel and Schopenhauer about music’s ability to access the deepest levels of truth and meaning. This is what Wagner was aiming for in his music dramas. This is what emerges to some extent in Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, and to a greater extent in Coppola’s staging of the Intermezzo. Coppola’s instrumental mission is reinforced by the way he uses *Cavalleria*’s Prelude, which initiates the entire opera sequence. After a blackout that closes the previous scene, the Prelude’s mystical opening of widely spaced thirds provides an evocative accompaniment to a nighttime view of Palermo and the opera house. Musically it resembles a birthing process – a descending version, as it were, of the primal ascending opening of the Prelude to *Parsifal* – and this sets up a quality of rarefied emotion. It also supplies the first member of the bookends for the journey into the aesthetic that will be realized in the concluding Intermezzo. This birthing rounds off Michael’s dying at the end, and sets up the path that will render the “future of Pacino behind him.” Coppola’s investment in this moment can be gauged from his desire to name the film *The Death of Michael Corleone*, which describes the main event of the last installment. A Wagnerian analogy re-emerges as we recall that *Siegfrieds Tod* (“The Death of Siegfried”) was Wagner’s original name for the last part of the *Ring* cycle.

Coppola's instrumental re-ordering of Mascagni seems to make of the opera proper a prelude to the really meaningful part: the instrumental music. But although Coppola may be Germanizing Mascagni by emphasizing the instrumental music, he is only highlighting Wagnerian elements already present in the work.⁹⁶

As a group of films that are operatic, the *Godfather* trilogy plays out a fascinating relationship between the medium of opera and the medium of film. Stanley Cavell, for one, identifies film as the successor to opera, and this suggests affinities of one for the other.⁹⁷ Indeed, Coppola's trilogy, steeped in operatic narrative and expression, aspires towards opera, towards the historical impetus for film. This makes it classical filmmaking in another way. In the end, despite the staging of part of *Cavalleria rusticana*, the work shuns the vocal basis of opera and glorifies silence and feeling. Coppola's withholding of subtitles during the opera, unlike his approach to the Sicilian dialect spoken in the films, further demonstrates how substantive meaning in the voice is being minimized. So what we have is an operatic film saga that partakes of *verismo*, melodrama, grand opera, epic, and the German ideal of transcendent instrumental music: a catholic vision that represents a magnificent juncture of film and opera. We should be grateful that at each stage of the twenty-year genesis of the trilogy, Coppola acted in the spirit of the Corleones and found that the *Godfather* was an offer he couldn't refuse.

2 | Opera as fragment: “Liebestod” and “Nessun dorma” in *Aria*

At the end of *Aria* one must decide, I suppose, what it all means ... You could almost call *Aria* the first MTV version of opera. Roger Ebert¹

In 1987 British producer Don Boyd released an unusual operatic film. Entitled *Aria*, it consists of ten segments drawn from different operas, each filmed by a different

director.² Each could choose their own repertoire and film it any way they wished. Boyd encouraged contributors to devise fanciful visualizations for the music and avoid traditional renditions of the story. Each segment had to be less than ten minutes in length and use music from the recorded catalogue of RCA, a major sponsor of the project. Celebrity directors such as Federico Fellini and Woody Allen were originally going to participate, but had to drop out because of scheduling conflicts. The final result includes a few famous names – notably, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Altman, and Ken Russell – but most of the contributors are British directors who were young and relatively unknown at the time (see [Table 2.1](#)).

Not surprisingly for an anthology, the filming styles that resulted are quite varied – from dreamlike exotic fantasy (Russell) to gloomy black-and-white documentary (Charles Sturridge), from swooping cam-like montage (Altman) to a relatively fixed camera (Bruce Beresford), from hyper-real color schemes (Franc Roddam) to a matter-of-fact palette (Godard). The repertoire also spans a wide range. It extends from the seventeenth-century French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully to the twentieth-century German-American figure Erich Korngold, but the film resists chronology by arranging segments in random order. To provide a semblance of coherence, Boyd inserted a story between the segments. This became a narrative of a man entering an Italian opera house, applying theatrical makeup, reacting to the individual stories, and emerging onstage as a clown in the final segment,

Table 2.1 Segments of *Aria*

Source opera	Director
(1) Verdi, <i>Un ballo in maschera</i>	Nicolas Roeg
(2) Verdi, <i>La forza del destino</i> ("La Vergine degli angeli")	Charles Sturridge
(3) Lully, <i>Armide</i>	Jean-Luc Godard
(4) Verdi, <i>Rigoletto</i>	Julien Temple
(5) Korngold, <i>Die tote Stadt</i>	Bruce Beresford
(6) Rameau, <i>Les Boréades</i>	Robert Altman
(7) Wagner, <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> ("Liebestod")	Franc Roddam
(8) Puccini, <i>Turandot</i> ("Nessun dorma")	Ken Russell
(9) Charpentier, <i>Louise</i> ("Depuis le jour")	Derek Jarman
(10) Leoncavallo, <i>Pagliacci</i> ("Vesti la giubba")	Bill Bryden

where he lip-synchs "Vesti la giubba" to a scratched recording of Enrico Caruso. The nature and disposition of the selected music display great variety. Among the three Verdian segments, for example, two offer a potpourri of numbers for an extended, fanciful narrative (Nicolas Roeg's *Un ballo in maschera* and Julian Temple's *Rigoletto*), and the other presents a complete aria to accompany a sobering tale of a teenage car crash (Sturridge's "La Vergine degli angeli" from *La forza del destino*).

Aria represents a pastiche, a collection of fragments that Jeremy Tambling characterizes as sound bites that mark a postmodernist approach to filmed opera.³ While an unusual occurrence in film, this sort of layout resembles traditional musical formats such as an operatic recital or a CD of vocal favorites. Nonetheless, Tambling is right in recognizing *Aria*'s innovative position with respect to filmed opera, especially in its use of elements from MTV and other forms of pop visual culture.⁴ Boyd had these connections in mind when he conceived and promoted the venture. By borrowing the imagery and techniques of MTV, which was in an early and exciting phase at the time, *Aria* was going to popularize opera and make it accessible for mass audiences. Perhaps he believed it could compensate for the problems that arise when opera combines with film, especially the conflict between opera's slow pace and cinema's affinity for speed.⁵

Although *Aria* did not “rescue” opera on film or become the commercial success Boyd envisioned, it paved the way for later incarnations of opera and pop culture. For example, in Anna Netrebko’s 2005 DVD of MTV-style production numbers choreographed around famous arias, the sexy soprano looks like a pop star as she lip-synchs to famous numbers amid fantastic visuals full of color and whimsy.⁶ For visual clips of opera, of course, we should not forget the populist *YouTube* website and its famous (and infamous) moments of your favorite opera star. *Aria* does not partake of MTV’s dependence on the visual star power of the performers – it uses actors (mostly unknown ones) instead of singers, and forgoes lip-synching in most segments. But in its fragmentation, disjunction, fantasy, and generation of image from music, *Aria* draws heavily on its pop-culture cousin.⁷ Although a few segments mimic opera in their focus on performance, *Aria* ignores many of the conventions of visually recorded opera: it dispenses with subtitles, and pays scant attention to the identity and musical presence of the singers. Not only do we never see them, but their names appear only at the very end of the film amid the scrolled credits for each segment. While the opening pane of each portion lists the director, the composer, and the title of the segment, the performers are noticeably missing.

Two of the most striking segments in *Aria* are Franc Roddam’s “Liebestod” and Ken Russell’s “Nessun dorma,” which occur in succession. Other than the coda-like “Vesti la giubba” that caps the inter-story, the Roddam and the Russell serve as the only segments that are built entirely on operatic hits. Many portions of the film use lesser-known repertoire, such as Beresford’s take on *Die tote Stadt* (Korngold) and Jarman’s on *Louise* (Charpentier), or fashion a pastiche from the opera, as in Temple’s segment on *Rigoletto* and Godard’s on *Armide*, in which both incorporate spoken words into the scenario. “Liebestod” and “Nessun dorma,” however, promote the idea of the operatic hit song.⁸ Not only does this separate the numbers from their respective operas, but it allies them with MTV’s goal of furthering the fame of a particular number. It also affirms the independent life of these two pieces in culture at large. Wagner’s “Liebestod,” for instance, boasts a

fascinating history in film. In *Humoresque* (directed by Jean Negulesco, 1946), a melodramatic cross between a performer bio-pic and *film noir*, Joan Crawford commits suicide to the strains of Franz Waxman's arrangement of the "Liebestod" when she drowns herself in the surging waves.⁹ More recently, Baz Luhrmann borrows portions of the "Liebestod" to accompany the death of the star-crossed lovers in his updated film version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1996). "Nessun dorma" has also carved out an important niche. In 1990, a few years after *Aria* appeared, the World Cup took place in Italy and "Nessun dorma" became the official theme song of the event, which also hosted the first Three Tenors concert. This launched the runaway musico-cultural phenomenon, and Pavarotti's performance of "Nessun dorma" staked a claim on the aria as the tenor's signature piece. His rendition made the pop charts in Britain, a singular event for classical music. Although Pavarotti is not the singer for the *Aria* segment, the aria resonates in a special way with viewers because of its cult-like fame in culture at large. Moreover, traces of the now-deceased singer probably inhere to some extent when we watch Russell's segment. In addition to the generalized idealism associated with the cry of "vincerò" at the end, we may link the triumphalist message with Pavarotti's career and his ability to stay on top for so long.¹⁰

The segments on the "Liebestod" and "Nessun dorma" occupy a central position in *Aria*. They are the seventh and eighth segments out of ten, and when the film runs from start to finish they act as a dual climax for the whole. With death as a theme that circulates through much of *Aria*, the shocking double suicide that concludes "Liebestod" becomes the *ne plus ultra* moment that brings everything together. Directly after comes "Nessun dorma." Here the reverse takes place, as a near-death victim of a car accident returns to life. In the bigger picture, the resurrection story could represent opera itself; Tambling, for one, contends that opera is culturally dead. In a reflexive move, the film may suggest that an innovative venture such as *Aria* can bring opera back to life.¹¹

The two segments offer further meaning beyond the film's borders, for the one-two punch of "Liebestod" and "Nessun dorma"

traces a major arc in operatic history. Not only do they represent highlights of the canon, but they define turning points in the history of the genre. The “Liebestod,” as a symbol of *Tristan und Isolde*, both summarizes operatic romanticism and forges a new way that every composer through the early twentieth century has to engage with, whether as affirmation or rejection. It serves as a major stylistic marker. If we fast-forward to the 1920s we encounter “Nessun dorma” as the memorable number of Puccini’s final (and incomplete) opera *Turandot*, which many consider the end-point of the great tradition of Italian romantic opera.¹² Hence the juxtaposition of “Liebestod” and “Nessun dorma” creates a whirlwind tour of high moments in opera history. Although such ties seem antithetical to *Aria*’s freewheeling spirit, the audacious pairing comes off as dazzling – as exhilarating as any two quality music videos shown in succession. Yet despite their historical and dramatic connections, “Liebestod” and “Nessun dorma” remain discrete fragments whose individual content grabs our attention when we watch them.

The two segments form the focus of our inquiry, and they will be treated individually. Stylistically we will explore a range of features. These include expressive elements – especially fantasy and exoticism – and filming techniques, temporal structure, and narrative features, particularly those that are related to MTV. Music serves as another major concern. *Aria* uses pre-recorded opera music as the impetus for visual interpretation, and so the relationship between music and image is important. We consider film-music functions and whether categories beyond diegetic and nondiegetic are pertinent. On a medial level, the discussion addresses the opera/ film interface with respect to Werner Wolf’s theory of intermediality. A third theme of the chapter delves into interpretive issues. We will see how each segment involves cultural criticism, and how sexuality and race figure prominently. Meanwhile, the notion of death-and-resurrection that connects the segments permeates the inquiry. At the end I offer observations on the relationship between the part and the whole that lies at the heart of *Aria*’s conception as a filmic and operatic pastiche. Overall, the chapter’s examination of selected segments aims to convey a sense of

the versatility and imagination that can be vested in the fragment, an alternative format for filmed opera.

RODDAM'S "LIEBESTOD"

Franc Roddam (b. 1946), who filmed "Liebestod," belongs to the relatively unknown cadre of British directors chosen for *Aria*. Roddam possesses a fairly thin movie résumé, with only a few films to his credit. *Quadrophenia* (1979), a story built around The Who's rock album of the same name, probably ranks as his best-known work. Considered a classic of the genre, it attracts more than casual interest in connection with the *Aria* segment because it concerns teenage angst and uses pre-recorded music.¹³ Roddam has also written screenplays and worked in television in a variety of roles involved with direction and production. Reportedly he had no knowledge of opera before *Aria*, and producer Boyd suggested that he work on Wagner's "Liebestod."¹⁴ When Roddam went over budget with his shoot in the United States (Las Vegas and Arizona's Painted Desert), RCA considered dropping him. This would have been ironic, as Roddam signed on to the project in its early stages, when it was pitched as an inexpensive video.¹⁵ Despite the challenges, the "Liebestod" segment turned out extremely well and is arguably the most successful part of *Aria*. Respected cinematographer Fred Elmes, whose work includes David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) and Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche New York* (2008), worked his magic to create a striking visual language that feels utterly appropriate to the hypnotic effect of Wagner's music.

The story is simple. A young couple, probably teenagers, drive in a colorful and hyper-real desert. Briefly they pass a native American woman who is frisked at the side of the road by the police, and she looks pleadingly at the couple. The couple enter glittering 1980s Las Vegas at night and drive past neon-drenched casino signs and chintzy wedding chapels, and peer at polyester-clad old women working slot-machines. The next location is a hotel room with flashing neon lights from outside. Here the lovers are naked and have sex to Wagner's orgasmic music. Then they slit their wrists in a bathtub. After views

of blood snaking down the drain and the women emerging from the casino in early morning, the scene returns briefly to the desert, and from a distance we see the couple drive off down the open road. Or we assume it is the couple. Since their heads are small and we never get a good look, we are not sure who is there. Nonetheless, the image resonates powerfully. Does it represent our desire to see them “drive into the sunset,” a Hollywood euphemism for the happy ending? Is it mere fantasy, or dream? Or is it a kind of American-West transfiguration that relates to *Isolde*’s transfiguration as she joins Tristan in death?¹⁶ Our difficulty in defining meaning affirms its affinity with MTV, where fantasy, improbability, and nonlinearity find a comfortable niche.

The story is further complicated by a suggestion of flashback, but it is very subtle. How can a flashback be subtle? It can seem uncertain if the element defining the present is not firmly established, and hence there is little sense of something anterior.¹⁷ In the Roddam, the film opens with a fleeting image of the man at the window in the hotel room. It starts a second or so before the music. Immediately the scene shifts to the desert. After that location plays out, the hotel-room scene opens with the same shot from the very beginning. This implies a flashback: the lover gazing out recalls the depraved and depressing things he has seen, and the couple decide life is not worth living and commit suicide. Even if one misses the flashback – the initial image seems introductory instead of the actual film – Roddam’s social criticism is clear. The world (or specifically the USA) is shallow, and replete with greed, exploitation, and repressive authority. By setting the scene in Las Vegas Roddam represents American culture at its most artificial – a place that focuses on human avarice and defies day–night divisions. Of course, a disrupted day–night pattern recalls the situation in *Tristan und Isolde* and the way that transcendent love can exist only under darkness of night. In the Roddam the capitalist decay of Las Vegas’s eternal night must be escaped from, while in the Wagner eternal night is good and can be sustained only through death. Both segment and opera produce a sense of claustrophobia for the principals, and the only way out is death.

Music-image relationship

The music for the segment is sung by Leontyne Price. A star of RCA's backlist, Price is also heard elsewhere in *Aria*, for instance Roeg's episode on Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* and Jarman's on *Louise*. Price enjoyed a glowing reputation as an exponent of Verdi and Puccini roles, but she hardly sang Wagner. Thus it is surprising to hear her voice in the "Liebestod," and as soon as the music starts we sense something unusual. The segment's sex and nudity – as acted by a young Bridget Fonda and James Mathers, whose beautiful bodies are shot in close-up – are not what we encounter in stage productions, and certainly not when the "Liebestod" is excerpted in concert versions. In *Aria* nudity also figures prominently in Godard's portion, but the "Liebestod" often symbolizes the film in ads, where *Aria* is described as a totally sensuous experience. Regardless of its marketing role, Roddam's "Liebestod" stands as a magnificent realization of Wagner's music and text. I think of it as an ultimate, and ultimately appropriate, visual representation of the music. The orgasmic quality of the music is finally materialized, not merely expressed in sound, and we get to see literal "Love-Death." Roddam actually portrays death as tragic and horrific as he details the excruciating pain of slitting one's wrists. Might this be a jab at Wagner's mystically painless death for Isolde? Whether or not the viewer notices this, the suicide of Roddam's lovers plays as a principled protest against the violation of their ideals. The segment remains a stunning visualization of the iconic piece.

Music clearly drives image in the segment. Wagner's piece generates the scenario, *mise-en-scène*, and montage, and the visuals seem like accompaniment to the music. As in the rest of *Aria* there are no subtitles, and the vocalized words easily blend into pure sounds as they cede referential meaning. This may be particularly apt for the "Liebestod," where voice, orchestra, and words lose themselves in the move towards ecstatic transfiguration. For the film, the integral presence of the music supplies all the sound, and actors are rendered mute as they mime movements and gestures. In this way they resemble

silent-film stars. Unlike their predecessors, however, these actors do not simulate dialogue with their lips, nor are they supported by inter-title screens.¹⁸ The nameless protagonists operate in a bubble that is cut off from everything except the music, which in this case includes words that also act as expressive agents available to the lovers.

Roddam's visualization forms a very close relationship to the music. Major musical divisions organize the filmic structure, and musical procedures provide the impetus for characteristic moments of image. Table 2.2 lays out the structure.

The segment begins with image only, without music. The blond man's face in medium close-up appears next to a window and half-open blinds, and garish hues dance off his pale skin. We have no sense of where we are. The brief image is joined by the very start of the "Liebestod," and the scene changes quickly to a surrealistic landscape that approaches a dream. We are moving through a richly colored desert, which the credits identify as Arizona's Painted Desert. We drive by a native American at the side of the road who is brusquely frisked by the police. She (or he – it is hard to discern gender) turns and pleads for help, and the camera shows that the event registers with the couple in the car. At this moment the "Liebestod"'s text intones "Seht ihr Freunde, seht ihr's nicht?" ("Do you see, friends, don't you see it?"), an utterance by the distressed character or the omniscient narrator/singer that is addressed to the couple and possibly us as well. When the scene changes to Las Vegas, the start of Section III, a brilliant alignment between music, text, and image takes place. Here, in m. 9, the sleek nocturnal cityscape parallels the smoothed-out part-writing and the extended vocal note (c") that creates a voluptuous seventh over the harmony. The text is highly significant for the location. It begins with "sternumstrahlet," one of Wagner's evocative compound words. Denoting something like "star-illuminated," the word captures the neon twinkle of the skyline in the distance. Here, starlight loses its status as natural and innocent, as it was in the desert, and is replaced by an artificial version fabricated by capitalism.

Several interesting effects figure in the drive through the city. Seeing continues as a key trope in text and visuals. The line "hoch sich

Table 2.2 Structure of the “Liebestod” segment

Section no.	DVD timing	Scene and action	Measures	Music	Text	Other
I	57:06	Looking out of hotel window	I	A flat 6–4, first two beats	“Mild und ...”	Very brief; image starts a bit before music
II	57:09	Switch to desert; driving and passing frisked native American	I (2nd half) to 8	Sequencing of opening pattern	Features two statements on seeing	Interval of fourth prominent
III	57:51	Switch to Las Vegas glitter; driving through town	9 to 28	Textural change, gradual rhythmic intensification	“sternumstrahlet” at start; statements on seeing	Long section, with various Las Vegas shots
IV	59:26	Return to hotel room (man at window); couple have sex	29 to 59	Starts on expectant F sharp pedal, at resolution of augmented-6th chord	Switches to hearing	Longest section
V	1:01:43	Switch to fast zoom to bathtub; slitting of wrists, blood flows	59 (last note) to 73	Starts near end of dominant run-up; resolution (big climax) and aftermath	Moves towards short units; at “ertunken” have blood on floor	As music calms, coda-like shots of street and blood in drain
VI	1:03:14–1:03:44	Return to desert; couple (?) drive away	74 to 79	Last iteration of “Tristan” progression over final chords	No text	Voiceless music accompanies final images

Freu - de! Seht! Fühlt und seht ihr's nicht? Hü - re ich nur die - se Wei - se,

p dolce

cresc

pp

poco cresc.

sempre con Pedale

Ex. 2.1 “Liebestod,” mm. 25–30.

hebt,” following “sternumstrahlet,” refers to the tall buildings they see, and another head-on shot of the couple shows their wonder. At the musical change in m. 12 (marked “etwas bewegter”), where the opening idea returns for development, “Seht ihr’s nicht?” intones as the couple ogle Western excess in tacky come-ons. Famous Las Vegas names light up – the Sands and Desert Inn among them – and over several measures the couple see the human toll as old women with tacky dress work slot-machines and cross the street. The text offers interesting commentary – sometimes straightforward, sometimes ironic – as it talks of sweet breath flowing from joyful lips. The Cupid Wedding Chapel passes before their eyes. Next come the closing measures of Section III, mm. 25–28, where key images parallel the text and music. The text returns to seeing – “Seht! Fühlt und seht ihr’s nicht?” – and closes off this trope in the number. Roddam literalizes it with a side close-up of the man craning his neck to get a better look. Meanwhile, the music funnels towards a big change. A progression through seventh-chords lands on an expectant augmented-sixth chord at the end of m. 28 before it goes to a B 6–4 sonority in m. 29 (see Ex. 2.1). This



Fig. 2.1 Tunnel view of Las Vegas strip in the "Liebestod" segment of *Aria*.

musical funneling is paralleled by a fabulous point-of-view tunnel shot down the gulch of the Las Vegas strip (see Fig. 2.1). The world is closing in on them.

The world opens up at m. 29, the fourth section; or rather, the lovers feel less confined psychologically. For the first time (or second, if you count the brief image at the start) they are in an interior space and bounded by walls, a place where they shut out the world and turn inward. The initial image, timed precisely with the resolution on the downbeat, returns to the segment's opening shot and creates a flashback. Standing at the window a moment, the young man seems to reflect on what he has witnessed – what we have just seen in the desert with him and his lover, and what the vocal narrator has been uttering in the admonition to see. Now they act instead of observe. This section, the longest of Roddam's "Liebestod," shows them making passionate love (see Fig. 2.2). The decorum and boundaries of everything previous disappear as they strip naked and perform the act with abandon – all this as Wagner's music and text intensify towards the ecstatic. The explicit sex occupies a long stretch of filmic time and is the focus of a synaesthetic shooting style. The scene teems with charged colors, supposedly from flashing neon lights outside, and they play on the faces and bodies. Sometimes a filter is applied, as when the woman's face assumes a blueish cast in the throes of passion. Soft focus further



Fig. 2.2 James Mathers and Bridget Fonda in the “Liebestod” segment of *Aria*

highlights pleasure. The expressive style marks a big change from the crisp montage in desert and city.

Although this section has a more active and improvisational feel to the images, the placement of shots is as methodical as before. The couple start kissing at the phrase that begins with “Wonne” (“rapture”), in m. 34. Sexual penetration occurs during the line “in mich dringet” (“penetrating me”). Not coincidentally, both places usher in new musical gestures and act as major markers in the musical flow. The next big moment occurs at the downbeat of m. 44. A new stanza of text starts with “Heller schallend” (“ringing out more brightly”), and the harmony resolves a big run-up that moves towards B major but settles deceptively on E (see [Ex. 2.2](#)). In contrast with previous music, the vocal line now swings widely as it proclaims the clarion call of the text. Visually, the camera switches position at the downbeat and shows the couple falling back on the bed that very moment – an effect as gestural and exuberant as the expansive energy in the music.

Tension mounts as a bottle falls and shatters, and a few measures later the man reaches down and picks up a shard. Meanwhile the music is surging towards climax over the relentless F sharp pedal. Section v links the run-up to the resolution with a breathtaking change of location: an extraordinary tunnel shot down a corridor with the couple in



Ex. 2.2 "Liebestod," mm. 42-45.

a bathtub at the end (see Fig. 2.3). It extends a bit over a measure and moves quite fast, forming a huge contrast with the preceding visual style. The speed brilliantly captures the almost-bursting musical tension of the climactic dominant prolongation and the "Liebestod" as a whole. The claustrophobic zoom (or tracking shot) reaches its goal precisely at the musical climax on "Welt" ("world") at the downbeat of m. 61. At that moment, Roddam has the woman sit up abruptly in reaction to slitting her wrists – a lurching gesture that parallels the lurching leap in the vocal line and the upper orchestral melody. Two measures later, when the harmony restarts the two-measure progression of E to B, the camera comes close-in as the man slowly cuts a vein in his arm with the glass. This is wonderful but horrifying, and I'm probably not alone in feeling my stomach turn over. When the harmony returns once again to E (m. 65), we see a close-up of blood drops on the white floor beside the tub. Over the extended pedal on E the couple hold each other as life ebbs away. The return of B at m. 70 brings a close-up of blood streaming down one of their backs as they embrace. Over the next three measures, as the music continues to wane, we see an



Fig. 2.3 Tunnel view of James Mathers and Bridget Fonda in the “Liebestod” segment of *Aria*.

early-morning street shot of one of the slot-machine ladies and a brief look at blood going down the drain. All is coming to rest.

At m. 74 (Section vi), just before the final “Tristan” progression, the scene returns to the desert. At the pickup the camera shows us their car from the rear on the open road (see Fig. 2.4). Inside we see what look like the backs of their heads, but we cannot be sure. The camera follows them for two measures, and over the final three measures creates a glorious effect as the car appears to accelerate away. Technically the camera goes forward more slowly than before, and as a result the car seems to move faster. The shot accomplishes wonders. It creates irony with the slow pace of the music in its final chords, and implies that the couple are driving ever faster to escape the tyranny of the world. As mentioned, we are unsure of what is happening. But whether it is filmic fantasy or characters’ transfiguration, that final shot is unforgettable.¹⁹

Hearing

I have said that music precedes image in Roddam’s segment, which implies that they are separate. But the situation is more complex. In the first half (Sections I to III) the musical text focuses on seeing,



Fig. 2.4 Final shot in the "Liebestod" segment of *Aria*.

and that is what the characters do; they look and observe what is around them. Even though they seem to be listening to the words of the music, there still seems to be a separation between music and image.

That changes in the second half (Sections IV to VI), which opens with a new sensory element, as the text engages hearing: "Höre ich nur diese Weise." It goes on to immerse itself in the sounds and sounding of this "Weise" – a tune of yore that in this case may be the "Liebestod" itself as Roddam's segment affirms the iconic status of Wagner's *Verklärung* ("Transfiguration," the original name). Hence the "Liebestod" appears to be referenced in this call to hear. Another key element is that the text becomes personal – Isolde herself hears the olden tune. For the Roddam the sounds and related text-images enter and come out of the first-person narrator, the singer. They penetrate the characters in the synaesthetically saturated visualization of sex and ecstasy, and later death. In the first half of the segment they were observers, just seeing, while here they are agents of action, personalizing the vocal message of music-and-text and fusing with it. In a related vein, Lawrence Kramer notes that in the opera Isolde gives herself up to the purely musical in the "Liebestod," to its performative nature.²⁰ By extension, we might say that in *Aria* the lovers internalize the music as sensuality and give themselves entirely to the

performance of sex. They are performing the music, and by virtue of that they are definitely hearing it.

Another aspect of their hearing the music in Sections iv to vi involves time. This second half occurs in the present, not the past, unlike the desert and city portions. After “Höre ich nur diese Weise” the “Liebestod”’s text offers more of a present, as Isolde expresses her current state and move toward transfiguration. This heightens the aesthetic tie between the singer and the words, and by extension the characters and the music. In addition, more than in the first half, one senses that only the lovers hear the music – that the hermetic world, lacking outside noise, that Roddam creates is even more solipsistic than before, as the music fuses with the characters. They are “cocooned” in themselves and parallel Isolde’s ecstatic journey. In the film, the retreat from the world is brilliantly conveyed through the tunnel shots that trace their claustrophobia and inward-moving psychic journey. Occurring at key moments, as described above, they promote the idea that the characters are removed and exist in an aesthetic realm with the music.

To return to an earlier question, I believe that music still precedes image in the second half, but only slightly. The move towards music’s fusion with the characters blurs distinctions between them, and we might say that Wagner’s drive to encompass the entire “Welt” by the end is beautifully realized in Roddam’s work. Moreover, if the “Liebestod” traces a progression towards full immersion in what music is, namely the purely aesthetic, then Roddam accomplishes this with his musically informed visualization. That he was an operatic novice seems astonishing given the outcome, and perhaps we owe a lot to cinematographer Elmes for the sophisticated rendition of Wagner’s work.

Film music, intermediality

Standard film-music functions are defined in relation to the diegesis, loosely defined as the story or narrative. This presents a challenge with respect to Roddam’s segment (and *Aria* generally). The story in

the "Liebestod" segment, as we have seen, is bound up very closely with the music – is in fact generated by it – and it is hard to separate them from each other. The *Aria* project pointedly foregrounds opera as the *raison d'être* for images and story, and so the music is integral to everything. Strikingly, in Roddam's segment music and story form an interactive relationship with each other, which is another reason they cannot be easily disentangled. In light of such an unusual relationship it is hard to apply the traditional framework of film-music functions. This is true even if we devise offshoots to the diegetic–nondiegetic dyad, such as the category of psychodiegetic, discussed elsewhere in the book,²¹ because such extradiegetic categories also work in relation to the diegesis. And because the diegesis encompasses music in Roddam's "Liebestod," at least to some degree, functions based in diegesis do not really apply.

Perhaps opera-film, a genre generated by opera music and built entirely on it, could provide an alternative model.²² Film-music functions based on diegesis do not apply to opera-film because its main discourse is music, and the question of location with respect to the diegesis is irrelevant. How does the Roddam fare with this model? In Roddam's "Liebestod" music is fundamental, but not exclusively the main discourse. It avoids a defining feature of opera-film, namely opera's performative element. While the Roddam has important connections with Wagner's music, which we have discussed, the two are still farther apart from each other than are the filmic and musical styles in opera-film. Indeed, even opera-films that foreground gaps between image and music, such as Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal*, display a more integral link to performance traditions than does the Roddam.²³ Thus it is only mildly helpful to have the model of opera-as-the-main-discourse replace the system of film-music categories.

Perhaps the idea of the soundtrack offers a better framework for Roddam's "Liebestod." The term has expanded considerably since its earlier use as music written by a film composer for a movie. In recent years, soundtrack has come to embrace any music in a film, including diegetic pieces and pre-existing music.²⁴ This flexible model avoids the Procrustean bed of diegesis. Its spaciousness accommodates the

kind of interactive music/story encounter found in “Liebestod.” If we wanted to apply a label, we could term the music-film component an interactive soundtrack. And if we wanted to acknowledge the generative force of the pre-existent music, we could call it an operatic interactive soundtrack. Other terms could no doubt be devised. The main point for the Roddam is that the music functions in a special way in relation to the film, and we should go beyond the traditional system based in diegesis.

The intermedial situation, however, is rather clear. The self-conscious aim behind *Aria* of a film built on operatic music suggests that each medium is prominent and recognizable. In the Roddam the signifiers of opera and of film are intact and dominant, and the properties of each medium remain quotable. In Wolf’s system this qualifies as overt intermediality. But might the situation be more complex? After all, we saw how opera generates image, and how the focus on hearing in the second half could imply that music engulfs image. Despite this musical spotlight, however, film retains its independence and holds its own with its signifiers remaining dominant. As we know, film in general can embrace a variety of styles. Since Roddam’s “Liebestod” certainly comes across as film, its somewhat unusual music–film relationship does not tip the balance away from film. Wolf’s overt category is indeed appropriate.

RUSSELL’S “NESSUN DORMA”

Ken Russell (b. 1927), the director of the segment on “Nessun dorma,” evinces a different relationship to opera from that of Franc Roddam. An aficionado of classical music and a director of many staged opera productions, Russell boasts an impressive catalogue of films devoted to classical music. Most are biographical, and they range from movies of performers, as in *Lisztomania* (1975), to what has become his stock-in-trade, bio-pics of composers, which include works for television and for cinema. For television, which meant the BBC before a parting of the ways in 1970, selected titles include *Portrait of a Soviet Composer* (1961, on Prokofiev), *Elgar* (1962, and for another network

in 1984), and the highly satirical work *The Dance of the Seven Veils: A Comic Strip in Seven Episodes on the Life of Richard Strauss* (1970). For cinema, two famous composer bio-pics are *The Music Lovers* (1970), based on Tchaikovsky, and *Mahler* (1974). Russell has also directed a so-called rock opera (*Tommy*, 1974); bio-pics of other artists, as in his 1966 television film *Isadora Duncan: The Biggest Dancer in the World*; and mainstream movies, such as *Women in Love* (1969), which earned him international renown as a director. Of special interest for the *Aria* project is his promotional rock video for Andrew Lloyd Webber's new musical *Phantom of the Opera*, which Russell filmed as he was shooting "Nessun dorma."

Russell has always generated controversy. In the belief that straight historical re-creations are deadly dull, he enlivens the past through titillating effects and fictional events that grab viewers' attention, including nudity, explicit sex, crude juxtapositions, irreverent dialogue, and satire. Russell's critics charge him with debasing history and exploiting the past for the sake of notoriety. Yet Russell has drawn praise for fresh insights into composers' lives, especially the neglected British figures Edward Elgar and Frederick Delius. He also broke ground in historical re-creation when he insisted on using actors to portray historical figures, a practice previously banned by the BBC. Controversy aside, Russell exhibits a keen sensitivity to music and uses it to fine advantage in his work. As Joseph Horowitz has observed, "Only Stanley Kubrick, among major contemporary filmmakers, treats music with something like the respect and understanding Russell accords it."²⁵

Russell offers a clue to his iconoclasm with a witty description of how he came to do "Nessun dorma":

When Don [Boyd] handed me the RCA music catalogue and told me to take my pick I expected an embarrassment of riches, but the classical section was disappointingly small and by the time nine other directors had got there before me most of the goodies had gone. Top of my shortlist was "One Fine Day" ["Un bel dì"] from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, which I had produced [i.e. directed] on three continents with the help of a young friend who had recently met her death in a car crash. On brooding over the enigma of her short life, however, another Puccini



Fig. 2.5 Linzi Drew at the opening of the “Nessun dorma” segment of *Aria*.

opera came to mind: *Turandot* – a tale of love and death in Old Peking. So I chose the aria “Nessun dorma” (“None shall sleep”) which concerns the identity of a mysterious stranger. Is he life or is he death? That became the theme of my nine-minute scenario, which I eventually shot in a primitive studio on the Thames at Battersea.²⁶

The segment stars pin-up model Linzi Drew in a two-part scenario that corresponds to the music. Part one is the instrumental music with choral interjections that opens Act III, and part two is what follows, the aria “Nessun dorma.” In part one the blonde bombshell appears in fantastic visuals that resemble dream or hallucination. First she floats in a skimpy costume with Saturn-like disks around her neck (see Fig. 2.5). One eye has a large smudge around it, and glistening gems adorn her face. Soon black figures come towards her to bedeck her body with jewels. A black man becomes prominent through an astral-themed looking glass that magnifies his eye. By the end of part one a glass crown is placed on her head and she becomes frightened as the figures approach head-on. They are agents of some magical or primitive ritual, and the black man especially arouses dread (see Fig. 2.6). Perhaps she fears torture, rape, or sacrifice, and the mood recalls Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. In the Russell white society’s fear of the black Other, by way of a white woman before a black man, is foregrounded. As the music of part one comes to a close, a white-jeweled



Fig. 2.6 Point-of-view shot of priest and assistants in the "Nessun dorma" segment of *Aria*.

disk approaches her mouth and turns into a flaming branding iron. At the resolution to G major and the stability of "Nessun dorma," the disk becomes the kiss of her lover to her lips.

With part two everything changes. Now we see the woman in a real setting, the badly injured victim of a car crash. Retrospectively we sense that part one was her hallucinations. The female medical attendants, who are black, were the priestesses of her fantasy, and the rivers of blood on her body the red jewels applied to her torso. After she is taken by stretcher into the hospital, the physician turns out to be the same black man who was the priest. The woman is still afraid of him. For example, the glinting scalpel he wields is shown close against his eyes above the surgical mask. It is hard to know if this is drug-induced fantasy or what she actually sees, and Russell seems to suggest that the line between reality and fantasy is irrelevant in terms of racial fears, for they are everpresent. Soon the woman's EKG becomes flat, and she is revived by electrical shock to her ample naked chest – a gratuitous effect worthy of Russell's sensationalist bent. On the second try she returns to life, and the message of triumph in "vincerò" heard on the soundtrack wins the day. Eyes open and she smiles. The end.

The segment's mixed time frames, or in this case real time with hallucination, links it to its predecessor. Other similarities occur. Both

feature blood, emphasize red as a visual theme, and make use of a car, although towards different ends. In “Liebestod” the vehicle serves as an inhabited space that is used as a way to get from here to there and from which to survey societal decay. In the Russell it appears only briefly, at the crash site, its sexy red (!) sporting a flamboyant emblem on the hood. Perhaps the most obvious thread comes through their succession. After the “Liebestod” couple drive into the sunset, the floating figure of “Nessun dorma” could be a post-death transfigured version of humanity, or even of the blonde woman just expired. She could also be the center of a mystical transfiguration in some far-off place that bridges death with a return to life.

The music at the start of the Russell furthers the impression of a linear connection between the segments. Puccini’s music from the start of Act III of *Turandot* seems to evoke a transfigured state in a sonic language that is vague, wandering, and static. Just like the floating woman with wavy arms, the musical surface undulates but goes nowhere. It lacks tonal direction, features repetitive phrase-groups that circle back on themselves, and consists of core sonorities that underpin everything. Such an Eastern aesthetic, entirely apt in the context of *Turandot*, resembles the state of being lost in a fog and not finding markers to reach secure ground. Viewed in this light, Russell’s meandering imagery is utterly appropriate to the music.

The music of part one is remarkable. [Example 2.3](#) shows the first statement of the core pattern that is repeated many times.²⁷ Basically it consists of a vertical sonority that stays intact intervallically as it moves to various pitch levels. The wholesale transfer belongs to a process of planing that creates stasis. The chord itself consists of a minor triad with a superimposed major triad at the dissonant interval of a major seventh. In their important study of *Turandot*, William Ashbrook and Harold Powers deploy the term “bicentrism” for this passage.²⁸ Although it could be called bitonality, I prefer bicentrism because it bypasses the suggestion of mainstream modernist practice in favor of something more individual. In this passage, tonal direction is avoided in the movement of the outer voices, where intervallic succession organizes the music. The upper part spans a tritone, C sharp down



Ex. 2.3 *Turandot*, start of Act III, mm. 1–5.

to G, that disrupts a sense of key. In addition, the asymmetric phrase length of five measures encourages ambiguity. While the next phrase adds some variety – the upper triad is augmented in three of the five measures, and the melody changes direction – the affect remains one of uncertainty and inertia. The only break comes with the vocal interjections and the temporary elimination of the vertical dissonance. But the bicentric fog returns and nothing much changes. It is telling that Ashbrook and Powers characterize the entire introductory section as bicentric by virtue of the prevailing sonority.²⁹

A big change occurs with the aria. The fog lifts, and suddenly all is clear as tonal syntax and directionality are put in place. Opera as opera emerges strongly as the soaring tenor voice (Jussi Bjoerling) replaces the descriptive instrumental music, which resembles typical film music. Even the choral comments of part one evade organized operatic discourse in their speech-like character. In this regard it is fitting that Russell connects a restoration of opera proper to a restoration of reality in the story. Musically, dominant–tonic progressions establish a clear key center, and the double-strophe form lends order to what seemed aimless before. We take comfort in the rich Puccinian sound of doubled or tripled strings on the vocal line – the *sviolinata*

effect for which he is renowned – especially in the second half of each stanza. Just as the music has cleared up previous ambiguity, so the images proceed logically to the end-point of the triumphant narrative as life returns.

Larger aesthetic issues

In the second part of the segment the visuals accompany the music. Music comes first, as per the guiding mission of *Aria*, and the aria's mantra "... and no one shall sleep" appears prominently on the opening screen.³⁰ In part one, however, the descriptive instrumental music that resembles a film score makes the music-image relationship more ambiguous, and it is difficult or even pointless to determine which precedes the other. This is one way in which the music of Russell's segment operates differently from the Roddam. Of course, Russell's sequence is built on a very different musical base: two contrasting sections, not one continuous span with an essentially uniform style. The larger aesthetic of the two pieces is quite different – the one Wagnerian metaphysics at its most Schopenhauerian, the other Puccinian lyricism suffused with exoticism and hints of modernism. In addition, the music of each functions differently in its opera. The "Liebestod," at the end of *Tristan und Isolde*, serves as climax, culmination, and resolution of a four-hour-plus foray into desire denied. "Nessun dorma" and its lead-in merely begin an act and occur *in media res*. Although the aria represents the hero's big moment and asserts his intention to prevail, the opera's plot is far from resolved. In the larger comparison, the apocalyptic "Liebestod" provides spiritual catharsis and the Puccini excerpt entertaining fantasy and pleasing music. The aria proclaims a quotidian triumph, grounded in the here and now, and nothing more.

Unlike Roddam's "Liebestod," particularly its second half, characters in the Russell do not seem to hear the music. Music and story proceed in separate tracks and avoid merging with each other. In part one the music evinces an accompanimental role as it parallels and fills out the affective contour of the narrative. In part two the separation

seems even stronger as music and story each seems complete within itself and there is little sense of merging or fusing discourses. Voice remains voice, with fully formed melody and syntax, in music that viewers instantly recognize as a World-Famous Tenor Aria. Russell’s characters appear to be oblivious to the aria’s sounds, and the sort of synaesthetic fusion we saw in the “Liebestod” is absent. In contrast to the move to the performative in the “Liebestod,” Puccini’s aria retains its integrity as a discrete piece of music. The performative enters only through the act of performing, not by way of the aesthetic nature of the music.

We noted how Roddam’s staging of the “Liebestod” features very close ties to the music. Russell’s segment, in contrast, represents more of a generalized visualization of the music. For example, the protagonist’s psychological stasis in part one corresponds in a general way to the musical style: the woman floating aimlessly is set to undulating music that goes nowhere. But a few places exhibit close connections to the music. In part one the black priest is often highlighted at an important musical place. When the chorus of heralds enter with the Princess’s order – “Così commanda Turandot” (“Thus ordered Turandot”) – the priest’s eye is magnified full-screen as a menacing gaze. A similar image occurs when they enter next with “Pena la morte” (“On pain of death”). In these music–image connections the black man signifies authority: the exotic-one-in-power, as is Turandot in the opera. Russell also reacts to details of orchestration. Many iterations of the core motive (see [Ex. 2.3](#)) add a glockenspiel and celeste on certain offbeats to further exoticize the sound. When this occurs after the first choral entrance, Russell literalizes the sound in the image through a visual sparkle on the gems that is nothing short of alliteration – as if the heard “ping” is the seen “bling” of the jewels. He also capitalizes on the text’s imagery of the mouth. In part two, near the end of the first stanza there occurs the line “sulla tua bocca lo dirò” (“on your mouth I’ll tell you”), which relates to the pivot that converts a branding iron to a lover’s kiss. A bit later, the second stanza begins with “Ed il mio bacio” (“And my kiss”). Not only does it relate to the earlier kiss we saw, but Russell

gives a near-literal image as a black oxygen mask is applied to her mouth when the line is sung. For the woman this serves as memory of both the fantasy and her lover's kiss.

Russell's segment shares many features with MTV, especially in part one, where static music and narrative non sequiturs create a sense of atemporality. Tense, order, and causation are minimal, and we do not know how to make sense of what we see. This resembles MTV and its tendency to subvert temporal logic. Cultural theorist E. Ann Kaplan talks about MTV's "timeless present" in which "there is one time continuum in which all exists: past, present, and future do not indicate major time barriers, but rather a time band upon which one can call at will."³¹ Russell taps into this aesthetic with a timeless present built on primitive ritual, contemporary sexuality, and futuristic decoration, the last a characteristic look of many music videos.³² As in MTV, titillating female sexuality plays a central role in the Russell. The feminist argument over whether such display of the female body represents exploitation or sexual liberation is still being debated.³³ Suffice it to say that using a pin-up star as the lead and having her naked breasts heave under electroshock therapy is titillating (pun intended) and on the edge of bad taste. This has as much to do with Russell's affinity for sensationalism as it does with MTV.

The style of MTV also informs the segment's spatial arrangement. We encounter an ambiguous sense of place, minimal perspective robs us of a feel for distances, and the plain background keeps us in a fog, especially in part one. These traits fit Kaplan's description of music videos, where the "world looks like noplac... without boundaries, definition, or recognizable location."³⁴ The images presented by Russell focus on objects in close-up and fragment them into isolated bits that confuse meaning. With only partial knowledge of what is happening, we experience a desire for resolution. Part two fulfills our wish to some extent, but its residual fantasy may leave us unsettled. Such angst may be triggered by a major theme I mentioned briefly: white society's fear of the racial Other. Although a daring notion for mainstream idioms in the 1980s, Russell found a way for opera to convey this sort of social criticism. I will return to this when I

discuss exoticism. For the moment we can state that the strategy owes a lot to the freedoms afforded by the music-video format and popular culture in general.

Russell's statement on how he decided on "Nessun dorma" mentions the "mysterious stranger" as an idea that intrigued him. In the opera the score designates the figure as "Il principe ignoto" – the unknown or nameless male lead. Is this the black man in the segment? This is certainly possible, and while his identity appears to be cleared up in part two – he is the surgeon in the operating room – the aura of the unknowable Other still inheres in his persona. Or might the mysterious stranger be a kind of super-narrator, the voice in the aria? Or does some combination of the two make sense? I find the last idea attractive, for it gives voice to a key narrative strand and affirms the aria's message that no one shall sleep – or in this case, no one shall die. While this might appear to contradict my earlier point that music and story are separate, what I am suggesting is something subtle, more of an impression than a certainty. There is no clear link between any on-screen character and the singer, and "voice" refers to a general narrative position rather than a literal singing voice. Therefore, the aria remains intact as a Great Tenor Aria.

In the segment, meanwhile, the mysterious stranger takes charge as he treats the woman. This parallels the opera's plot, where Calaf, "l'ignoto," is on the way to assuming control over the person in power, Princess Turandot. Both Russell's woman and Turandot end up victorious (Turandot wins even as she loses), and both have undergone transformation through a mysterious stranger. Russell answers his query "Is he life or is he death?" with a strong affirmation of life, and in the larger arc of *Aria* the segment pointedly restores life after the death-suffused ending of the "Liebestod."

Earlier we discussed film-music functions in Roddam's segment and proposed an interactive model based on the soundtrack. The situation in the Russell is in some ways simpler, in other ways as complex. With a minimum of interaction between music and story, the "Nessun dorma" segment entails significantly fewer precise alignments and exchanges than the Roddam. Russell's part one seems like

nondiegetic music because its instrumental music fulfills the same sort of descriptive role that nondiegetic music does in regular film. Parallelism obtains between music and story in their mood and affect, and only a few of the imitative “mickey-mousing” effects found in classic Hollywood scores make an appearance.³⁵ Opera seems to be absent in this almost entirely instrumental section, and only opera fans will recognize it as opera music. As a practical matter, however, the stated purpose of *Aria* as a film of operatic excerpts contradicts the observation. By the time viewers arrive at this eighth segment and see Puccini’s name on the opening screen, they will categorize the heard music as opera and not film music. Even if the segment is excerpted from the rest, the composer’s name appears at the start. Of course, if the viewer does not recognize the name, the opening music will seem nondiegetic.³⁶

With the aria’s arrival in part two the functioning changes. The film’s explicit goal of presenting opera is actualized in this Great Tenor Aria, whose style is paradigmatic Italian opera and whose vocal sound is almost an exaggerated symbol of opera. The music seems to fall under the opera-film model in which music’s function is neither inside nor outside the diegesis. Obviously the tie to opera-film is limited because no visual performance or simulated performance occurs, and the MTV influence renders it quite different from opera-film. Ultimately we may have to conclude that film-music functions do not apply to this situation and their application risks distorting the actual behavior of music in relation to story.

The intermedial situation for Russell’s segment is interesting. While the prominent participation of opera in the Roddam made for dominant signifiers in both opera and film throughout the segment, Russell’s visualization is less consistent. Part one can be interpreted in two ways. If one dispenses with the knowledge that *Aria* consists of opera, one will hear the instrumental first part as ordinary film music. This means that the music belongs to the medial realm of film, and opera’s signifiers lose their meaning as opera or at best become subordinate to those of film. With these signifiers so devoid of operatic meaning the encounter creates covert intermediality. In part two,

however, the intermedial situation changes to overt intermediality. As mentioned several times, the aria "Nessun dorma" signifies strongly as opera, and opera and film each emerge independently in their own right. With each medium recognizable and quotable, and minimal movement towards one enfoldng the other in its semiotic system, the opera/film interface qualifies as overt intermediality.

Exoticism

Russell's "Nessun dorma" is by far the most exotic portion of *Aria*. Exoticism does not color the entire sequence but only the first half, although the second half includes flashes to the earlier style. As we have seen, the first section displays close ties to an exotic musical style that avoids tonal direction and glories in stasis. Visually it offers fragmented, far-flung images that subvert comprehension and instill desires for utopian pleasure through its ambiguous location, seductive surfaces, unfettered social boundaries, and hints of transgressive sex. This far-away place of the imagination represents a standard MTV technique. Russell's emphasis on disconnection, fantasy, and pleasure arguably renders his segment the one that best fulfills *Aria*'s mission of converting opera into MTV and attracting large audiences for opera.

Beyond the film the segment highlights exoticism in Puccini's opera, and in this way affirms Puccini's practice. However, Russell seems to be criticizing exoticism by the way he stages exoticism. The opera *Turandot* takes place in olden China, and specifically China as represented in an Italian-language opera. Hence Puccini comes to the project as an outsider, much as in Gozzi's relationship to his Chinese fairy tale, which is the remote source for the libretto. Although Russell's scene does not take place in China, its setting in some imaginary exotic time and place affords the director the opportunity to replicate an outsider's relationship to his material. Russell also establishes an outsider relationship in the plot. Unlike the usual black-person-white-person scenario, here the white woman is the outsider and the vulnerable person. She is frightened of the black figures, especially the

man, and as mentioned earlier she seems to imagine rape or torture. Although her fears are overcome, their resolution comes by way of a return to the present that feels like a *deus ex machina* rescue. As a result we may well believe that the hazy first part is the actual reality and the second part the fiction. That the woman is ultimately calmed of her fears does not change the fact of her anxiety in part one and some of part two.

By showing the West's fear of black culture Russell is affirming its existence – the recognition that Western culture feels the need to place Others into an exoticized role, as different. The affirmation takes place by using exoticism as an expressive and interpretive device – Russell deploys exoticism in order to criticize it. This is a daring maneuver, for the use of a negative device runs the risk of further spreading its harm. Yet no objectification or condescension arises in the representation of minority culture in the segment. Orientalism, or the negative Othering of marginalized groups, is avoided, and Russell stages a successful act of social criticism.

Russell's project echoes Paul Robinson's theory of exoticism, which argues that the deployment of an idiom with such negative implications can be used to criticize that idiom. Robinson makes his case in connection with Verdi's *Aida*.³⁷ Conceived as a rebuttal to Edward Said's view of the opera as Orientalist exploitation by a composer from an imperialist culture, Robinson's theory holds that Verdi criticizes the colonialist content of the opera. He accomplishes this by way of archaic music that reveals the inhumanity of the Egyptian priests, and a sympathetic portrayal of the Ethiopians whose plight resembles that of the colonized Italian people in Verdi's time. Whether or not one agrees with Robinson, it is worthwhile to mention an Orientalist film of *Aida* that contrasts sharply with Russell's approach to exoticism. Clemente Fracassi's kitsch *Aida* of 1953, with a voluptuous Sophia Loren who lip-synchs to Renata Tebaldi's voice, offers a caricatured portrayal of the Ethiopians as dark Africans who are sex objects or primitive barbarians. The film lacks a critical viewpoint and amounts to a third-rate imitation of Hollywood Bible-epics, which were popular at the time. As I have stated elsewhere, were it

not such a poor movie there would be a pressing need to engage its Orientalism in a serious way.³⁸ As it stands, Fracassi's *Aida* is useful for demonstrating the gulf in filmed opera between a mindless Othering of non-Western populations through exoticism, and Russell's critical use of exoticism to expose its negative meanings.³⁹

Russell's segment has more to tell us about the exoticism of its source opera. The exotic quality of *Turandot* can fade after repeated viewings as our growing familiarity naturalizes the idiom into mainstream Western style. It may take something like Zubin Mehta's 1998 production in Beijing, directed by Chinese film director Zhang Yimou, to recuperate exoticism and underscore the Chinoiserie of the story and Puccini's score.⁴⁰ I recently revisited the production on DVD and was amazed that Puccini's music, which basically signifies Italian opera, is not dissonant with this authentic setting, but quite the opposite. Imperial China as a "set" makes *Turandot* more glorious and meaningful than ever. Russell's "Nessun dorma" seems to accomplish much the same thing, but in a different way, as pop culture opens a door on Puccini's exoticism and reinforces its importance to *Turandot*. While some purists might wince at Russell's setting (and at others in *Aria*), the director gets to the heart of what the opera is about as he deconstructs, and implicitly critiques, the premise of exoticism upon which it is built. This is quite a feat.

When the segment was made Russell directed another short film that foregrounds exoticism: a promotional rock video for Andrew Lloyd Webber's upcoming show *Phantom of the Opera*.⁴¹ It features the title song in a fantastic MTV style. The story centers on an opera diva in skimpy Oriental garb who travels to the Phantom's realm below. Female sexuality is prominently displayed and closely linked with Otherness. Unlike the "Nessun dorma" sequence, exoticism serves as titillating decoration, instills far-flung desires, and avoids critical engagement. With lip-synched words, the video is meant to promote the song as an individual number and showcase the star power of singer Sarah Brightman. In these ways the work fits squarely in the MTV category. Although we have seen how MTV informs the "Nessun dorma" visualization, the rock video demonstrates the limits

of that influence and the ways in which opera's seriousness tempers MTV's role in *Aria*.

I would like to conclude the discussion of the Russell with a few observations. Russell's narrative of a return to life replicates what was happening with Puccini at this stage of his career: a fascinating echo of the director's general interest in composer biography. In the years before *Turandot* Puccini underwent a challenging period in which he worried about his compositional abilities, faced serious personal problems, and found it difficult to find a suitable project. Although he would never live to complete the work, *Turandot* became his return to creative life, and its staying power in the repertoire has helped keep his reputation alive. *Turandot* has not always had an easy time on the stage, however. As Alexandra Wilson points out, the coldness of the title character has drawn sharp criticism since the work's premiere. As everything revolves around her, the opera has been attacked as silly and ineffective.⁴² In this context, Russell's segment serves as a resexualizing of the icy princess that restores her to womanly life and repairs the reputation of the opera. This analogy between film and opera resonates in a special way for Puccini because the composer's music has been likened to film music. Indeed, Wilson proposes film music as a workable model for interpreting the music of this under-analyzed composer whose pretty tunes have damaged his credibility with serious scholars, at least until recently.⁴³ Russell's treatment may not always use the operatic music as film music per se, at least in the usual way the term is understood. But in this pointed marriage of operatic music and filmic image, the project more than carries out the spirit of Puccini's close connection to film.⁴⁴

A TALE OF TWO SEGMENTS

As we approach chapter's end, Roger Ebert's words from the beginning are worth revisiting: "At the end of *Aria* one must decide, I suppose, what it all means." One issue raised by the film concerns the interplay between the part and the whole, and I see *Aria* in a positive tension between the two. The film is neither purely postmodernist

with an emphasis on the fragment, nor modernist with an insistence on some unified whole. As we have seen, "Liebestod" and "Nessun dorma" stand as complete works by themselves yet form a striking narrative connection that links them and impacts the entire film. Does this connection contradict the idea of the fragment behind the project? Not really. For one thing, other mini-narratives and relationships appear in the film. For example, Temple's segment on *Rigoletto*, which comes fourth in *Aria*, uses a tacky setting in the American West, the Madonna Inn in San Luis Obispo, California, that resembles the tacky Las Vegas location of Roddam's "Liebestod." In a similar vein, Beresford's portion on Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, in fifth position, echoes the idea of death that is strongly conveyed in the Roddam. In affirming that the Roddam culminates much of what preceded it in *Aria*, the sampling sends a cautionary message about passing over meaningful connections for the sake of theoretical purity.

Thus, the operative model for *Aria* entails the fragment as the main unit, which is juxtaposed with stylistically unrelated fragments, and the resultant collection forming narrative connections that create a larger arc for the whole. We might theorize this larger arc as operatic in its own right: a collection of diverse dramatic moments whose succession we absorb in some order that could be considered operatic. This renders *Aria* a film with an operatic style on the larger level. Beyond this operatic quality, the organization may recall classical arcs in theater, literature, and the like. The climactic segment of the "Liebestod" arrives approximately three-quarters through the film. Although this is not squarely the Golden Mean, it acts in a similar way. Yet as suggested earlier, the film is steeped in the individual fragment and each stands on its own as a discrete work. This fundamental duality could provide a model for imaginative opera/film encounters in the future. In fact, it already exists. If one downloads individual filmed numbers, for instance, from *YouTube*, onto an iPod, one can shuffle or otherwise order them and create new narratives at will.

Russell's "Nessun dorma" segment embodies the concept of the individual number. Does its concluding cry of "vincerò" proclaim a resuscitation of opera? Does it exalt the individual number as the

savior of opera – not merely through the media download, but more generally as the Great Tenor Aria? The two are connected, but I would like to keep them separate for a bit. And I would like to return to *Aria* and what happens after the Russell. The next two segments continue the idea of the individual number by showcasing the opera singer. In no. 9, the aria “Depuis le jour” from Charpentier’s *Louise* forms the backdrop for a former opera singer, now an old woman, fantasizing stage bows from her former life (she also flashes to her earlier love life, on a beach). In the concluding tenth segment the clown of the inter-story lip-synchs “Vesti la giubba” on a deserted stage to a scratchy recording of Caruso’s voice. Tracing an arc of decline as they lament a better time, they seem to say that the victory cry of no. 8 is hollow. Nonetheless, opera’s call-to-life in the “Nessun dorma” segment rings in our ears. We may infer that despite opera’s decline as an institution, at least from the vantage point when *Aria* was made, the power of the voice triumphs along with the cult of operatic personality that goes with it. Caruso’s scratchy voice in no. 10 lives on even as it suggests pastness, and the clown can only mime to the recording and feel defeated. We absorb the message that media representations of opera create a vibrant “afterlife” as they carry on long after their literal life.⁴⁵ And as a media project itself, *Aria* conveys the idea with wry self-reference.

Although *Aria* supposedly abounds in elements of MTV style, much of the film features traditional shooting techniques and rhythms. Even the purportedly “hip” shooting styles and content look tame next to current practices of super-fast montage and cam-rendered sweeps.⁴⁶ Hence *Aria* is dated. It comes from a time when postmodernist aesthetics attracted great interest, but whose features have been integrated into the mainstream and surpassed by newer techniques. Nevertheless, *Aria* is an important marker of 1980s-style media. It also expresses a certain moment in the social position of opera. As noted, many believed that opera was undergoing a decline and needed a boost by branching into popular culture. Certainly, the film’s imaginative approach to MTV led to a re-thinking of what opera can be. But *Aria*’s experimentalism also has roots in full-length opera

on film. In the 1980s opera-film experienced a surge in popularity as many big-budget movies were released, among them Syberberg's *Parsifal*, Rosi's Bizet's *Carmen*, and Zeffirelli's *Traviata* and *Otello*.⁴⁷ A culture of operatic support and openness led to *Aria* just as much as MTV did. We should not overlook this operatic climate in the rush to see *Aria* as a special case defined by popular styles.

To return to Ebert's query yet again, in the end *Aria* can sustain a variety of interpretive views. Its position at the intersection of the part and the whole, and of tradition and the popular, makes it a very special film. Although it never attracted the widespread interest its backers hoped for, *Aria* represents a landmark in the fascinating encounter that is opera and film.

PART II

Subjectivity

3 | Subjectivity in the opera-films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle

Jean-Pierre Ponnelle is one of the most important opera directors of the late twentieth century. From the 1960s through his death in 1988, his work appeared in leading venues across the world, from Salzburg to San Francisco, and he usually served as designer as well as director. Ponnelle's reputation rests on imaginative productions steeped in a thorough knowledge of music, libretto, and cultural context, and an obsessive attention to detail.¹ He was considered a leading interpreter of Mozart, and his twenty-year relationship with the Salzburg Festival led to memorable productions.² In addition, his legendary Monteverdi cycle at Zürich in collaboration with Nikolaus Harnoncourt (1975–77) marked a major moment in the revival of early opera.

Extending his operatic reach to the screen, Ponnelle began a fruitful relationship with Unitel, the German media company, and from 1972 to 1988 they collaborated on sixteen opera-films for television. While many are little more than stage productions captured by the camera, for example *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1972), several make extensive use of cinematic techniques: *Madama Butterfly* (1974), *Le nozze di Figaro* (1976), and *Rigoletto* (1982). Others, such as *Orfeo* (1979) and *Così fan tutte* (1988), feature cinematic touches but remain close to the stage.³ Although a few use real locations (*La clemenza di Tito* [1980] and *Rigoletto*), Ponnelle's work was shot mainly in the studio, a common approach in European televised opera at the time.

Full-length opera-films for cinema blossomed in the late 1970s and 1980s, roughly the heyday of Ponnelle's television films. Unlike many directors of cinema opera, including Joseph Losey, Francesco Rosi, and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Ponnelle minimizes ideology in his opera-films. He does not replace it with an aestheticism found in Franco Zeffirelli's films that promotes visual excess and regressive desires in viewers.⁴ Instead, Ponnelle stresses subjectivity. Broadly

speaking, this means an emphasis on the individual as a thinking, functioning agent. We find out more about character and motivation than we do in most screen operas. Subjects inhabit a specific socio-cultural milieu and may embody elements from the literary source or the era in which the opera was set or composed. Moreover, Ponnelle's subjective emphasis frequently entails a multiplication of narrative strands that allows access to the character from more than one perspective.

Our inquiry concentrates on the many devices Ponnelle uses to stress subjectivity. One consists of camera techniques that highlight the individual, especially point-of-view shots, zooms, differential focus, and sharply angled shots. Another device involves doubling. An element of the story or narrative is doubled – typically through a prop, physical likeness, or imaginary projection – and this intensifies the impact of the original. A third technique involves interior singing: texted music that is heard on the soundtrack but lacks an image of moving lips. Like doubling, interior singing increases the number of narrative strands and opens interpretive possibilities. It also poses intriguing questions about the genre of opera-film and its relationship to film-music functions and to intermediality. Finally, Ponnelle manipulates time to underline subjectivity. This effect occurs on the large and small level, from structure to detail, and affects subjectivity in varied ways. In our discussions of the four techniques, Ponnelle's most cinematic films provide the lion's share of examples: *Madama Butterfly*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Rigoletto*.

The study of subjectivity raises larger issues concerning Ponnelle's relationship to cinema and television, and the link between subjectivity and his work as a whole. Does Ponnelle's emphasis on subjectivity preclude some other emphasis, especially a critical approach practiced by *auteurs* of film? Does a focus on subjectivity have anything to do with the fact that these works are for television rather than cinema? How does a subjective emphasis tie in with the close relationship between music and directing style found in Ponnelle's operatic work? And does Ponnelle's virtuosic visual style make him an *auteur* of opera-film?

In spite of his importance for screen opera, Ponnelle has received much less critical attention than other figures.⁵ This study of subjectivity shines a light on his methods and gives us a better understanding of what makes his style special. In the process we see how a major director of opera-film uses techniques that are characteristic of the genre but depend heavily on film in their treatment of image and music. In this way Ponnelle's work contributes to the larger aim of the volume to plumb the aesthetics of the opera/film encounter in its various incarnations.

CAMERA WORK

Ponnelle was an activist behind the camera. He enjoyed experimentation, especially in the early films, and his visual effects typically serve a greater purpose, be it expressive, dramatic, or musical. Ponnelle considered the camera a musical element, as he stated in 1983:

To me, the language of the camera is like added lines in the score [*Partitur*]. That means that one can and must master this technique musically. I see analogies between the vocabulary of music and that of film. Dynamics in music are similar to tracking shots ["Travellings"], camera movements, zooms, etc., in film. Harmony in music, the vertical, relates to color in film [and] variety in focal adjustment from the whole to the close-up. Musical rhythm corresponds to cutting, which must follow exactly from the score ... It's [important] to preserve the primacy of music. One can also proceed contrapuntally, dialectically.⁶

Although Ponnelle may exaggerate the parallels between the aesthetic properties of music and film, his advocacy of music's central role in visual decisions is striking. Even when his films depart from an affirmative connection and place musical and visual elements in opposition to each other – what he calls a contrapuntal or dialectical approach – viewers sense the musicality of his methods and the ways in which operatic drama is shaped by image and flow.⁷

Like many a classical filmmaker – Welles and Coppola come to mind – Ponnelle set store by the individual shot, including its ability to embrace movement, and he minimized cuts and shot–reverse-shot

sequences.⁸ Ponnelle's preference for *mise-en-scène* over montage may result from the fact that he reportedly used a limited number of cameras. But the variety he achieved suggests that he did not lack for expressive means.⁹ Indeed, repeated viewing encourages admiration for the imaginative links forged between image and drama – connections that underpin Ponnelle's emphasis on subjectivity.

Point-of-view

Point-of-view (POV) is a hallmark of Ponnelle's style and a potent technique for emphasizing subjectivity. It refers to shots that appear to emanate from the eyes of characters in the fiction: "from a character's optical standpoint," as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe it. This heightens subjectivity, "one we might call perceptual subjectivity."¹⁰ A striking instance of POV in Ponnelle occurs in Cio-Cio San's aria "Un bel dì" in *Madama Butterfly*. In this climactic aria, Ponnelle arranges the A section and much of the B section as a dreamy vision focalized through her eyes. We do not see her but only what she is looking at: hazy reeds at the edge of the hill-top. The camera pans gently as she scans the horizon, and we assume her position. It is daring of Ponnelle to show abstract nature instead of the character for such a long stretch, and one reason it works is that the wavy reeds have become thematic. In Act I Pinkerton saw them in a POV shot as the women made their entrance over the hill. Misty reeds also appeared when the lovers consummated their marriage, and as Helen M. Greenwald shrewdly observes, "Un bel dì" is "a fantasy re-enactment of her wedding night."¹¹ Ponnelle makes the link explicit with the recurring image. Nevertheless, the focus on nature at "Un bel dì" marks something new. Cio-Cio San appears soulful, not needy or subservient, even if she is deluding herself. Moreover, the visual change affirms the importance of the aria to her character and the structure of the opera.

Point-of-view also figures prominently near the end of *Butterfly*. When Cio-Cio San spots Pinkerton's wife the image originates in Butterfly. Butterfly stands at the edge of the hill-top, angled from

below (as in the climax of “Un bel dì”), and in a medium long-shot looks down at the stranger. Her shock is heightened because this is the joyous place where she would spot him when he returned. A bit later POV underlines Butterfly’s split identity in the growing crisis. After Butterfly goes in the house, we get a blurred image from her eyes of a Western hut and its icons. While Butterfly earlier honored Christian gods and American symbols here, now the fuzzy POV reveals a shattered world. Soon, accompanied by grim timpani strokes, a strong POV from Butterfly focuses on the Japanese god’s shrine and marks a return to her own culture.

Then comes the *coup de grâce*: a stirring death scene that features a reverse-angled or doubled kind of POV. By this I mean a view of a character who is looking hard at something. We may assume the omniscient viewpoint, or a character may stand in for us. The doubled looking heightens the subjectivity of all concerned, possibly including the outside viewer.¹² In the suicide scene Pinkerton bursts into the room as Butterfly is about to kill herself. In medium close-up the camera fixes on him at the wall as we watch him watching her (she is not in the frame). Then we see Butterfly head-on, knife at throat, with Suzuki standing behind her; we might be watching from Pinkerton’s eyes, but that’s uncertain. The moment of death is shot from Butterfly’s back, and we see Pinkerton in a direct line with her as he gapes at her. We think we are the source of the POV, but our vantage point probably emanates from Suzuki. Perhaps we adopt Suzuki’s subject position to the point of feeling intimately tied to Butterfly; at the very least Suzuki is conduit for some degree of audience identification with her mistress.¹³ Then, as the camera holds steady, we watch from Suzuki’s high angle and see Pinkerton back away in horror towards the outer wall, his eyes glued to the dead Butterfly.¹⁴

Cherubino’s aria “Non so più” in *Figaro* offers another fascinating example of POV. Similar to the reverse-angled technique in *Butterfly*, the camera in “Non so più” shows people from Cherubino’s eyes, and Cherubino from the eyes of another. The confused teenager alternates between interior and regular singing and cannot control how he expresses himself.¹⁵ His visual language is similarly askew, aided



Fig. 3.1 Susanna (Mirella Freni) in a point-of-view shot from Cherubino during “Non so più” in *Le nozze di Figaro*.

by the herky-jerky motion of a hand-held camera and a circling pattern around Susanna. From Cherubino’s eyes we see POV shots of Susanna that register her amusement at his confusion (see Fig.3 1). Her wide-eyed reactions raise the possibility that Cherubino may be projecting onto her his own expectations of her reactions. We also see Cherubino from Susanna’s location. But sometimes the views seem closer to emotional self-imaginings of Cherubino than to images Susanna actually sees. Once again Cherubino projects his instability onto what he thinks Susanna sees of him. This makes the shots a type of POV that entails mental as much as perceptual subjectivity. Either way, we know much more about Cherubino by the end of the scene. An interactive POV has conveyed what a character thinks of himself – a visual ping-pong match that involves the mirroring of a character’s subjectivity. Although mirroring should encourage viewer identification because it strengthens the subject, who is doubled, the erratic camera impedes the connection. Instead, Cherubino seems trapped in his own world, and this is what Mozart’s aria is about. Moreover,

Cherubino's narcissistic qualities in the opera make visual mirroring in his signature aria a brilliant move on Ponnelle's part.¹⁶

Another instance of POV in *Figaro* deserves mention. It occurs in the Act I Trio "Cosa sento," at the start of the second-group key area. Susanna has been thrown off balance by having to counter lies of Don Basilio that now incur the Count's wrath (the Count has just emerged from hiding). As the music modulates to the dominant Susanna leans against a wall, looking woozy, and the camera comes in tight to her eyes. Then, as the F major second group begins, the camera projects POV from those eyes, an out-of-focus close-up of Basilio and the Count. They are like doctors observing her, commenting in musical imitation, "Ah! già svien la poverina!" ("Ah! the poor girl's already fainted"). Certainly Ponnelle could have shown her swoon more directly, and he does that later. The way it is filmed at the start, through Susanna's subject position, makes us complicit in her understanding that these men are cads. It becomes harder for us to remain detached observers.

Zooms and pans

Like POV, zooms figure prominently in Ponnelle's work. Film theorist John Belton's work on the aesthetics and psychology of zooms helps us to understand Ponnelle's practices.¹⁷ Zooms resemble tracking shots in the way the image changes size. But while tracking shots have the camera literally moving (on tracks, hence the name), zooms entail a fixed camera whose lens changes focal length from a larger view to a detailed view (wide-angle or normal to telephoto, or vice versa).¹⁸ Hence, zooms can erase or confuse a feeling of time because there is no sense of traversing space and the time it takes to do it. If one does sense time, it is a present rather than a past. In Ponnelle this comes across as a feeling of immediacy, and the effect often suggests the immediacy of theater. Another effect of zooms is that their prescribed movement – their origin in a fixed composition, with fixed camera – can impart to the viewer a feeling of limits and limited choice. Ponnelle makes use of this quality for subjective ends. Furthermore,

the ambiguities of time, space, and choice that characterize zooms can open a place for abstract qualities. For Ponnelle this means a chance to emphasize music, the musical qualities of filmwork, and subjectivity. He also capitalizes on obvious qualities of zooms.¹⁹ As zooms pinpoint something in a larger field, they often serve as a substitute spotlight, and more generally shape tension, pacing, and major moments in drama and music. In Ponnelle's early films, which make frequent use of zooms, the device may occasionally substitute for montage as it injects variety into his visual style.

Zooms often appear in combination with POV technique, for example when Cherubino is spotted by the Countess and Susanna in the middle of Act III in *Figaro*. In a courtyard outside, the page is dressed as a girl amid a female chorus of homage. At the end, the zoom as sharp POV punctuates the recognition, collapses the distance between fictional observers and their object, and breaks up the static quality of the number.

This zoom initiates a cluster of zooms that underline a rise in tension as conflicts come to a head. After the Count's reaction to Barbarina's remark that he told her he'd give her anything if she'd love him ("Barbarina, se m'ami, Ti darò quel che brami"), a medium-quick zoom zeroes in on the Count's face as he utters, "Non so qual uom, qual demone, qual Dio rivolga tutto quanto a torto mio" ("I don't know what man, god, or demon turns everything against me"). Indicated as an aside in the score, the line is rendered as interior speech and no lips move. The Count's sense of entrapment continues, now with Figaro. After some give-and-take between them, a sharp zoom-in to the Count punctuates his sour reaction to Figaro's statement that Cherubino could have jumped from the balcony as easily as he ("se ho saltato io si può dare che anch'esso abbia fatto lo stesso"). Then after the Count's line "Anch'esso?" ("He too?"), with a zoom-in, we see the clincher: a sharp zoom-in as Figaro retorts, "Perchè no? Io non impugno mai quel che non so" ("Why not? I never dispute what I don't know"). This shot and the Count's stunned reaction occur at the wonderful musical elision joining the recitative and the start of the wedding march. Figaro wins that round and the zoom acts as a

visual climax to the Count's difficulties since the start of Act III. These clustered zooms, brilliantly effective, italicize a central concern of the film: the man-to-man contest between Figaro and the Count.

In *Rigoletto* zooms help craft a key scene for the title character. In the opera *Rigoletto* finds his clearest musical voice in the Act II aria "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata," a climactic number. In a stable harmonic language and the unifying tonality of the work, he curses the courtiers and their way of life. The aria belongs to a larger complex (*Scena ed Aria*, No. 9) as he comes to the palace seeking his abducted daughter. Ponnelle has *Rigoletto* pacing and cowering near the wall, like a cornered animal. When he bursts out "Io vo' mia figlia" ("I want my daughter"), the charged line is marked with a quick zoom to his face. It is like the third stage of a creative layering process: Ponnelle places a visual emphasis on Verdi's musical emphasis (sudden harmonic change) of Piave's text. Later, during a tense dominant preparation, the courtiers hurl him against the wall after he lunges at them. Precisely at the tonal resolution that starts "Cortigiani" a very quick cut occurs, and a new shot zooms out from a close-up as he starts the number. The music-image connection is close and extremely effective. The moment is also important because the cluster of zooms stands out from the general style of the film. Moreover, the buildup and explosion of tension created by the zooms recall what Ponnelle did in *Figaro*. The explosion at "Cortigiani," however, comes at a much more important place in the opera and marks the dramatic high point of the main character. Soon *Rigoletto* begins a decline that ends in his downfall.

Butterfly features a zoom at a similar turning point for the title character. In Act II, well after "Un bel dì," Sharpless tries unsuccessfully to tell *Butterfly* that Pinkerton is not coming back. Finally he asks, "Ebbene, che fareste Madama *Butterfly* s'ei non dovesse ritornar più mai?" ("Well, what would you do, Mme. *Butterfly*, if he were never to come back?"). Directly after this a pointed zoom comes in close for her stunned reaction, accompanied by a loud timpani stroke. Silence follows. The camera stays close, and the dark, sparse orchestration at her response reveals her distress. While other zooms have appeared before, this marks the closest she has come to facing reality.

Zooms also point out details. So, for instance, in *Figaro* right after “Cosa sento,” the first word of the recitative is punctuated by a zoom. The camera zooms out from the Count as he utters “Basilio!” This almost seems too insignificant for a zoom. But the dynamic re-establishes the Count’s authority over Basilio and Susanna, who have said questionable things about him, and also over Cherubino, recently uncovered on the bed. Similarly, the Count’s authority is represented by a zoom later, but now the tables are turned on his power. It happens in Act III, after the faux-happy reunion in the Sextet that wrecks the Count’s plans. When the victorious conspirators boast in homophony that they do not care about the Count’s anger (“E schiatti il signor Conte al gusto mio”), the camera zooms in quickly to the Count’s trappings of power, including judicial gown and wig. When we saw them in his accompanied recitative at the start of the Act, they symbolized his power. Now they mock it. The earlier views also featured zooms to highlight the objects. Considered together, the two places show how Ponnelle uses visual effects thematically.

Pans are generally less important than zooms for subjectivity, but one example deserves mention. Pans are camera movements that traverse space horizontally, and sometimes motion comes from a character’s viewpoint, which makes it a POV pan. We saw this in *Butterfly*’s “Un bel dì.” It also occurs when Pinkerton scans the assembled family in a circular motion, at the wedding in Act I. The exaggerated shot conveys his bemusement at so many relatives, and such strange ones at that (to him).²⁰

Sharp angles, differential focus, and other effects

In film, sharply angled shots from above or below place emphasis on a character, and Ponnelle uses them to highlight power or social status. In *Butterfly* several instances appear. The stirring conclusion of “Un bel dì” has Cio-Cio San shot from below at the edge of the hill (see Fig. 3.2). As her voice rings out at the climax, “Tienti la tua paura, io con sicura fede l’aspetto” (“Keep your fears, I wait for him with secure faith”), and the orchestra concludes the piece, she looks strong, even



Fig. 3.2 Butterfly (Mirella Freni) and Suzuki (Christa Ludwig) at the end of “Un bel dì” in *Madama Butterfly*.

heroic. The stance is striking because such a pose is rarely given to women. Ponnelle reprises her confidence when a low-angled shot of Butterfly, Sharpless, and Goro conveys her scorn at Yamadori's approach. Still later, near the end of Part I of Act II, Ponnelle presents another noble side of Butterfly, again with a low shot. She has just reacted to Sharpless's question about what she would do if Pinkerton never returned. Now Ponnelle arranges her on the floor with her son, hutch in background, and she becomes a Madonna with Child come-to-life. This filmic *tableau vivant* features a triangular composition typical of Renaissance paintings of this subject. We might be in an old church looking up at an altarpiece, especially since Ponnelle frames the image on three sides, with walls and floor. The powerful reference conveys a sense of Virginal self-sacrifice, and we mourn with Butterfly. There is also a touch of irony, for she will be forced to reject Western religion.

Rigoletto exploits sharply angled shots to sketch the jester's relationship to power and conscience. In the opening party scene – an orgy in Ponnelle's version – Monterone appears on a high balcony. Rigoletto



Fig. 3.3 Rigoletto (Ingvar Wixell) looking up at Monterone (also Ingvar Wixell) in the party scene of *Rigoletto*.

and the courtiers look up at him, he looks down at them. At the first Curse we get a highly exaggerated shot of Monterone as the camera, just behind Rigoletto, looks almost straight up at him (see Fig. 3.3). Although not literal POV, the shot functions as POV. The exaggerated angle conveys Rigoletto's total fear before this voice of morality, a fear reinforced by the frescoed equestrian figure behind Monterone: a possible reference to the Commendatore of *Don Giovanni*, whose presence haunts this scene through Monterone's words that "Spettro terribile mi rivedrete" ("You will see my fearful ghost again").²¹ The jester's conscience is also disturbed, not least because the singer playing Monterone is the same singer portraying himself. This duality will be explored in the discussion of "Doubling," below.

Rigoletto's struggle with power is expressed through similar means near the start of Scene 2. At the Moderato section of "Pari siamo," the jester walks across a piazza and stops at a black equestrian statue, supposedly of the Duke. Rigoletto utters resentfully, "Questo padrone mio, giovin, giocondo, si possente, bello ..." ("This master of mine, young, gay, so powerful, handsome ...") The camera is sharply angled

from below as it follows Rigoletto's gaze to the statue's head. When Rigoletto curses the Duke at "Oh, dannazione," a big moment with sudden harmonic change (B flat minor to E major), the angle switches abruptly to a high viewpoint that behaves like POV from the statue. In the sequence Rigoletto looks small and powerless to the viewer: first the low-angled grandeur of the statue from Rigoletto's eyes, then the high-angled view that dwarfs him.

In *Figaro*, imagined power is on the mind of Bartolo in Ponnelle's filming of his aria "La vendetta." Ponnelle satirizes Bartolo's grandiose self-image with sharply angled shots. The scene takes place in a multi-storey library, and Bartolo tries hard to display learnedness. Shown at various levels in low-angled shots, he gradually ascends to the top: a sign of his mastery of knowledge, but actually an indication of utter self-delusion. After the opening section, which has a half-body shot from below of Bartolo at a table with Marcellina, he abruptly appears on a higher level, at the top of the stairs, with a grossly exaggerated full-body shot from below. The angle and juxtaposition with what came before parallel the musical disconnect at that point (at "Coll'astuzia"). Bartolo harangues Marcellina, seated below, with jabbing gestures. He ascends higher and is seen from below, leaning over the balustrade. Sometimes we see sharply angled shots from his perspective as he looks down at Marcellina and attempts to impress her. The visual apex comes at the recapitulation, "Tutto Siviglia conosce Bartolo" ("All of Seville knows Bartolo"). A low-angled long-shot shows Bartolo at the top level, purported master of knowledge. Marcellina will have none of it, however, and sneers at his pompousness.

One way of interpreting Ponnelle's active film staging is that it merely reproduces Mozart's wonderfully over-composed aria. "La vendetta" has too many musical styles, juxtaposes unrelated gestures, and lacks smooth transitions: a recipe for depicting a bumbling character. The parody of learnedness also resides in Mozart's Baroque mannerisms that permeate the piece. As much as anywhere in Ponnelle's films, the aria demonstrates how the director's thorough understanding of music directly influences his visual work.

The Count's power is also portrayed through low angles. The strongest example occurs in the other revenge aria of *Figaro*, the Count's "Vedrò," near the start of Act III. The sharp angles that depict his power, in a number similar to Bartolo's in key, style, and function, create a parallel between the characters and tell us they are not as different as they first appear.²² Of course, Bartolo imagines a power he does not really have, while the Count has *de facto* power. Nonetheless, one of the main themes of the opera and film is that the Count's power is waning. Ponnelle still shows us, through low-angled shots, flashes of the Count's display of power.

One of my favorite places is the exaggerated low-angled view of a whisky bottle in Act I of *Butterfly*, a rare instance of social critique in Ponnelle's films (see Fig. 3.4). From the vantage point of the floor, Ponnelle shows the bottle on top of a box, and Pinkerton and Sharpless flank the image as they raise their cups. This occurs with a snippet from *The Star-Spangled Banner* and the English text "America forever!" The passage is at the end of Pinkerton's aria, "Dovunque al mondo," which tells of Yankee freedom to roam the world. Ponnelle italicizes the sequence by leading into it with an optical effect that flips and reverses the composition of the previous shot – something I cannot recall elsewhere in his films – so as to set off Pinkerton as a symbol of American imperialism. This is not the only way Pinkerton signifies America in the film. Chewing gum, smiling a lot, and sporting an easy physicality, he exudes a cockiness and shallowness that Europeans associate with Americans.²³

Another technique of Ponnelle to visualize subjectivity is differential focus. In *Butterfly*, which has many examples, differential focus acts like an emotional spotlight, drawing our attention to a charged situation for a character. This happens after Butterfly spots Pinkerton's ship in the harbor. She walks ahead of Suzuki, in medium close-up, and the blurred reeds appear behind her. Still in clear focus, Butterfly exults how she kept her faith. Suzuki emerges in the blurry background, holding the child. Remaining out of focus, they represent dim concepts in Butterfly's world, and her clear-eyed look expresses deep involvement in the moment. In the next scene Butterfly and Suzuki pick cherry



Fig. 3.4 Pinkerton (Plácido Domingo) and Sharpless (Robert Kerns) near the end of “Dovunque al mondo” in *Madama Butterfly*.

blossoms in the garden to greet Pinkerton’s arrival. Ponnelle and conductor Herbert von Karajan pull out the stops in lyricizing *Butterfly* – in drowning her in emotion just as the blossoms engulf the room. She is in clear focus in the middle ground, but the flower bushes in front are blurry, as is Suzuki in the background. *Butterfly*’s joy is projected onto her surroundings, and we empathize with the spillover. There is more. At the languorous duet of the women as they spread the petals – a sound redolent of Strauss’s female blend in *Der Rosenkavalier* – Ponnelle gives us slow motion, and viewers join the characters in the sensual mood. This only works with a very slow tempo, and von Karajan’s glacial pace teutonicizes Puccini. No matter. While it leads to aesthetic excess of a kind that typifies Zeffirelli’s films, the scene is enchanting and we cannot help but be seduced.

In *Figaro* differential focus serves to highlight one group against another. In the Act II Finale, the fifth section, “Conoscete, Signor Figaro,” has the Count pitted against a trio consisting of the Countess, Susanna, and Figaro. Near the end comes an extraordinary musical passage, over an extended tonic pedal. The trio ask the Count to grant

their request for the wedding, and when the Count weighs in with an aside calling for Marcellina to arrive, Ponnelle shoots the Count in clear focus while the trio in the back are fuzzy. The two kinds of image underscore the two kinds of utterance, one explicit and one private, and the technique offers a fine example of Ponnelle's propensity for choreographing the score.

Two places with other striking visual effects conclude the discussion of camera work. One involves freeze frame. Near the end of the exposition of the Sextet in *Figaro*, after Susanna slaps Figaro, a freeze frame captures everyone's stunned reaction to what has happened. It lasts a long time – some eighteen measures of 4/4 time signature – as the music gets stuck in a repetitious cadential pattern. The freeze produces a form of interior singing, as no physical movements show the source of the sounds. Presumably the six characters are internalizing their thoughts. On the other hand, the freeze inserts distance between them and us, and the static swell of sound verges on voice-over commentary. Ponnelle is expanding the narrative forces and adding a Greek chorus whose job is to comment on what's happening. Although the sudden freeze can seem mannered, it beautifully articulates the sudden confusion of all the characters after Susanna punctures the artifice with a genuine human reaction. The freeze underscores the irony.

The last example is from *Rigoletto* and represents a projection from Rigoletto's mind. In Act I, Scene 2, "Ah! veglia, o donna," after a joyful reunion with his daughter, Rigoletto sings about safeguarding his daughterly treasure. As the number begins, we see an ethereal image of Gilda in slow motion, approaching him like a floating angel. She may be actually walking towards him. But the otherworldly quality suggests it is filtered through his psyche – a kind of mental POV shot. Although the conceit is maudlin, it captures the jester's unrealistic view of his daughter.

DOUBLING

Rigoletto's distance from reality makes Ponnelle's film feel like a fantasy at times, a projection from the jester's mind. This is accomplished

in part through doubling: the mirroring of Rigoletto's subjectivity in characters and props.²⁴ In a virtuosic act Ponnelle casts the same singer, Ingvar Wixell, as both Monterone and Rigoletto. As Peter Conrad observes, "Compounding the roles makes the opera a therapeutic dream-play; the blanched, stony Monterone is the reproving superego to Rigoletto's ribald, jesting id. Rigoletto hallucinates a fantasy which his other half, Monterone, intercedes to punish. He has helped the Duke ravish Monterone's daughter; he must therefore want, Ponnelle deduces, to ravish his own."²⁵ For Conrad, Rigoletto is responsible for his daughter's death and merely acts out the Curse his alter ego uttered. The path to destruction includes visions of figures he identifies with, figures he senses are like him. His fatherly role is obviously paralleled in Monterone, who, by being shown as considerably older than Rigoletto, becomes an Oedipal fatherly figure. Perhaps in desiring the death or besting of this Oedipal figure, Rigoletto desires his own death. His own death does not occur, but it occurs metaphorically through the death of his daughter.

The father-father commonality derives from the opera's source, Victor Hugo's play *Le Roi s'amuse* (1832). In Hugo's passionate defense of the short-lived drama, from which Triboulet and the king will become the operatic Rigoletto and the Duke, the paternal link is emphasized:

The father whose daughter has been taken away from him by the king is mocked and insulted by Triboulet. The father raises his arms and curses Triboulet. The whole play evolves from this. The true subject of the drama is the curse ... On whom has the curse fallen? On Triboulet the king's buffoon? No, on Triboulet the man, who is a father, who has a heart, and a daughter.²⁶

As we will see later in Ponnelle's reference to Beaumarchais's play at a major moment of *Le nozze di Figaro*, the unitary casting of Rigoletto and Monterone in *Rigoletto* shows the influence of the opera's source on Ponnelle's filmic interpretation. In these cases film becomes a way to expand the operatic frame to embrace a theatrical conception, and in its richness to approach an independent genre.²⁷

In Rigoletto's projections of people the jester sees mirrored images of himself. Almost all occur in the first half of Act 1, Scene 2. The monologue "Pari siamo" contains several flash images. First are two flashes, four measures apart, of Sparafucile. Rigoletto relates how they are similar: the jester stabs with laughter, Sparafucile with a dagger ("Io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale; L'uomo son io che ride, ei quel che spegne"). A bit later, as Rigoletto thinks of his daughter and the music waxes lyrical (in E major), he visualizes Gilda on a balcony. This brief musical section is elided into a statement of the Curse motif. Ponnelle marks the juncture with three successive images that summarize Rigoletto's subjective realm: a medium close-up of Gilda, dissolving into a close-up of Monterone's face (the same image at the end of the party scene), dissolving into Sparafucile's face. In all three he sees aspects of himself, and with Monterone he is actually looking at himself. The cycle of flashes comes to a head at the big resolution into C major, Allegro vivo, m. 69, as he and Gilda finally meet. Five quick images form a thrilling *stretto*. First is Gilda in close-up, screaming. Second is a zoom-out from above of the courtiers, his enemies. Third is Rigoletto staring at them, or at what is happening. Fourth is another flash of the courtiers, now with metal masks and pointing at someone offscreen, presumably Rigoletto. And fifth is a posed still of "the happy couple" as the Duke stands triumphant over an unconscious (or dead) Gilda. The cluster not only builds on Rigoletto's past fears, but projects his fears of the future, which do come to pass.

Inserted images also appear in "Ah! veglia, o donna." At a point of musical interruption, as Rigoletto opens the gate to see if anyone is there, he spots Sparafucile outside. The image is quick, easily missed by the viewer, and picks up on the dramatic rhythm of the music. Rigoletto's reaction implies that the image is psychological, not literal. The second image appears at the end of the duet. During the concluding *ritornello*, after Rigoletto leaves his daughter, Sparafucile is seen in a quick view outside the wall. He strides off purposefully, in a pre-shadowing of Rigoletto's departure. The doubling is even more exact: Sparafucile's clothes in both images are the same as Rigoletto's, just as in "Pari siamo." That Sparafucile is holding the

jester's face-stock, which itself mirrors Rigoletto, only intensifies the psychological projection.

As I have suggested for the film, and Wolfgang Osthoff justly observes for the opera, Sparafucile as murderer and social outcast serves as a mirror to Rigoletto.²⁸ But I see further resonance between them in the film. Not only do the inserted images of the assassin supply a subtext of future disaster, but they suggest that Rigoletto envies Sparafucile. This rests partly on self-identity. Unlike Rigoletto, who conceals his name, Sparafucile exposes his identity, and the thief's ability (at least as perceived by Rigoletto) to be open elicits admiration.²⁹ For instance, at "Sparafucile, mi nomino" in their duet, Rigoletto smiles in awe at Sparafucile's pluck and good-guy banditry. I think this admiration, tinged with superiority and loathing, is part of the reason for the repeated images later. Their similarities are also important in this regard. The mirror that Sparafucile holds up to Rigoletto is a mixed reflection – of good and bad, of real and projected qualities.

Osthoff believes that the pattern of not-naming in the opera creates a "dehumanized" subjectivity.³⁰ Do Ponnelle's visual additions rehumanize subjectivity? Does more equal more, or do the personas in the new images reinforce the dehumanized aspect by "extracting" this quality from the libretto and making it visible? The questions may be better answered if one realizes that these images are focalized through Rigoletto, seen from his viewpoint. Through the focalized images, I see characters who are more human than Osthoff describes. But viewers can inhabit a dual track as they see through characters' eyes and simultaneously make their own observations. Director Peter Sellars, for example, depends on this Brechtian aesthetic in his televised opera productions.³¹ I do not think that Ponnelle wishes us to form that distance here. But he may encourage us to feel sympathy for Rigoletto by entering his mind, as we too switch gears and take in the drama as a whole. Of course, the duality surrounding Rigoletto inheres in the opera itself and attracted Verdi to the story in the first place.³²

Ponnelle also plays up the physical likeness between Rigoletto and Sparafucile by emphasizing their humps.³³ Their deformities might be likened to a de-forming visual discourse in the film, a breaking-down

of whole images. The flash images that populate the main narrative, and especially Act I, Scene 2, are a kind of fracturing of the personas already presented whole. Perhaps it is no accident that the images often occur when the music is unstable, for example with diminished-seventh chords, tonal flux, or transitional chromaticism. Such de-formed gestures seem appropriate to Rigoletto's de-formed body. Rigoletto's physical deformity is also reflected in the deformity of others. Count Ceprano has one eye sewn shut, and the Duke's servant is a midget, an added character.³⁴ There is also the brief appearance of the Duchess's courier in Act II, played by a boy soprano instead of a woman. This *frisson* of ambiguity rounds out the environment of physical otherness.

Deformity is also expressed in Rigoletto's face-stock, another mirroring element.³⁵ It has exaggerated features, with big nose, big mouth, and deeply furrowed brows. The stock represents the truest surface mirror of Rigoletto, his real alter ego. Yet once we look more closely we see traces of another alter ego. The eerie resemblance to Ponnelle's face becomes apparent in a publicity still that has the director holding the face-stock next to his own (see Fig. 3.5). This is the same pose we saw at Rigoletto's entrance in the party scene, also with the face-stock. Is it meant to bring the director in as an integral part of Rigoletto's persona and create another parallel? Is the jester a stand-in for the director? Or is it a secret game meant to delight knowledgeable viewers? I think the ruse is little more than the director's wish to join the action with a minimum of fuss.

Ponnelle practices a lively kind of choreography on the face-stock and uses it for keen dramatic purpose. It becomes a key aspect of subjectivity in Act I, Scene 2, the place where projected images are clustered. We notice, however, that the face-stock is absent when Rigoletto is with Gilda. Instead, it seems to function as a sign of his public life. The opening scene of the film, staged during the Prelude, shows the contrast. Rigoletto, alone in a large public arena that will house the party scene, picks up the face-stock from the floor. He drops it melodramatically when he sees the body of his dead daughter (a foreshadowing of the end). Something similar occurs in Act I, Scene 2 when he



Fig. 3.5 Publicity still of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle with Rigoletto's face-stock.
© Unitel.

reunites with Gilda. As Rigoletto crosses the garden wall that separates exterior from interior world, he flings away the stock with a grand gesture. But the face-stock is obviously a central element at the start of the scene, when Rigoletto faces himself. He peers at it quizzically at the opening, over a diminished-seventh chord whose ambiguous tonal implications suggest his own self-doubt. A bit later, in “Pari siamo,” he examines it closely over an extended passage, and for a few measures the twin faces fill a medium close-up (see Fig. 3.6). At the tonal resolution at “il pianto!” (“tears!”) he drops the stick. The next time we see the stock is in the hands of Sparafucile in the two fleeting images Rigoletto has of him. Does this mean that Sparafucile has assumed Rigoletto's identity, or that Rigoletto's subjectivity is further divided? Perhaps Rigoletto fears that Sparafucile or the like will take him over. This is no longer envy, as in the earlier flashes, but something more serious – a glimpse of what Rigoletto will be forced to become.



Fig. 3.6 Rigoletto (Ingvar Wixell) and face-stock near the start of “Pari siamo” in *Rigoletto*.

Rigoletto's destiny is also tracked in a kind of stand-in doubling. His daughter is doubled by the daughter of Monterone, an added character.³⁶ Both wear white, both have pale skin, both have blonde tresses. This double of Gilda appears in the party scene. When Rigoletto accuses Monterone of conspiring against the court, he mentions the dishonoring of Monterone's daughter. Ponnelle has the jester rip the bodice of her dress and force her to face her father. Monterone utters “Novello insulto!” and the moral tone ratchets up towards the Curse on Rigoletto and the court. Rigoletto's defiling of Monterone's daughter is a symbolic defiling of his own daughter and signals her downfall. Of course, the unitary casting of Rigoletto–Monterone implies that the daughters are interchangeable: Hugo's theme of parallelism applied to daughters as well as fathers.

Figaro

In Ponnelle's *Figaro* an instance of doubling is as sensational as the unitary casting in *Rigoletto*. Figaro's big aria in Act iv, “Aprite un po’

quegli occhi,” presents two Figaros, both played by Hermann Prey.³⁷ In the introductory accompanied recitative, a dejected Figaro sits on a bench in a clearing in the woods, and the music is rendered as interior singing. Still in wedding attire, he believes Susanna will be unfaithful on their wedding night. In the short pause before “Aprite,” the camera tracks slowly to the left and reveals another Figaro. Standing and in clear focus, this Figaro – henceforth Figaro II – is dressed in the servant’s clothes from the start of the film. Figaro II sings almost all of the aria proper, with moving lips. He begins the aria facing the viewer squarely, in direct address, which encourages a sense of the present as well as the viewer’s co-intimacy with the message on the screen. Figaro II gives a cautionary lecture to men in the audience to beware of women’s wiles, and he aims some sections directly at Figaro I. Both figures can be seen simultaneously because Figaro I is superimposed in pre-filmed stock. Late in the number Figaro I responds to the taunts, uttering “Il resto nol dico” (“The rest I need not say”) to the jabs that personalize the effects of women’s deceit. The uniform response, akin to a litany, indicates the extent to which the character has capitulated to the inevitable. The vocal dualism is reinforced by the antiphony in the music, and the pattern of each line is distinct: in register (high versus low), melodic shape, orchestral timbre (strings versus winds), and gestural function (beginning or medial versus cadential function). The differences reinforce the gulf between the figures.

A *Doppelgänger*, a face in the mirror, arguing with itself: what does this mean? One thing that comes to mind is the uncanny. Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” discusses the odd effect of a figure meeting itself.³⁸ The person is apt to take an instant dislike to the image. The double seems like a ghost and conjures up the spectre of one’s own death. As Slavoj Žižek writes, “Seeing oneself looking, unmistakably stands for death ...”³⁹ And with the image of death comes denial of desire and one’s very self. Figaro I undergoes a kind of death when Figaro II appears, the death of his subjectivity. Figaro II marks a rebirth of the old Figaro – the feisty factotum from the start of the film – and Figaro I withers under Figaro II’s intense gaze and embodied voice. Figaro I’s

avoidance of looking at Figaro II accords with Žižek's theory that the double avoids gazing directly at the original.⁴⁰

Fearsome as he lectures and accuses his alter ego, Figaro II serves as superego and attempts to instill correct behavior in his wayward counterpart. What Ponnelle shows us through clever montage is a favorite argument of the eighteenth century: the debate between reason and feeling. Figaro II, hearkening back to the old Figaro, embodies the voice of emancipation and reason, while Figaro I capitulates to feeling and emotion. Just like the film's Figaro of "Se vuol ballare," Figaro II is socially progressive; bereft of reason, Figaro I is socially archaic. Figaro I's surrender to feeling also means that he has been feminized, and this is another target of the rational Figaro II. The battle comes to a head in the exchange at "Il resto nol dico," where the antiphonal music lends itself to Ponnelle's dual visual representation. The notion that feeling and the feminine are false will itself turn out to be false. Figaro will discover that Susanna is faithful and that his reason was deceived. With his two halves reconciled, he will emerge as a reconstituted subject and represent the truly progressive individual in his ability to embrace reason and feeling at a higher level of understanding.

Figaro II's use of direct address reminds us of an earlier Ponnelle film. In *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Figaro turns to the audience frequently and sings in direct address, a mode appropriate to farce. Ponnelle also affirms the connection between Figaro II and the clever barber through casting: the same singer portrays Figaro in both films. The intertextual link through Hermann Prey might come off as merely coincidental or amusing. But when Figaro II appears in "Aprite," the return of the confident manipulator from *Barbiere* is obvious. Figaro II provides narcissistic confirmation beyond the borders of the *Figaro* film and resuscitates a prehistory that affirms a reason for his existence.

Another doubling element links the films. Both feature a portrait of the head of the household and use it at suitable moments. In *Barbiere* an unflattering portrait of Dr. Bartolo, Rosina's foolish guardian, hangs on the wall. Figaro brandishes it a few times to mock him. In

Figaro the portrait is of the Count, and the conceit is quite clever.⁴¹ We first see the portrait during the Overture. It is one of Figaro's personal items he packs for the move to the main house after he is married. The camera comes in to capture the inscription on the back: "Al mio carissimo Figaro in Rimembranza delle nostre Venture a Siviglia. Il suo Lindoro. 1779" ("To my dearest Figaro, in memory of our adventures in Seville. Your Lindoro. 1779"). This reveals their former friendship, reminds us that class difference disappeared in their conspiracy against Bartolo, and establishes a credible base for Figaro to challenge the Count now. In the film proper the portrait becomes a substitute Count for servants and peasants to rail against. So, early in Act I, after Figaro is convinced by Susanna that the Count has designs on her, he directs his aria "Se vuol ballare" to the Count's portrait, placed on the floor in the foreground. At "saprò" ("I'll know [how]") he picks it up and carries it through the Scherzando section and its litany of complaints. In the recapitulation Figaro stands still amid the peasants in a kind of class portrait. They stare contemptuously at the Count's image, until Figaro fetches it quickly at the end. The peasants interact with the portrait again. At the Homage Chorus (No. 8), which Figaro literally conducts as a stand-in for Basilio, the Count's portrait is held up at the back of the group. This is a funny gesture – the homage is gratuitous and smacks of political boosterism, as in "Vote for Count Almaviva." Even if this instance is anachronistic, the portrait contributes to our knowledge of Figaro and the Count, and strengthens their ties to the past history of *Barbiere*.

INTERIOR SINGING

Like doubling, interior singing increases narrative possibilities. It creates a space between what is heard and what is seen – heard sound but no moving lips as the apparent source – and fills it with a way for knowing more about the character. Lines otherwise sung explicitly become private lines not heard by other characters, but still heard by us. At the simplest level, we become privy to internal thoughts, and there is a suggestion that the character has chosen to keep things from

other characters. The heard music takes on the quality of psychodiegetic music even though the genre of opera-film typically deploys music as the diegesis and renders standard film-music functions moot. Interior music, however, alters the discursive landscape with its extended narrative reach. At such places we move beyond pure opera-film and borrow features from other genres or media. For example, interior singing can resemble the voice-over in mainstream film, as they share an untethered vocal location. Or, especially if a character is alone, internal singing can turn music into a kind of written literature, as in the novel, where thinking is described but not heard. Alternatively, internal singing can mimic the effect of a soliloquy in the theater. Like interior singing, all these devices increase access to consciousness and subjectivity.⁴²

Interior singing expands the intermedial relationship beyond merely opera and film. As it reconfigures the playback system by removing the image of the music's vocal production (apparent or real), interior singing can reshape our sense of which media are involved and how they interrelate. Opera-film typically constitutes a clear case of overt intermediality because of its strong and dominant signifiers in both opera and film. Interior singing complicates the opera component because the performative element becomes ambiguous and the heard sounds may enter the medial realm of film or something else, such as the novel. This is not to say that opera is weakened in such situations. Opera's effectiveness in a filmic environment is arguably strengthened through interior singing as it forms inventive relationships with film. In Ponnelle's hands the device bolsters his subjective emphasis and leads to new interpretations of famous repertoire.

A wonderful example of interior singing occurs in "Vedrò mentr'io sospiro," the Count's aria near the start of Act III in *Figaro*. The entire aria is rendered as interior singing, as is a major portion of the preceding numbers, which together form an extended scene focused on the Count. In the *secco* recitative that opens the Act, the Count muses in interior singing about the confused state of affairs. When Susanna appears their exchange is rendered normally. The duet of seduction, "Crudel! Perchè finora," is a mix of the two modes. Conversation

and questioning are in exterior singing, while personal reactions are interior (especially at “Mi sento dal contento”). Soon the Count realizes he has been duped, and his accompanied recitative, at first exterior with angry utterances, turns interior as he considers ways to trump Figaro and Susanna. The aria “Vedrò,” entirely in interior singing, has the Count in judicial attire as he renders a verdict against Figaro and Susanna, who are among the spectators in the courtroom watching the mimed proceedings. The Count is the featured player on a platform, and “Vedrò” marks the apex of his power in the film. For the remainder of the opera, the Count’s exterior voice continues to betray him: in the revelations of the Sextet, the run-ins with Figaro before the wedding, and the romantic assignations in Act iv. Interior singing, or an absent voice, may be all that is possible for an outmoded figure.

Ponnelle’s arrangement presents a curious situation. The use of interior singing suggests that the aria keeps to its tradition of being private. Libretto and score indicate that the Count is alone during the number, and most productions stage it that way. In the film the aria is rendered in a public forum, but no one in the fiction hears it. Interior singing allows Ponnelle to reconfigure the private element of an aria – what it means to be airing one’s thoughts, alone – and stage the number as a public spectacle that still remains private. It also means that we assume an omniscient viewpoint as we become privy to thoughts to which characters in the fiction do not have access. Although this suggests an unusual or even radical enactment of “Vedrò,” the idea of the courtroom comes from Beaumarchais. In the play, the start of Act III takes place in the Count’s throne room, and, as in the film, the Count renders a judgment before the household on Marcellina’s claim on Figaro. Da Ponte eliminated this location and most of the dialogue but distilled the essence into the aria “Vedrò,” sung when the Count is alone in a room in his palace. Ponnelle’s recuperation of the courtroom, with the same physical layout as in the play, underscores the menace of the Count and the fear of the other characters. It also draws literature into the fold and creates a more complex intermedial terrain.

In the opera the archaic nature of the Count renders him frozen in time. The music of “Vedrò” brings out this quality, with its Baroque mannerisms, abrupt changes, harmonic retrogressions, and curious coloratura.⁴³ Like Bartolo, his social discomfort is conveyed in an inability to find a workable musical language. Suspended, the Count cannot move forward or back. In the film, interior singing attenuates the feeling of suspension and arrests time by extending the psychology of one or two moments. This freezes image and plot, and the freed-up dramatic time is available for an intense interplay of subjectivities.

An interior voice is adept at conveying a character’s expression of emotion, which is one of the functions of an aria. But how does an interior voice affect time in a public setting, as in “Vedrò?” Other numbers may provide an answer. In the film, some sections of ensembles are rendered as interior singing, notably passages in the Sextet, in the trios “Cosa sento” and “Susanna, or via sortite,” and in the Finales to Acts II and IV. Most of these places humanize or retextualize the drama through asides or personal reactions within group interaction, and they also counteract the driving motion of Mozart’s dramaturgy. Ponnelle’s “Vedrò” can be said to function like an ensemble in voice and time because it resembles an extended aside: one long reaction to prior events, expressed amid others. Although silent, other characters in the courtroom are players in the drama. Linked to the Count by the camera, they participate in a group interaction that is not very different from that of the ensemble.

For the inert courtroom spectators the spectacle is effectively mime in suspended time. One has the impression of a return to the theater, while the absence of fictional sound suggests the Count’s portrait come to life, akin to a *tableau vivant* – a device noted earlier in *Butterfly*. Nonetheless, the courtroom scene comes off as thoroughly cinematic. Interior singing multiplies narrative and subjective elements, and redefines the ways in which time and image limn character.

In other numbers in the film interior singing intensifies the private realm, for example in the Countess’s aria at the start of Act II, “Porgi amor.” Marking her first entrance in the opera and meant to be sung when she is alone, in her bedroom, the aria is rendered

entirely as interior singing by Ponnelle. Unlike “Vedrò,” however, the setting remains private and no additional characters appear. The text, only four lines long, conveys her sorrow as a neglected wife – a “sposa abbandonata” – and ends with a plea to die if her beloved does not come back to her (“O mi rendi il mio tesoro, O mi lascia almen morir”). Depicted through interior singing at her first entrance, the Countess is immediately associated with a rich inner life as the performative arrangement suggests thoughts so personal that they cannot be expressed aloud. The director furthers the sense of a removed subjective world by stressing symbols in her environment. Ordinary details share the stage with uplifting imagery – slow panning shows us ceiling cracks as well as crucifixes. The collective images convey her fear of losing the things she holds most dear, which are embodied by the sanctity of her bedroom. The connection between interior singing and personal loss returns in the Countess’s second aria, “Dove sono.”

Overall, interior singing occurs frequently in Ponnelle’s *Figaro*, in *secco* and accompanied recitatives as well as arias and parts of ensembles. It capitalizes on film’s ability to split image and sound, in order to tell us more about characters and what they feel and think. That it does so in an opera packed with dialogue and plot twists makes Ponnelle’s arrangement the more remarkable. Interior singing applies a brake to the fast, talkative quality of the opera – its theatrical mode, as it were – and affords a place for new layers of emotion and thought to be expressed. It helps Mozart’s opera to work as screen opera.

Butterfly

In Ponnelle’s *Butterfly* interior singing is scattered but appears at key places. It permeates several passages of the Love Duet, and Conrad comments on the general effect:

One of the bequests of film to opera is its demonstration that song is soliloquy, not overt statement: that the voice is consciousness – or the yearning subconscious – overheard. Thus in Ponnelle’s film of *Madama Butterfly*, the love duet is shown to be a nervous double soliloquy. Neither

Butterfly nor Pinkerton is seen to be singing, and they're separated from each other. She's inside undressing, while he waits outdoors, smoking a cigarette. The soundtrack is the subliminal sounding of desire.⁴⁴

This occurs near the start of the number and approaches a split-screen effect as the wall of the *shoji* separates them. Pinkerton takes off his Navy jacket, suggesting sexual openness, and the separated sounds swell up high, untethered to a visual source. This is the longest section of interior singing in the Duet and the film. The scene changes to silvery reeds on the hill-top – an ethereal setting for a magical change of texture and harmony. Ponnelle has Butterfly floating in the reeds against a jet-black background, uttering as interior singing, “*Somiglio la Dea della luna, la piccola Dea della luna che scende la notte dal ponte del ciel*” (“I’m like the goddess of the moon, the little goddess of the moon who descends from the bridge of heaven at night”). The effect resembles an aside, a mystical parenthesis that gives Butterfly added depth. When Pinkerton carries her in his arms, a series of exchanges mixes exterior and interior modes. As he interjects “*Vieni*” (“Come”) with moving lips, she thinks to herself about the beauty of the night and the stars. About a minute later a film cut shows a new position and the passing of time. Lying on top of Butterfly, Pinkerton utters “*Vieni*” aloud and she has interior lines about the stars and the night. By the end they sing in unison, and a crane shot makes it difficult to tell if their lips are moving.

Vera Calábria writes that Ponnelle understood “*Vieni*” sexually and directed accordingly: “Ponnelle interprets the continually ecstatic progressions towards musical climax as the culmination of the sexual act through Pinkerton, and with the words ‘*Vieni, vieni*’ ... Butterfly is supposed to reach orgasm, while Pinkerton lies on her. At the end of the Duet the Act [of the opera] is over and Pinkerton falls asleep on her after the completed sexual act.” In this regard, Calábria believes that Butterfly talks to herself about the stars and the night, “partially losing speech, out of shame and fear,” and this is one of the ways Ponnelle contrasts their cultural difference.⁴⁵ Perhaps this was the director’s intention, but in my view the interior singing betrays an independence in *Cio-Cio San* that is often missing in stage

productions. Furthermore, her passionate exterior singing elsewhere in the Duet suggests she is gloriously happy in consummating her marriage.

As with other punctuation devices we have mentioned, interior singing marks an important moment in the film: Butterfly's subjective death. It occurs late in Act II, after a POV from Butterfly of Pinkerton's wife. With the camera on Butterfly in medium close-up for a sustained period, she utters as interior singing, "*forse potrei cader morta sull'attimo*" ("perhaps I could fall dead in an instant"). Butterfly returns to interior mode as Sharpless lays a comforting hand on her shoulder. She intones "*Ah! è sua moglie*" ("Ah! she's his wife") with a flat expression and melodramatic gestures from kabuki theater, which have great impact because she is in full geisha regalia. Then comes the clincher: "*Tutto è morto per me! Tutto è finito*" ("Everything has died for me! Everything is over").⁴⁶

Other major points in the opera are marked by textual quotation, and Ponnelle frequently uses interior singing to emphasize the role of memory in these references: obvious examples of psychodiegetic music. Near the start of Act II Butterfly recalls to herself Pinkerton's line about when he will return: "*O Butterfly piccina mogliettina, tornerò colle rose alla stagion serena quando fa la nidiata il pettirosso*" ("O Butterfly, my dear little wife, I'll return with the roses in the bright season when the robins make their nests"). The camera tracks in for further emphasis, and Butterfly is down on her knees, eyes closed, in prayer-like reverie.⁴⁷ At the end of the film, as she prepares for suicide, she utters to herself the guiding principle of her culture: "*Con onor muore, chi non può serbar vita con onore*" ("One dies with honor when one cannot stay alive with dishonor"). This is heard in a medium close-up, stark in its abstract framing, as she pulls the dagger horizontally out of its sheath.

In the film as a whole interior singing is associated mainly with Butterfly. The device creates a more intimate and humanized portrait of Cio-Cio San than usual, and she is less passive and more determined than in most productions. Displaying more subjective sides, she emerges as much less of a victim as she finds solutions that fit her culture.

MANIPULATION OF TIME

While interior singing expands Butterfly's subjectivity, temporal manipulation illuminates Pinkerton's character. Ponnelle structures the film as a loop that traps Pinkerton and makes it impossible for him to escape his self. The closed psychological circle creates a charged portrait of a character who usually comes across as shallow, chauvinistic, and racist. Now he appears to suffer indefinitely for his selfish ways.

The film opens with Pinkerton crashing through the paper wall: a violent gesture that matches Puccini's violent fugal music (see Fig. 3.7). It is shot in slow motion, in washed-out color, and extends the palette of the dreary-looking shoji that appears with the title credits. Anguished, Pinkerton runs down a path and ignores the startled look on his American wife's face. He pushes over Goro, whom he blames for the terrible outcome. If watching the film for the first time we probably do not know who these characters are, and they resemble figures in a dream: a parallel to Butterfly's Vigil, explored below. As the passage ends Pinkerton lopez towards the camera, still tormented. A dissolve to smiling face and full color heralds the start of the story proper: a flashback in Pinkerton's mind of the events leading to his return and Butterfly's suicide. As we have noted, the suicide is staged with Pinkerton present. After he backs away in horror from her dying body, he crashes through the wall. The image is frozen at the end, and its continuation on the outside opens the film. While the breaking through physicalizes the libretto's themes of fragility and impermanence,⁴⁸ for Pinkerton it marks an obsessive need to break free of his guilt and the psychological drives that led to the tragedy. It also symbolizes a kind of reverse sexual penetration of Butterfly and her culture.

The open-endedness of the image creates ambiguity, and I believe that Ponnelle may have been guided by the ambiguity of the final chord. Instead of a conclusive resolution to the tonic of B minor, Puccini has a first-inversion G major chord (a G-6 chord), and this is where Ponnelle places the freeze image. While some consider



Fig. 3.7 Pinkerton (Plácido Domingo) at the start and the end of *Madama Butterfly*.

the sonority a B minor chord with an added sixth, I hear it as a first-inversion vi chord because of its orchestration, spacing, and absence of F sharp. Regardless of the precise harmonic label, the stability of the tonic is undermined and the musical uncertainty becomes a source for Ponnelle's sensational ending.⁴⁹

Rigoletto's loop

Ponnelle's *Rigoletto* is also structured by a circular flashback that charts the psychology of the male protagonist. Maureen Turim's term "frame tale" applies to the organization: opening and closing sections that are temporally removed from the main story and form their own story.⁵⁰ The first part of the frame tale in *Rigoletto*, discussed earlier in terms of doubling, takes place during the Prelude, which introduces the Curse Monterone will hurl at Rigoletto. (The creation of action or images during the overture, by the way, is a trademark of Ponnelle's

stage productions.)⁵¹ In the film a long fluid take, begun in close-up, captures Rigoletto's movements. First seen with despairing, sweaty face, the hunchback gradually emerges whole after a tracking shot, and he picks up his face-stock. Slowly he moves forward, over a *tutti* crescendo, to the dead Gilda. When he sees her he throws down the stock, and at the second diminished-seventh outburst he cradles her in his arms. When the music quiets down to a single trumpet intoning the rhythm of the Curse Motive, he looks first to his upper right, then upper left – as if he is actually hearing the Curse and looking at the place where it was (or will be) uttered by Monterone, on the balcony. Turim calls this sort of sound memory an “auditory flashback.”⁵² At the final cadence the camera comes in tight as Rigoletto stares straight ahead, a reprise of the first shot in the Prelude. When the tonic is first resolved we get a series of quick jump cuts: a riverside silhouette of Mantua, a horrified reaction on Rigoletto's face (Gilda dies on the river), a pastoral cloth scrolling down, and another close-up of his horror. The *stretto*-like sequence, an explosion of psychic energy, accelerates towards the raucous party scene. As the *banda* music begins, Rigoletto turns around quickly, the scroll goes up, Gilda's body is passed back, and the story proper begins, shot in a grand interior Renaissance arena.

The end of the film presents the closing portion of the frame tale. The order of events reverses some of the quick images from the first part. Gilda dies in her father's arms as they glide on the Mincio River, with the outline of Mantua, flashed in the first part of the frame, in the background. As Rigoletto utters the final “Ah! la maledizione,” the pastoral dropcloth seen earlier descends quickly and Monterone's face appears. On “-ne,” the final syllable, and Rigoletto's face in close-up, as at the start, the background changes from a blue that suggests the outside to a red that indicates the inside. Rigoletto returns to the interior space where he had started the film, and now we recognize it as the empty space of the party scene. He once again cradles the dead Gilda in his arms, with the same tearful face.

Earlier we discussed how images of people projected by Rigoletto form an aspect of doubling. These psychological images – of

Sparafucile, Monterone, Gilda, courtiers, and the Duke – also represent displacements of time as they cull events or impressions from the past or project them into the future. Virtually all occur in the second scene of Act I, a place where we encounter Rigoletto's private world and inner demons. The director creates a pattern of recurring images, of differing tenses, and the structure is especially fascinating because it occurs in a larger framework of flashback. The frame tale lays the emotional groundwork for the recurring images. Accordingly, it is tempting to suggest that the psychological content of the frame tale is so important to generating the rest that it serves as the core narrative of the film, not a peripheral element. Acts I, II, and III become a projection in Rigoletto's memory or psyche – their events may have happened or not. These three Acts take on greater narrative prominence when images of others are flashed, because the flashes represent an extension of his core psychological state that was presented at the beginning and end. Considered in this light, the inner Rigoletto is constituted through psychological recall, while the outer Rigoletto, like the court jester, is a sham.

Butterfly's fantasy

Butterfly's visions occur in one place, the instrumental Vigil Scene that separates the two Parts of Act II. Greenwald considers it "the point of maximum dramatic tension" in the opera – "Butterfly's attempt to realize the dreams of 'Un bel dì'."⁵³ She hallucinates past and future with her desires and conflicts – her wish to be accepted as a Westerner mixed with nagging thoughts of her Japanese past. Ponnelle sectionalizes the scene by returning rondo-like to her face in the present. Expectedly, he uses music to guide the content of the images, the visual rhythm, and the filmic style.

The first imaginings concern the future and the joyful reunion with Pinkerton. After a return to her present face new music ushers in the past. We see flashbacks to the Love Duet and the spreading of petals, both sensuous events. After she recalls his dramatic removal of her hairpiece in the Love Duet, her present face returns. Then,

over an ecstatic motif, a more explicit recall of the Love Duet occurs as they lie on the ground. Now Butterfly projects a slew of American symbols, among them Uncle Sam and Buffalo Bill, and sees herself as a Western bride. But even in Western dress, her face displays the white make-up of Japanese culture. She visualizes again the removal of the hairpiece, this time causing a startled look on her real-time face. Things turn darker in her mind. She sees herself ostracized and pulled between her Japanese conscience and her American desires. The nocturnal present returns briefly in a medium shot of Butterfly, still upright on her knees. As a lively horn call heralds morning, images turn more grotesque. A hallucinatory pan of her dreamscape, which reminds us of Pinkerton's pan at the wedding, brings things to a head. A vision of Pinkerton appearing at the shoji, similar to the start of the Vigil, closes off the sequence. When he vanishes his place is taken by the light of a real morning. The Vigil is over.

THE LARGER PICTURE

When I personally am working on a concept and writing the shooting-script, I see no *a priori* difference between film and television. Of course I know that a television screen is much smaller than a big Cinemascope screen. All the same, I don't believe there's a fundamental difference. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle⁵⁴

For me, there is a *conditio sine qua non* as there is in stage productions: opera-film directors must be musical. I want them to accept the primacy of music and that they think and act with music, in the music, perhaps also against it but in a relationship with the music. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle⁵⁵

Ponnelle's emphasis on subjectivity is tailored to television. Television is a more intimate medium than cinema in size and scale, and it is typically viewed in a small, domestic space rather than a large, public place. Although home viewing can present distractions, television encourages co-intimacy between the viewer and the characters in the fiction, and Ponnelle's subjective emphasis builds on that tendency. I especially see the thematic use of interior singing in *Butterfly* and *Figaro* as a televisual device. Interior singing could "play" in a movie theater, of course, but not so consistently with extreme close-ups or

subtle gestures in face and hands. This would not accord well with the size and scale of the movie screen and the venue. More generally, the subjective devices we have discussed open up a private narrative space. By this I mean a special private area associated with a character, but also an intimate link between that private area and the viewer's private space in a domestic setting. This co-intimacy might be compromised in a movie theater, and Ponnelle's opera-films less successful.

So how do we reconcile the director's statement that television and cinema are not fundamentally different? For one, Ponnelle made the remark in reference to a question about film stock versus videotape (he uses film stock, as do movie directors). Second, his opinion is largely moot, perhaps irrelevant, because he never did an opera-film for cinema.⁵⁶ And third, he may be referring to certain elements of the shooting script that would be similar, disregarding those that create intimacy and shape a subjective approach. Ponnelle qualifies his point when he notes differences in size and scale between the two media, and I suspect he would have said much more in a lengthier forum.

Nonetheless, the enriched narrative content resulting from Ponnelle's stress on subjectivity renders the films cinematic. They draw on a variety of devices to round out character and drama, and these come from cinema's arsenal of imaginative techniques. They include the ability to separate sound and image; to manipulate time through flashback and flashforward; and to deploy camerawork that crafts style, color, rhythm, and composition, as well as focalization from a character's viewpoint. What is not cinematic, but rather televisual, is the intimacy created by the strong subjective emphasis. Hence we might say that cinematic techniques are being used for televisual affect and communication.

Repeatedly I have returned to the idea that subjective effects are connected to music and text. The strong ties between them suggests that filmic subjectivity serves as a pretext for Ponnelle to bring out nuances of music and text that are passed over elsewhere, especially on the stage. As a stickler for detail and someone who reputedly knew the orchestral score by heart, the director may have relished a

special outlet to channel his musical knowledge.⁵⁷ One might wonder if Ponnelle's dependence on music as his point of departure has a further impact on the intermedial relationship between opera and film. As noted, his use of interior singing complicates opera-film's inherent status as overt intermediality by muddying the strength of opera's signifiers. Yet Ponnelle's narrative doubling and visual effects to stress subjectivity rebalance the intermedial landscape by buttressing opera's role as the driver of everything else. The films come across as examples of overt intermediality, but the recipe for attaining that status is unusual.

In conclusion, one can ask whether Ponnelle's virtuosic style renders him an *auteur* of opera-film. *Auteur* traditionally denotes cinema directors who insert a highly personal style or viewpoint in their films.⁵⁸ But because music figures as the impetus for Ponnelle's virtuosic style it is harder to call him an *auteur*. For many, music implies a strong tie to stage opera, and that link hinders originality and individuality in the new medium. Calábria contends that Ponnelle always respected the intentions of the composer.⁵⁹ While his productions do not bear this out – Ponnelle adds characters, locations, and movements, even on the stage, when none are indicated in the score – the musical sensibility behind his subjective conception remains fundamental and persuasive. This does, I believe, preclude a film that puts forward a counter-reading, especially a strong counter-reading, and the notion of the *auteur* usually entails this sort of assertion of a director's personal vision. Yet the kinds of doublings, additions, and manipulations of sound, image, and time that Ponnelle practices mean that he is just as imaginative and individual as *auteurs* of film. Ponnelle manages to be both individualist and traditionalist as he gets to the core of a work.

In the study of screen opera, postmodernism has been favored in many quarters – hence Jeremy Tambling's Marxist volume that launched the field, Jeongwon Joe's dissertation, my study *Opera on Screen* to some extent, and the impetus behind Joe's and Rose Theresa's collection *Between Opera and Cinema*.⁶⁰ While postmodernism offers productive ways for studying the hybrid medium, one sometimes has

the impression that a director who stresses music and the original opera is regressive or conservative, thus insufficiently imaginative from a filmic perspective. This is especially true if opera constitutes an entire film rather than appearing within a mainstream film. While these factors help to explain why Ponnelle has received less attention than movie directors, another reason may be that media studies has valued cinema more than television and made it the disciplinary centerpiece of film studies. In recent years, however, television has been making major strides in the scholarly arena.

Perhaps Ponnelle's imaginative forays into subjectivity call for a new definition of *auteur*: one based on a rapprochement between an insistence on a film's independence from stage opera and a recognition that music and the original opera are major sources for filmic interpretation. I am attracted to this view, and I believe it characterizes Ponnelle's achievements. In this newer sense, Ponnelle counts as a major *auteur* of screen opera.

4 | *Don Giovanni* and subjectivity in Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*

Opera presented on television in a film's story is rare in cinema. One of the most striking examples occurs in Claude Chabrol's film *La Cérémonie* (1995). In this adaptation of Ruth Rendell's crime novel *A Judgement in Stone* (1977), a well-heeled family is murdered by their illiterate maid and her zany girlfriend as they watch a telecast of *Don Giovanni*.¹ Resentment quietly builds in the film until it implodes in the climactic scene of the opera broadcast, which is key to the film's success. Not only does Chabrol deploy his formidable subjective methods in the presentation of the opera, but he leaves us with an interpretation of *Don Giovanni* that is suggestive for Mozart's work.

Chabrol has enjoyed a productive career and emerged as an *éminence grise* of French cinema. A founding member of the New Wave and contributor to its mouthpiece *Cahiers du cinéma*, Chabrol has made over fifty films and is one of the most prolific living directors. His output is eclectic and influenced by key developments of the late twentieth century. According to biographer Guy Austin, these include "neorealism, the new wave, the trauma of the Algerian War, the political legacy of 1968, the rise of the consumer society and the 'pompidolien' bourgeoisie, the perennial popularity of the thriller, the tension between television and cinema, the decline of Marxism."² Although many considered Chabrol's diversity a betrayal of the New Wave and denied him his due for a long time, the situation changed with the extremely positive reaction to *La Cérémonie*. Frédéric Strauss in *Cahiers* called it "the best French film in a long time," and the editorial in the same issue declared that the film marks Chabrol as "the greatest French filmmaker."³ *La Cérémonie* joins other Chabrol films inspired by crime fiction, such as *Le Cri du hibou* (1987) from Patricia Highsmith's thriller *The Cry of the Owl* (1962). Chabrol has also done films based on *faits divers* – real crimes, often sensationalist, that receive

passing mention in the press. *Violette Nozière* (1978), for example, which launched his association with actress Isabelle Huppert, is based on a true story of a woman who poisons her parents.⁴ Similarly, *La Cérémonie* and Rendell's novel resemble a French case of the 1930s: the Papin sisters' brutal murder of their employers.⁵

The plot of *La Cérémonie* is simple. The cultured Lelièvres, who inhabit an isolated house in Brittany, hire Sophie (Sandrine Bonnaire) as a live-in maid. Although minimally responsive, she is competent and fulfills expectations. But we sense that something is awry. When she is sent for new glasses we learn that she cannot read: the shameful secret that Sophie is determined to hide. Meanwhile, she becomes best friends with the chatty *postière* Jeanne (Huppert), whose hyperactive resentments light the fuse that sets off Sophie. They talk of suspicious murders in their past, but we never know if they committed them. The turning point in the story comes when grown daughter Melinda discovers Sophie's secret, and Sophie's retaliatory attempt at blackmail gets her fired. When she returns with Jeanne for her things, the family is watching a telecast of *Don Giovanni* from the Salzburg Festival. The denouement begins. Halfway into the opera, paterfamilias Georges is gunned down by Sophie in the kitchen. Son Gilles, Melinda, and wife Catherine (Jacqueline Bisset) are executed in the television room. Afterwards Jeanne dies in a car accident. Melinda's tape recorder, which recorded the opera and the shootings, is found by the police in the wreckage. The last image shows Sophie outside listening to the playback from afar, then walking into the night.

The ambiguous ending typifies the film. Chabrol thematizes elusiveness, a quality that he and others have dubbed "opacité": in space, image, political viewpoint, soundtrack music, identification with characters, subordination of plot and motivation to character, and distancing between story and viewer. Hitchcock's brand of unease plays a role in the calibrated suspense and psychological ambiguity.⁶ Chabrol's elusive style features a complex treatment of vision, which in *La Cérémonie* is a key component of subjectivity. Many manifestations of vision, including watching opera on television, are questioned or criticized as Chabrol interrogates the nature

of looking on the part of the characters, the camera, and the film's audience. Class assumes a key role in his critique and is bound up with the idea that mastery of the world comes about through visual means, especially the ability to read. Class also figures prominently in the disposition of *Don Giovanni*. As in Rendell's novel, the opera affords parallels to the story, comments on it, and injects irony. In the end the meaningful rendition of the opera that remains is an aural version on a tape recorder. Hence, the visual has been effaced and replaced.

We will examine Chabrol's use of *Don Giovanni* and its connection to subjectivity and the role of vision. Two main issues occupy our attention. One concerns the variable subjective viewpoints in the film and *Don Giovanni*. Chabrol presents a complex representation of class and literacy, and uses television viewing as a lens into subjectivity. I offer a close reading of *Don Giovanni*'s role in the film that illuminates Chabrol's understanding of Mozart's opera and its relationship to his subjective ends. The second issue involves what may be Chabrol's clearest subjective position: the audible as the remains of the visual, and arguably the rightful remains. This intriguing idea raises questions. Does it herald a regression to a pre-television era, to hearing opera rather than seeing it? Does it advocate a repression of spectacle and the operatic relay telecast? Along the lines of Michal Grover-Friedlander's work, what are the implications of heard vocal remains in opera?⁷ And how do the vocal remains in *La Cérémonie* compare to the instrumental remains in *Godfather Part III*, discussed in [Chapter 1](#)? In a concluding section, we will see how Chabrol's approach to *Don Giovanni* compares to other filmic interpretations that also use it for social critique.

SUBJECTIVE VIEWPOINTS

The filmmaker places one's gaze at a crossroads, stripping one of the subject position, that permanent and universal object of desire. Jean-Claude Polack⁸

[Chabrol divides] his look into multiple points of view to bring off the effect of objective opacity. Isabelle Huppert⁹

In a documentary Chabrol refers to *La Cérémonie* as “the last Marxist film,” made by someone who is not a Marxist. Then he chuckles.¹⁰ The sly remark hints at the ambiguities of class and subjectivity in the film. Class critique has occupied Chabrol his entire career, but here the “problem” is that the employers are decent people who are kind to their employee. They appreciate beauty, and Georges adores classical music. Several times we see him listening to music – to Elgar’s Cello Concerto, Chausson’s *Poème* for Violin and Orchestra, and Mozart’s Concerto for Flute and Harp, K. 299. Chabrol pays close attention to power relations, especially by way of the camera. In the masterful opening sequence a lengthy shot establishes the dominance of Catherine as Sophie approaches a restaurant for the hiring interview. But at the train station on her first day of work, the hierarchy changes as Sophie’s gaze assumes the privileged position.¹¹ This flexibility sets the tone for the variable subjective identifications in *La Cérémonie*. No clear line separates good and evil, and the viewer becomes a detached observer. This subjective position is promoted by the atonal soundtrack music of Matthieu Chabrol, the director’s son, whose “lugubrious score,” mostly for chamber strings, helps to keep “the viewer’s nerves on edge.”¹²

Literacy and illiteracy form the backbone of the film. Sophie’s inability to see words and decipher the world contrasts with the Lelièvres’ ability to thrive in the world. The family is immersed in trappings of literacy, including books, musical scores, tasteful décor, and classical music. After Sophie gets glasses she appears to have access to literacy, yet when the glasses lead to Melinda’s discovery of her secret, their liberating power becomes ironic. Rendell makes the point earlier. When Sophie obtains her glasses, the author’s voice notes her intimidation by the family’s books and how “they must read to provoke her, for no one, not even schoolteachers, could read that much for pleasure” (49).¹³ And then, “She had been happy, but the glasses had destroyed her happiness” (50). Typical of Chabrol, the film offers nothing on how Sophie came to be illiterate, while Rendell goes into great detail.

Although Sophie may elicit viewers’ empathy, Jeanne confounds such identification. Jeanne is literate, and one of her favorite pastimes

is reading other people's mail, especially the Lelièvres'. Hyperactively chatty, she embodies excessive presence, while the nearly silent Sophie represents absence. Both are outsiders to privilege, but Jeanne's maliciousness makes it harder for us to blame society for Sophie's condition. Jeanne is also insane. Chabrol again withholds details of a past, while Rendell gives a full picture. Jeanne has a husband, a promiscuous background, an obsession with Satan-thumping activism, and has gone "completely mad." Irony in Rendell comes from forthright statements in surprising juxtaposition, while Chabrol achieves it through elusive images and murky music.¹⁴

Chabrol observes that in having a viewer and not a reader, he "elaborated the relationship with television."¹⁵ Television is also important in the Rendell, but Chabrol goes further: television is key to his staging of literacy. As in many of his films, the device is indicted for its promotion of bourgeois values. For the Lelièvres television conveys high culture, and their murder accompanies an opera telecast: just retribution for their access to bourgeois culture. Lower on the social spectrum, Sophie becomes catatonic in front of the television in her room, where she "finally enjoys a world where the visible ceases to persecute and disqualify her, and gives her a place" – Frédéric Strauss's apt description of Sophie's ironic situation.¹⁶ Inane game shows and the like make up the nonstop fare from her viewing perch on the floor. When Jeanne joins her the two fuse into a mindless absence and link arms in a creepy togetherness that spells trouble. These connections show how television, as a lens that engages looking, functions as a subjective agent across the film. In Jean-Claude Polack's neat characterization, "Everyone in the house has her/his particular mode of attachment to the apparatus that seems endowed with a power of regulation or of generalized subjective replenishment."¹⁷ The telecast of *Don Giovanni* is no exception.

DON GIOVANNI

The film's final ceremony, the Lelièvres' blood-stained massacre, enacted before the TV set, becomes a symbolic expiatory act, atoning for the sins of bourgeois society.

Florence Jacobowitz¹⁸

Chabrol has commented on *Don Giovanni* in the film, wondering if it would work for him:

I asked myself: Rendell chose *Don Giovanni*, with paradoxical relationships between the progression of *Don Giovanni* and that of the ceremony [i.e., capital executions], but wouldn't the functioning be better visually with *The Marriage of Figaro*? I tried. In vain. I would have been forced to completely change the progression of carnage. She worked hard to make her book, she must have her reasons for having chosen *Don Giovanni*. She certainly must have also thought about *Figaro*. I kept her private reason. I worked hard on connections with the makeup [*l'intérieur*] of the opera.¹⁹

While Chabrol may have been thinking of the match with *Figaro*'s class relations, its non-violent plot, relatively benign music, and theme of forgiveness would not mesh with his Marxist sympathies. *Giovanni*'s ruthless protagonist is much more suitable.²⁰

The *Don Giovanni* tableau in *La Cérémonie* occupies over thirteen minutes of filmic time (see Table 4.1). Stylistically it stands out because of cross-cutting between two plots instead of the more unitary pattern elsewhere. The telecast is shown a few times, but mostly the heard music represents the opera or we watch the family watch it. After the Overture's opening chords a lengthy cutaway to another location (Jeanne and Sophie in a car) suspends opera, which returns when the pair arrives at the Lelièvres. Chabrol uses four sections of the Act I Finale, and after a pause the first three numbers of Act II. Many numbers are incomplete, and sometimes remote places are pasted together. The massacres occur in two of the Act II numbers. Georges is killed to the opening duet between Giovanni and Leporello, and the other three during Giovanni's serenade "Deh vieni alla finestra." Two measures into the following recitative Jeanne turns off the television and the opera goes mute until the aural remains emerge on the tape recorder. The opera creates parallels and irony with filmic events, and the contradictory relationship serves up "opacité" that accords with Chabrol's style.

For the Lelièvres, especially Georges, the telecast creates a special evening. Although they are overdressed for television viewing, the

Table 4.1 Don Giovanni in the murder sequence

Musical number	DVD timing	Portion of number	Action	Comments
Overture	1:31:18–1:31:30	First two chords	Mozart's name shown, then cutaway from opera and house	Afterwards long hiatus from opera
Act 1 Finale (Section 5): "Protegga il giusto cielo" (Adagio)	1:34:37–1:36:50	Complete	Cross-cutting between screen and two film plots	Goes directly into next section (v–i relationship)
1 Finale (Section 6): "Riposate, vezzose ragazze" (Allegro)	1:36:50–1:37:36	First section	Cross-cutting between two film plots	Big musical cut afterwards, as Sections 7–9 of Finale omitted; pasted to middle of Section 10
1 Finale (Section 10): middle of "Ecco il birbo" (Andante maestoso)	1:37:37–1:38:59	Last section	Cross-cutting between two film plots and screen (at end)	Goes directly into next section (v–i relationship)
1 Finale (Section 11): "Trema, scellerato" (Allegro)	1:39:00–1:40:27	Complete except for a few internal cuts of repetitive passages	Cross-cutting between two film plots and screen (especially at end)	End of Act 1; brief hiatus afterwards represents intermission

Table 4.1 (cont.)

Musical number	DVD timing	Portion of number	Action	Comments
Act II, no. 14: Duet, "Eh via buffone" (Giovanni and Leporello)	1:41:15–1:42:00	Incomplete	Cross-cutting between screen and two film plots; Georges is killed.	Start of Act II
II, no. 15: Trio, "Ah taci, ingiusto core" (Elvira, Giovanni, Leporello)	1:42:10–1:42:53	Incomplete	Cross-cutting between two film plots	Second of three consecutive numbers
II, no. 16: Canzonetta, "Deh vieni alla finestra" (Giovanni)	1:42:54–1:44:54	Complete	Screen at start; then murders of Gilles, Catherine, and Melinda; then aftermath	Aria followed by two measures of next recitative, then Jeanne turns off television

formal attire connects them with the audience at the performance, whom we never see, and the elegance of the Salzburg Festival. As preparation, Catherine finds a score and expresses delight that it is in two languages. Musically and linguistically this signifies a virtuosic command of literacy. When Georges exclaims "Mozart, nous voilà!" ("Mozart, we're ready!") the four settle on the couch, in rapt attention (see Fig. 4.1) Their horizontal lineup mimics that of a real opera audience. We watch them as the screen illuminates their faces. Then we watch with them, as the television screen fills the film screen and we join their subjective viewpoint. "Don Giovanni" appears in big letters atop a picture-postcard image of Salzburg. This affirmation of the



Fig. 4.1 Gilles (Valentin Merlet), Catherine (Jacqueline Bisset), Melinda (Virginie Ledoyen), and Georges (Jean-Pierre Cassel) watching the telecast of *Don Giovanni* in *La Cérémonie*.

opera's identity as Old World Culture lasts a few seconds, then comes "dramma giocoso in 2 acts by Lorenzo Da Ponte."²¹

Still over the image of Salzburg, the words "Music by Mozart" appear next. As if literalizing the message, the opera music begins, the D minor chords accompanying the image. The second series, on the dominant, effect a cutaway to Jeanne and Sophie in a car. The music cements the plots and briefly becomes soundtrack music. Mozart's subversive music may well infiltrate the women's psyches, as psychodiabetic music, and foment literal violence, for in the opera it portends violence and will return for Giovanni's demise. Back in the film, no opera music sounds until Sophie and Jeanne arrive at the Lelièvres'. Meanwhile, the edgy soundtrack music plays during Jeanne's narration in the car about her daughter's death and how Jeanne was not responsible – a sequence that in Janet Maslin's view acts to "cancel out any pangs of conscience" and prepare the way for the gruesome violence.²² In the commercial video of this Salzburg production, no music begins until Herbert von Karajan reaches the pit and conducts the overture. Chabrol made an elision to move things along and keep the focus on the Lelièvres. Moreover, he is wise to avoid the distraction of von Karajan's god-like persona.

251 **Adagio**
DONNA ANNA

D.A. Pro - teg - ga il giu - sto cie - lo il

DONNA ELVIRA

D.E. Ven - di-chi il giu - sto

D.O. Pro - teg - ga il giu - sto cie - lo il

(Entra e chiude.)

L. - mor.

Adagio nell' orchestra

p Archi

p Fiati

Ex. 4.1 “Protegga il giusto cielo,” mm. 1–4 (mm. 251–54 of Act I Finale).

Act I Finale

When Jeanne and Sophie get out of the car at the Lelièvres, the stunning music of “Protegga il giusto cielo” from the Act I Finale is heard (“Protect, righteous heaven, the zealousness of my heart”; see Ex. 4.1).²³ The camera’s slow movement towards the illuminated window tells us it comes from the house. This is confirmed by a cut to the television screen and our view of the performance. Chabrol uses the entire piece. In Mozart’s opera, Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, and Donna Elvira sing the number, without the masks they donned to gain entry to Giovanni’s party. In the preceding section Leporello invited them to the festa. Now they invoke a prayer to protect them from their nemesis.

A magnificent choice to begin the tableau, “Protegga” offers parallels and more than a whiff of irony. In the opera and the film, invaders wish to penetrate the enemy’s domain, and in both they proceed from outside to inside, from a private to a public space. In the opera “Protegga” is the last section of the Finale that occurs outside and

engages a private mode.²⁴ It represents a blissful suspension of time in the headlong rush of Mozart's finale, and its musical calm belies the elevated tension level surrounding it. This is obviously parallel to the situation in the film. In addition, the meaning of this number as the end of private moments and narrative separation echoes the family's situation. Without their knowing it, "Protegga" intones as a farewell to tranquility and a supplication for their afterlife.

The last connection hints at "Protegga"'s irony with the film. Who do the masqueraders represent, and for whom are they invoking protection? The masqueraders confronting Giovanni belong to his class – they are privileged, upper-class characters. They are asking for protection for their own safety. In the Chabrol, however, class separates the two women and the Lelièvres, and part of the resentment stems from envy of the family's position. Are the upper-class opera characters requesting divine providence for the film's lower-class conspirators? Not really. If they are asking on behalf of the Lelièvres, fellow class members, then their parallel with the film's invaders does not hold up. It is true that Giovanni gains power over everyone, including his peers, through serious transgressions. Anna, Ottavio, and Elvira have reason to seek revenge. But the opera's ambiguous class antagonism muddles Chabrol's view of class and inserts distance between the opera and the plot of the film. It also complicates subjective identification between the viewer and the events on the film screen, including the opera. Whom do we identify with, and what subjective connections form between the plots enacted before us? Ambiguity abounds.

Enacting a slow rhythm corresponding to the noble music, Chabrol's camerawork in "Protegga" is extremely sophisticated. When Elvira reaches the exposed seventh of the v-7 chord in the fourth measure (see Ex. 4.1) – a gorgeous sonority at the peak of the musical arc – the camera cuts to the television screen. We adopt the Lelièvres' point-of-view as we see the motionless singers, the telecast showing a very slow zoom-in that matches Chabrol's visual rhythm. The parallelism continues as he begins a slow pan around the room that ends at the window, lingers to inject suspense (a Hitchcockian

device), and cuts to the outside as the women approach. Inside, the next shot completes the semicircular pan and pauses on the family watching the opera. This occurs on the first important cadence of the piece. When “Protegga”’s imitative episode starts its second statement, Chabrol focuses on the women as they enter the house and begin dangerous horseplay with rifles. The visual rhythms are still slow, and the expressionistic shadows for Jeanne in the gunroom parallel the gravity of the music.²⁵ Irony starts to percolate as the women’s disturbing activity belies the tranquility of the heard surface.

Another musical element creates irony: the all-winds scoring of “Protegga.” Called *Harmoniemusik* in the eighteenth century and related to chamber music and divertimento, the sonority had populist appeal and figured in celebrations and entertainments. It will reappear in *Don Giovanni*, for instance, in the final party scene. *Harmoniemusik* had little to do with the topos that governs “Protegga,” which is the ecclesiastical style. As Wye Allanbrook observes, “The out-of-doors (from the cassation-style accompaniment) and the ecclesiastical are strangely bound in this intimate moment...”²⁶ Hence Chabrol’s choice of “Protegga” raises intriguing questions. Is it meant to question the sincerity of the prayer of the upper-class opera characters and undercut their validity in *Giovanni*? This is suggestive, for a subsidiary theme of the film concerns the hypocrisy of organized religion. Chabrol may also imply that the operatic trio are feigning prayer, as the music’s popular associations undercut their sincerity. Their play-acting might correspond to the play-acting with rifles by their invader counterparts in the film.

The operatic music continues into the next section, “Riposate, vez-zose ragazze!” (“Rest yourselves, my pretty ones!”). Sophie prepares a tray with hot chocolate, and Jeanne lays the rifle on the counter. The operatic text exhorts them to enjoy themselves, and they do. “Riposate” feels like an exuberant outburst after “Protegga,” and its lively rhythms launch the festivities in Giovanni’s ballroom. Now it is full orchestra, with strings in the lead, and we do not see the television screen. The camera cross-cuts between head-on views of the Lelièvres watching the opera and Sophie and Jeanne moving through the house.

After the camera lingers on the resting rifle (another Hitchcock technique), the family is seen during an ironic operatic line: Giovanni and Leporello with the encouraging words “tornerete a far presto le pазze, tornerete a scherzar e ballar” (“return to your capers, return to merriment and dancing”). They call for refreshments of coffee and hot chocolate, another ironic twist, for Sophie and Jeanne are taking hot chocolate upstairs that very moment (although an excited utterance from Georges blocks “Cioccolata!” from being heard). For the duration of this music, rendered incomplete, the camera focuses on the two women on the stairs.²⁷ Eight measures later, on the second storey, the music starts its modulation to the dominant. Again the text is suggestive – Zerlina and Masetto singing “Tropo dolce comincia la scena, in amaro potria terminar” (“It all begins too sweetly, it could all turn sour”). If the director favored parallelism the family would be shown, but Chabrol again opts for irony. Jeanne and Sophie enter Catherine and Georges’s bedroom, and the music fades away.

The entry into the bedroom marks a big jump in the score. Music from the middle of the penultimate section of the Finale, “Ecco il birbo” (“Here’s the scoundrel”), is pasted to the fadeout of the sixth section. Most of the camerawork focuses on the duo. Jeanne jumps on the unkempt bed and mimics urination as she pours out the pitcher of hot chocolate. She smashes framed pictures, then frolics to the closet and rips gowns in a frenzy of glee. Sophie joins in, a rare smile on her face. Meanwhile, the heard opera music proceeds at a slower pace than the previously heard music and displays a formalism that contrasts ironically with the visual anarchy. It starts with stylized dotted rhythms by Giovanni, goes to a mannered interchange between him and Leporello, then presents a point-of-imitation among the upper-class antagonists. Despite the formality a great deal happens. Giovanni publicly accuses Leporello of attempting to rape Zerlina, Leporello replies “Ah cosa fate!” (“What are you doing?”); Ottavio points a pistol at Giovanni, saying “Nol sperate!” (“You won’t get away with it!”); and the masqueraders unmask, to “L’empio crede con tal frode di nascondere l’empietà” (“The villain thinks his play-acting can conceal his crimes”).

The film shifts briefly to our watching the family view the television. They hear and watch Giovanni exclaim “Donna Elvira! ... Don Ottavio” at the unmasking: an ironic premonition of their own belated recognition of infiltrators. When the camera returns to the bedroom the music intones “Traditore, traditore, traditore!” (“Deceiver, deceiver, deceiver”). An extended passage of “Tutto tutto già si sa” (“Everything, everything is known”), initiated by the lower-class Zerlina, continues to the end of the number and accompanies the orgy of destruction. Two measures before the close we see the television screen, and the collective accusation of Giovanni finally assumes visual form. Ottavio points a pistol at Giovanni, reminding us of the rifle in the kitchen. Anna throws a crimson cape at the Don’s feet, recalling the tossed clothing in the bedroom. The cape is Giovanni’s, retrieved by Anna after Giovanni raped her near the start of the opera, which does not appear in the Chabrol. The confrontation in this part of the Finale continues the ambiguous subjective identification noted above. Giovanni’s accusers, while joined by lower-class characters, consist of his upper-class peers, while the Lelièvres’ antagonists are lower class. As the music halts on an expectant dominant chord, the camera returns to the bedroom.

The final section of the Finale (Allegro) follows immediately. The first shot shows Jeanne and Sophie continuing to ransack the bedroom, now against the operatic conspirators’ “Trema, trema o scelerato!” (“Tremble, tremble, oh evil one!”) and the *sotto voce* reaction “È confusa la mia testa” (“My head is in a whirl”) of Giovanni and Leporello. Sophie and Jeanne tiptoe to an interior balcony overlooking the television room, and the music emerges louder. Now comes a defining shot of the film.²⁸ As Giovanni and Leporello sing “Non so più quel ch’io mi faccia / Non sa più quel ch’ei si faccia” (“I don’t know what’s happening to me / he doesn’t know what’s happening to him”) and the others have “Saprà tosto il mondo intero, il misfatto orrendo e nero, la tua fiera crudeltà” (“In no time everyone will know about your heinous crime, your heartless cruelty”), Chabrol’s camera traces an extraordinary upward move from the television screen to the balcony where the women are planted. Slow and suspenseful, it contrasts with the speed of the music. It is brilliant in the details,



Fig. 4.2 Jeanne (Isabelle Huppert) and Sophie (Sandrine Bonnaire) looking down at the family in *La Cérémonie*.

as the pillars of Giovanni's ballroom on television are continued in the vertical beams supporting the balcony as the camera ascends. The two places have fused. At the melodic high-point on A flat, the visual climax occurs as the camera reaches Jeanne and Sophie on high, who assume the superior position over the family. A measure later Chabrol cuts to a medium close-up of the women's faces and their derisive calm as they survey their prey (see Fig. 4.2), and a point-of-view shot of the Lelièvres secures subjective control. This is the first time in the opera sequence the two groups appear in the same place, although one knows it and the other does not. It corresponds to the musical face-off between the groups in the opera. Then it is back to a medium close-up of the women as Jeanne mimes spitting on the family and the two leave their lookout. Chabrol underscores their dominance with a second point-of-view of the family even though the duo are no longer there. The balcony sequence creates irony as the women's stillness contrasts with the energetic music. It differs from the irony in the preceding number, where the hyperactive duo clashed with the static musical surface. In both places tremendous tension lurks behind the surface events of music and plot.

A startling change comes next: a close-up of Jeanne cutting the phone wires in the servants' entryway, where the firearms are kept.

This ratchets up the tension, and the music sounds a dissonant chromatic ascent in the vocal lines (Zerlina, Ottavio, Masetto). In a long stretch that includes the coda-like “Più stretto” section, Sophie and Jeanne have a chillingly casual conversation as Sophie proudly shows Jeanne how to load the rifle. At the concluding nine-measure orchestral flourish, we see the television screen as Giovanni tosses the red cape onto Ottavio, a displacement of guilt onto others. He escapes, and Act I is over.

Why the Act I Finale?

Unlike Chabrol, Rendell does not use the Act I Finale but other numbers from Act I.²⁹ They come in quick succession on one page (147), and are consecutive numbers in the opera. Rendell emphasizes connections between opera characters and the Coverdale family. As wife Jacqueline makes critical notes in the program guide (she does not have a score), “she whispered, following Ottavio, ‘Find husband and father in me!’ and she darted a soft look at George. But George, being a man, a handsome and sexually successful man, couldn’t help identifying with the Don.” The opera text is from the revenge duet of Anna and Ottavio (no. 2) after her father is killed. Rendell opens the next paragraph with “‘I will cut out his heart!’ sang Elvira.” This appears in Elvira’s entrance aria (no. 3). Rendell writes that everyone laughed except son Giles, who wasn’t much interested in music. He alone “heard a footstep on the gravel of the drive at twenty to eight while Scene Two and the Catalogue Song were ending” (no. 4 in the opera). And in the next paragraph we read, “As Giovanni sang, ‘O, *guarda, guarda* [Look, look]!’ the Smiths’ van entered the drive of Lowfield Hall and crept, with only side lights on, almost to the front door” (Jeanne’s counterpart has the surname Smith). These words occur near the start of the recitative after “GiovINETTE che fate all’amore” (no. 5), which introduces the peasants’ world of Zerlina and Masetto.

Rendell refers to all the major opera characters in the selected numbers. Not coincidentally, these numbers occur near the start of the opera and function as exposition. She uses her authorial voice

to create irony between the narcissism of the Coverdales and the menace on their doorstep. Although these numbers are basically consecutive in the opera, their unfolding in the novel obviously does not correspond to actual performed time. In this respect reading about musical events is vastly different from experiencing them. Film, however, offers the potential of real-time or nearly real-time unfolding of music, and Chabrol makes good use of extended expanses of Mozart's music. He also avoids exposition and prefers music well along in characters' interactions, and in Act I that could mean the Quartet midway (no. 9) and the Finale. Although confrontation of Giovanni occurs in the Quartet, it involves only one character, Elvira (Anna and Ottavio become antagonists after the number). The Finale, however, features collective confrontation, and one antagonist (Ottavio) threatens violence with a gun. Moreover, unlike the separate numbers in the Rendell, the Finale forms a self-contained unit cordoned off from the rest of the opera.³⁰ This detachment suits Chabrol's aims of having the opera-murder sequence feel different from the rest of *La Cérémonie*. It contributes to a self-contained climactic ending for the film.

Chabrol also uses the Finale because of its internal flow, and its continuity can be considered cinematic. Typical of the composite finale for which Mozart is known, this Finale excludes recitatives and other interruptive elements, and promotes higher-level continuity through linear harmonic relationships, especially dominant-tonic progressions. These qualities work well with the continuous presence of the camera. As we have seen, in Chabrol this means both affirmation and denial of the visual content. But the continual presence of the music, without the need for far-flung elisions, becomes an important way of cementing the images, especially given the cross-cutting style in this part of the film. The Finale's continuity also brings to mind the potential for continuity in soundtrack music. Historically, soundtrack music (nondiegetic music) has served to cement camera cuts into a coherent narrative and vivify "ghostly images" on the screen.³¹ In Mozart's operatic music, the composite Finale comes the closest to the soundtrack ideal because of its continuity and length.

The Act 1 Finale provides mounting excitement towards a climax. This seems ironic in light of Chabrol's preference for aesthetic "dryness," which he sees in the works of Stravinsky and Flaubert.³² He is well aware of this ironic gap in *La Cérémonie*. In the director's words, "I tried to attain a maximum of dryness [*sécheresse*] with music that is the least like this in the world, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*."³³ Regardless of Chabrol's acknowledgment of a misfit, the acceleration of the Act 1 Finale injects a teleology that builds tension before the murders and is one of the reasons the opera-murder climax works so well. The dramatic acceleration also resonates in the idea, aired earlier, that the film's characters may be driven to violence because of the propulsion of Mozart's music. From an interpretive perspective, the musical drive may serve as ironic commentary on the otherwise flat tone of the film and the contrast between the sparkling music tied to the Lelièvres and the gloomy atonality of Chabrol *films'* music for the downtrodden. Mozart's teleology implies potential for growth and improvement, while Chabrol's score signals a dead-end existence.

I would like to address a curious omission from the film: the portion of the Finale with "Viva la libertà" and the mixed-meter dances, probably the most famous part of the Finale. One would assume that its focus on class would be attractive to Chabrol. But there may be plausible reasons why Chabrol skipped this section. One is that it stresses ritualistic music and plot – "Venite" a formal invitation with trumpets and timpani, "Viva la libertà" with similar flourishes. Then come the superimposed dances of different classes and meters. While tremendous dramatic tension builds, the static musical surface fights with the growing tension in the film plot. The other reason involves the political message of "Viva la libertà." Initiated by Giovanni and repeated numerous times, the phrase serves as a rallying cry for unchecked individual freedom.³⁴ In addition to its conflict with Chabrol's Marxist sensibility, the director's penchant for "opacité" could probably not abide such an explicit political message here. I also suspect that the irony built into the Mozart – the masqueraders play-acting as they cheer the basis of Giovanni's power – creates too many dramatic contradictions for the film. Put another way, the subjective relationships

between the music and the film would become overly complex. Hedonism and confrontation form a better preamble to murder.

Act II

The opera intermission is short. The Lelièvres drink coffee and Catherine expresses unease over noises she has heard, while the duo in the kitchen play-act with rifles. The words “Act II” on the television screen, announcing the return of the performance, herald a discrete theatrical unit for the film, which is appropriate in light of the gruesome murders to come. During the murders Chabrol uses the first three numbers of Act II, the same pieces as in the Rendell. As we saw in the Act I Finale, these numbers provide parallels to the film story and create irony. The final stage of executions produces the greatest irony, as it occurs during what is arguably the most innocuous number of the opera, “Deh vieni alla finestra.” The effect is intensified by the total lack of emotion by the murderers. In an odd way, however, this fits with the evenness and lack of drama of “Deh vieni.”

The Duet “Eh via buffone” opens the Act. Leporello accuses his master of mistreating him: an obvious parallel to the film plot. Georges goes to the kitchen to check on a noise. The camera switches to the television screen and we watch seven measures’ worth of repartee between master and servant. Then we see nervous gun play-acting in the kitchen as suggestive opera text intones between Leporello and Giovanni: “Vo’ andar, vi dico (“I want to go, I tell you”), “Ma che ti ho fatto, che vuoi lasciarmi?” (“But what have I done to make you want to leave me?”), “Oh niente affatto! quasi ammazzarmi!” (“Oh, not much! Only half killed me!”), and “Va’ che sei matto! fu per burlar” (“You’re mad! it was a joke”). Georges enters the kitchen to Leporello’s line “Ed io non burlo, ma voglio andar” (“And I’m not kidding, I want to go”). He orders the women to put down the rifles aimed at him. More parallelism comes in the opera lines “Eh via buffone” (“Come on, you fool”) and “No no padrone” (“No, no, boss”).

In the third measure of Giovanni’s patter “Va’ che sei matto!” (“You’re mad!”) Sophie suddenly steps back and kills Georges, no

emotion on her face. Subjective identification is magnificently organized by Chabrol's camerawork. First the camera is behind the women as they corner him with rifles. He still feels in control. The camera shifts to Georges's point-of-view. In the blink of an eye comes a fast outward zoom as Sophie steps back and fires – a radical camera shot in the director's controlled style that creates an astonishing subjective jolt for the viewer. Our placement in Georges's position means we too are punished for our bourgeois complicity. We are also indicted for sympathies we may have with Giovanni. But our identification with Giovanni is complicated, for by this stage of the opera's reception history we feel ambivalent towards the dissolute hedonist at the core of an exhilarating work. We like and dislike him at the same time.

After the music becomes inaudible (sixteen measures later), the scene shifts to the family as they hear a loud pop (Chabrol replays the gunshot, with recitative-ending music). The next number, the Trio "Ah taci, ingiusto core," is a calm-sounding break between the killings, although the tension level is high. In the opera the number is ironic. It embodies a gap between Elvira's confused feelings, as expressed in stunningly beautiful music, and the mischief played on her by Giovanni and Leporello, who exchange identities so that it is actually Leporello who woos her (with Giovanni's voice).³⁵ In the film a gap opens between Catherine's mounting fears and the children's dismissal of them. Elvira articulates Catherine's angst with her opening line, "Ah taci, ingiusto core, non palpitarmi in seno" ("Be still, unjust heart, cease pounding in my breast"), just as Melinda says the Trio is her favorite part of the opera. When Elvira utters "è un empio, è un traditore, è colpa aver pietà" ("he's a scoundrel, he's a deceiver, it's wrong to pity him"), we are back in the kitchen as Sophie reloads. The text refers to the slain Georges and appears to speak for the director as well as for Sophie and Jeanne. The women, horribly calm, affect mannered poses on the counter, sipping coffee (see Fig. 4.3). Sophie suggestively has a rifle across her lap, and one is reminded of the staged poses of Bonnie Parker in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and their linking of violence and sexuality. The Trio disappears after twelve measures.



Fig. 4.3 Jeanne (Isabelle Huppert) and Sophie (Sandrine Bonnaire) between the bouts of murder in *La Cérémonie*.

“Deh vieni” is rendered complete, and Chabrol pays a lot of attention to the musical form and the text. Concluding chords of the preceding recitative are heard as the women set off on the next round of carnage. “Deh vieni” begins on television, and we see a medium close-up of Giovanni accompanying himself on the mandolin: a ritualistic parallel to the rifles of the women (see Ex. 4.2). The A section of the first strophe has the camera in the television room. For the first time, the camera shows the family from behind, inserting menace, as they (and we) watch the opera and we watch the family as well – a subtle and brilliant shift of subjective viewpoint (see Fig. 4.4). As if responding to Giovanni’s words “Deh vieni alla finestra, o mio tesoro, deh vieni a consolar il pianto mio” (“Oh come to the window, my treasure, oh come and heal my pain”), Catherine goes to the window and looks out, and the camera assumes her point-of-view as it scans the blackness outside. At the B section she asks Gilles to see what’s happening. On the text “davanti agli occhi tuoi morir vogl’io” (“before your eyes I want to die”), Gilles is gunned down after Sophie and Jeanne march lockstep, rifles pointed, into the television room. In the three-measure instrumental interlude Catherine and Melinda are killed. During the second strophe more shots are fired into the bodies. Sophie turns her sights on the books lining the wall as she shoots them

No. 16 Canzonetta
Allegretto

DON GIOVANNI

Mandolino

Mandolino
Archi

(pizz.)

D.G.

Deh vie - ni al - la fi - ne - stra, o mio te -

8

D.G.

- so - - ro, deh

Ex. 4.2 “Deh vieni alla finestra,” mm. 1–8.

as a protest against literacy and its power. As the B section begins the two move to the bookcase. Over the text “lasciati almen veder, mio bell’amore” (“vouchsafe me a glimpse, my beloved”) comes an erotic pose: Sophie motionless with rifle upright on floor next to her legs, Jeanne caressing her neck and striking a sexy Bonnie Parker pose with vampish knee and elbow.³⁶ After a few seconds Jeanne walks slowly to the television. The last music heard is the first phrase of the following recitative, “V’è gente alla finestra! sarà dessa” (“There’s someone at the window! it must be she”), an ironic comment on the women as invaders of the house. Jeanne turns off the television.



Fig. 4.4 Catherine (Jacqueline Bisset) and Melinda (Virginie Ledoyen) watching Giovanni (Samuel Ramey) sing “Deh vieni alla finestra” in the *Don Giovanni* telecast in *La Cérémonie*.

At first glance “Deh vieni” seems an unlikely number for the climactic executions. It is one of the least operatic numbers in *Don Giovanni*, much closer to folk music than to typical operatic fare (see Ex. 4.2); its strophic form avoids tension; and the piece remains static. Its role as filler, in the dramatically extraneous first half of Act II, makes it feel more like added entertainment than something integral. Its address to a non-existent character, Donna Elvira’s maid, also affirms its superficial function. In addition, the performative role of “Deh vieni” moves it outside the fiction of the opera and creates aesthetic distance that accords with the objective stance of Chabrol. Not insignificantly, it reinforces the performative and ritualistic nature of the executions, of what the French call “la cérémonie.”³⁷ It is interesting that Giovanni’s role of musician in the number aligns him with the Lelièvres’ involvement in music. Their slaughter during Giovanni’s performance implies that Sophie and Jeanne are attacking musical literacy generally. In this regard, critic Joël Magny offers an interesting musical observation when he contends that it is Mozart who is assassinated in the film.³⁸ That may be going too far, but the point is that high culture and art music are punished.³⁹

There is more to the implications of class. Irony results from the fact that Catherine’s move to the window places her in the subjective

position of the lower-class maid whom Giovanni is trying to overpower.⁴⁰ Through this exchange of identities, reminiscent of the exchange between Leporello and Giovanni in the Trio, the power relations in the Lelièvres' household are inverted as Catherine and the family are now in the inferior position. This lays the foundation for the culmination of the power reversal when the lower class wipe out their superiors.

As encapsulated in "Deh vieni alla finestra," the trope of windows holds special significance in the film. A window provides a means of looking through surfaces and past them, and we have seen this in the ironic interplay of surface and reality in the opera telecast. The window assumes great meaning as a metaphor for the complex subjective viewpoints during the murders. Throughout the film the television functions as a window into cultural disparity and a means of survival in a world of appearances. Furthermore, the telecast of *Don Giovanni* opens a window into the status of the art form. In *La Cérémonie*, it is interesting that the last looking out of a window is by Sophie, de facto mistress of the manor. No joy attends her dominance, and the window to her psyche remains as opaque as ever. The return of Matthieu Chabrol's chilly music says it all.

To conclude the analysis of *Don Giovanni*, it is useful to compare Chabrol's subjective methods to those of Ponnelle, explored in the previous chapter. Ponnelle is much more of an activist behind the camera. He uses more visual effects than Chabrol, such as zooms, differentiated focus, and sharply angled shots, and his montage is much livelier.⁴¹ Chabrol's style in *La Cérémonie* is subtle and restrained. We saw, for instance, how the climactic zoom at Georges's murder comes as an explosive shock in the prevailing style. Ponnelle keys his montage closely to the opera music, to the point where he choreographs the score. Of course, Chabrol is not directing an opera-film and the music-image relationship will differ. But even with respect to mainstream film, Chabrol's camerawork stands out for its avoidance of the kinds of connections that are typically forged with plot, motivation, and structure. When he does place a camera cut at a structural division in *Don Giovanni*, the visual flow remains smooth and supplies continuity with the rest of the film. In addition, the two directors craft different relationships among the elements of

the film. Using the camera to affirm the music or some narrative element, Ponnelle evinces a subjective viewpoint that is clear, consistent, and straightforward, while Chabrol luxuriates in complexity and elusiveness. Their approach to politics affects their subjective stance. Chabrol's interest in political critique promotes ambiguity and deflects identification with characters, while Ponnelle's minimal political engagement has him ascribe agency to individuals, supply clear lines of motivation, and draw in the viewer. Chabrol prefers to keep the viewer at a distance and vest agency in social structures. As I have noted, however, such observations are tempered by the differences between opera-film and opera in mainstream film. We should also remember that Ponnelle represents an opera director come to film, while Chabrol is an experienced filmmaker in peak form in *La Cérémonie*. Despite the differences, both qualify as *auteurs* in their own way.

AURAL REMAINS

Television is illustrated radio ... [Sound] is always foremost in television ... and does not need the image to be identified. Michel Chion⁴²

Through its sheer mortality and human frailty, the operatic voice wills what is beyond the human: the reversal of death. Michal Grover-Friedlander⁴³

The opera tableau of *La Cérémonie* leaves its trace on Melinda's tape recorder, recovered in Jeanne's crash. At the accident scene the police turn it on, and Mozart's music interlaced with gunshots and intense words wafts into the darkness. Sophie stops in her tracks as she listens, impassively, then walks off as the credits conclude. What is the meaning of these aural remains?

The replacement of the visual by the aural amounts to an effacement of image and a regression in technology. It marks a return to radio and a time before opera was visually produced for domestic consumption. Chabrol hints at the visual effacement in his staging of the opera-murder scene, where mostly heard music, not visual image, denotes the televised event. We see the family watching the

opera but are not shown the telecast very often, and most views are fleeting. In this way Chabrol prevents a sustained look at the opera and we depend on our ears for experiencing the work. This squashes the dominance of image and suggests that opera does not have to be experienced visually to be perceived. Only the Lelièvres are tied to the images of the opera. Sophie and Jeanne never look at the telecast, and they overpower those who are visually chained to the set, an ironic situation given Sophie's catatonic absorption in television during the entire film. For the family, sustained looking and the ignoring of other senses, especially hearing, become their undoing.

A question raised by Chabrol's staging concerns the manner of taping, for the choice of audiotaping is curious. Why not have Melinda videotape the telecast? A simple reason is that Rendell uses a tape recorder in *A Judgement in Stone*, a reel-to-reel machine as befits the time it was written. Home video did not become common until the mid 1980s, after the book appeared. But even though the triumph of the aural brings out Rendell's theme of the tyranny of vision, the novel deploys a visual element on the path to the aural. During the opera Jacqueline Coverdale writes musical comments on a program guide found by the inspector. The discovery of these bloodied visual remains leads to further investigation that will reveal the aural evidence. Chabrol, as we have seen, keeps the aural remains pure. There is also a practical reason for his arrangement. A home VCR would only record the broadcast itself, and the sounds of the murders would be missing. Be that as it may, the viewer senses an odd fit between Chabrol's modern setting and the mannered set-up with microphone on floor. The mismatch suits Chabrol's affinity for cultural regression and encourages us to depend on sound as in the era before television.⁴⁴

The tape recorder in the film is portable, like a boombox, and contrasts with the stationary television set showing the opera.⁴⁵ Its fleetness suggests a crossing of class borders. Art music rendered on audiocassette is transferable and accessible, and recalls the popular kinds of music played on a boombox. Anyone can use it, not just the privileged. After all, Jeanne, an outsider, picks it up and makes it her own.

And Sophie hears it as it is played outdoors by the police. She is able to decipher these aural messages – visual mastery is not needed, nor does she have to deal with their cultural trappings. Sound provides direct access, and this she understands immediately.

The opera relay

The aural remains serve as a criticism of the meaning of the opera telecast, or what is known as the opera relay.⁴⁶ A popular way of making opera available to a vast audience, the relay emphasizes a sense of occasion and makes home viewers feel part of the ritual and glitter at the opera house. As I have noted elsewhere, the role of the camera in guiding what we see and what we take from the broadcast renders the relay a separate work from the one experienced in the theater.⁴⁷ In *La Cérémonie* Chabrol gives us *Don Giovanni* transmitted from the Salzburg Festival, the most prestigious venue for Mozart and arguably the premiere operatic festival outside Bayreuth.⁴⁸ Its background is ideologically loaded, however. According to Michael P. Steinberg, the Festival was allied with Fascism over some of its history.⁴⁹ This may explain why Chabrol chose this production: to ally the Lelièvres with repressive politics. I would have expected Chabrol to foreground the festival name, but he only shows an image of the city, with opera title, librettist, and composer's name. Perhaps he assumed French audiences would recognize Salzburg and make the connection.

The tape recorder remains remove the cultural associations of the relay, especially its elitism and sense of occasion, and leave us with the heard *Don Giovanni*, which could just as well be on radio, LPs, or CDs. This is Chabrol's solution to the problem of art music on the culturally suspect medium of television. Another part of Chabrol's deflation of the television relay is the foregrounding of the technological basis of the broadcast by having partial remains represent the event. This draws our attention to the relay's manufactured nature and its ability to be transformed into something else when its key mechanical underpinning, the television camera, is effaced. Chabrol's unpacking of the cultural baggage associated with the relay also

challenges the aesthetic validity of the relay itself, as if to say that a visual reconstruction through the eye of the camera is a bad thing. This could be a sly advocacy of seeing opera live without the television eye pre-selecting what we see. This move is ironic, of course, since Chabrol fashions art through a camera. But to the director there is a world of difference between cinema and television.

Despite his criticism of the relay, Chabrol seems to be creating a relay once-removed through his decisions with respect to what is shown on the television screen and what is merely heard. A great deal of variety also inheres in the sound level – sometimes the music is prominent, and sometimes barely heard, depending on the location of the film camera. These effects of sound and image amount to a new version of the opera. In addition, Chabrol's complex lines of vision complicate the visual reception of the relay as he offers a new version of who is watching whom watching what. For instance, sometimes we watch the television with the Lelièvres, sometimes we watch them as they watch the television. By intercepting the sight lines for watching the relay and making them diffuse, Chabrol upsets the subjective relationships of the relay and the import of the televised event.

Chabrol also blunts the relay's impact by omitting subtitles. This compromises the relay's aim of providing ready access to the work and pulling in the viewer to the experience of opera. The viewer has less knowledge and seems to be at a greater distance from the work. In this case, Chabrol may be implying that the musical sounds convey sufficient meaning without the words, and he may wish to conceal more detailed information of what is happening in the opera. This suggests a ploy to obfuscate links between the opera and the film plot, and a desire to foreground the theme of literacy and show how the absence of read words lessens understanding. Even the relay, Chabrol implies, is based in visual literacy of words. And how do the Lelièvres fare when words are removed? Catherine has the translation in the score, which she follows now and then, but the others rely on the music and image. Withholding the word from the cultural event is an ironic way of making the doomed family as powerless as Sophie.

There are also practical reasons for dispensing with subtitles. Chabrol may not have wanted the fleeting views of the television screen to be burdened by text, for it would distract the film viewer and interfere with the director's control of narrative. Moreover, given the brief views of the screen, the text at any point would be fragmentary or nonexistent and make little sense to the viewer. A desire for clarification would rupture the viewer's involvement, disrupt the suspense, and dilute the ambiguity and irony. Chabrol may also have believed that the music conveys sufficient information for the viewer to know what is happening in the film. Of course, he may have assumed that the typical viewer of his films is European, intimately familiar with the opera and its text, and eminently able to fill in the missing meaning.

This raises an interesting question about my reading of the opera, which pays considerable attention to the text. Does Chabrol's omission of subtitles affect such an interpretation? Does there need to be a text-literate viewer for the analysis to be valid? The issue of viewers' knowledge with respect to pre-existing music in film has been raised elsewhere, notably in essays by Mike Cormack and Jeongwon Joe.⁵⁰ No definitive answer emerges, and as in most work on film music each case requires individual consideration. Assuming the analyst's viewpoint, I engage the text as a major element in the connections between the opera and the film. As we saw, the text serves as a key link between the two idioms, providing parallels and not a few points of irony. Not surprisingly, the text also has close connections with the music, and we noted places where irony arises between them. I believe that the opera–murder sequence assumes greater meaning for the text-knowledgeable viewer than for someone who is unfamiliar with it. But I also think that any viewer of Chabrol's film, even if ignorant of the operatic text, possesses sufficient aesthetic information to grasp the parallels and irony between the opera and the film. This ability stems from the expressive particularity of Mozart's music and the narrative sophistication of Chabrol's camera. The suspense, the horror, the parallels, the ironies: we “get it.” Thus, perhaps in an irony of a higher order, Chabrol's surface opaqueness by way of textual omission does not preclude a sureness of narrative meaning

for the viewer. This awareness does not disclose the director's precise subjective view of his characters and their situation, which remains opaque. But the relationship between the two narrative strands, of opera and film, seems transparent.

The overdetermined nature of the family's viewing of the telecast forms another transparent feature of the relay–murder sequence, but it leads us to wonder about the reason for the excessive ritual. Chabrol appears to be criticizing the Lelièvres' self-entitlement to the center of high-art culture. Shown in isolation and encased in a cultural bubble, the family live at a remove from neighbors or town and experience *Don Giovanni* far from an audience and from Salzburg, where the event originates and the Mozart legacy resides. The sham provides Chabrol with fodder for challenging the stress on individualism in bourgeois society. He looks askance at the contrast between the contrived formality of the family's viewing and the casual spectatorship characteristic of television.⁵¹ In short, the Lelièvres become casualties of their play-acting at the center of high art.

Aesthetically, the appearance of an opera relay in a film, which is unusual and possibly unique in cinema, sets up a fascinating intermedial situation. In the murder scene of *La Cérémonie*, film and opera each have their own strong signifiers that remain dominant as they interact with each other. We never feel that opera loses its status as opera and collapses into the medial domain of film, and because the opera is only seldom glimpsed apart from the filmic setting we always feel the integrity of film. Yet opera is not "pure" in *La Cérémonie*, but hybrid (or intermedial), because of the visual mediation of television. The opera–TV hybrid – the opera relay – functions as the representative of opera that interacts with film, and each retains its dominant signifiers. This renders the scene an example of overt intermediality. But when Chabrol does not show the television screen and we only hear the opera music – something which happens often, as noted above – then key signifiers of the opera relay are suppressed, namely the visual elements. Yet we still know that the heard music is emanating from the television and from the relay. So even when the visual is not literally shown, the opera relay retains its medial integrity as

a relay, and overt intermediality between film and the opera relay is preserved. The only exception occurs when the second series of chords in the Overture become nondiegetic background against the women's car conversation. In this brief encounter, only a few seconds long, the status is covert intermediality as opera becomes soundtrack music in the medial realm of film.

Apart from this fleeting moment, Chabrol's scene offers a memorable interplay of two visual media, film and television, in their interaction with opera, and leaves us with a cornucopia of medial arrangements that await another forum for further exploration. This rich landscape does not change the fact that in the end Chabrol effaces the diegetic visual component and has the aural emerge triumphant. In a sense he has chipped away, after the fact, at the complex intermedial relations of the opera-murder scene and left us with something relatively simple.

Myths and bodies

The progression to aural remains in *La Cérémonie* bears traces of the Orpheus myth. As Michal Grover-Friedlander observes, this founding myth of opera has been repeated in the narratives of many operas and in the interplay of voice and image that underpins opera's appeal for cinema.⁵² In Chabrol's film, as in the myth, the gaze kills. It comes by way of the exposure to television viewing, especially of a high-art event. This indicts the subjective position of class dominance, cultural literacy, and the opera relay, and is the aural trace that remains. Grover-Friedlander goes on to say, "The myth elaborates the power of voice as making present that which is absent, by bringing back the dead Eurydice. It also conceives of the gaze as that which deadens by insisting on a full presence."⁵³ Chabrol blunts the integrity of the gaze by letting viewers see the relay only sporadically and showing how the family's obsessive gazing at the screen leads to their downfall.

As mentioned earlier, aural remains underscore the ephemeral nature of television, and the looking back to pre-television resembles an Orphic looking back to something that will be lost. Here, however,

radio as represented by the aural trace survives, and is empowered. In this empowered state the aural remains make permanent (and repeatable) what had been rendered mainly through vision – Chabrol’s vision, the family’s vision, and the perceiving of the visual event on television.⁵⁴ The tape-recorded remains are disembodied from these visual discourses.

Grover-Friedlander offers another intriguing idea on aural remains. In a poetic analogy she proposes that aural remains resemble an afterlife. Tethering the idea to the concrete trace of a voice on a disk after a singer has died, she illustrates her hypothesis with perceptive observations on Maria Callas and the figure of the diva in Fellini’s film *E la nave va* (1983).⁵⁵ We could call the tape-recorded remains in *La Cérémonie* a living rendition of something that vanished, namely the opera–murder sequence. And when we recall Magny’s remark that Mozart is assassinated in the film, we might add that Mozart now assumes an afterlife in aural form, away from the tyranny of the visual. One wonders if this means that the film’s violent themes suggested in *Don Giovanni* have been materialized, and the taped version, with the real violence “composed” onto the music, has become a new opera. If so, we have looped back to the redeeming idea of the aural, of sound, behind the Orpheus myth. This creates a Chabrolian higher-order irony: it means that the aural trumps the visual techniques of this masterful filmmaker. I think the director would be pleased by the “opacité.”

The Godfather Part III

In [Chapter 1](#) we discussed instrumental remains at the end of *Godfather III* by way of the stunning Intermezzo from *Cavalleria rusticana*. How do these compare to the aural remains of *La Cérémonie*?

In the Coppola film, the Intermezzo serves a Romantic function as it idealizes the narrative and moves it into a higher realm. It makes the instrumental music transcendent and forges a big climax for the film and the saga. Subjectively it offers catharsis for the viewer. Much of our ambivalence towards the mobsters in the earlier installments is

converted into nostalgia as we grieve with Michael Corleone for what he has lost. Mascagni's late-Romantic style triggers our emotional involvement as we find ourselves lured by the sentimental surfeit of the lush music, which resembles the lushness of many a Hollywood soundtrack from the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, while a continuation of the opera and its diegetic status, the instrumental *Intermezzo* approaches nondiegetic film music as it accompanies the evocative images onscreen. Its function becomes complicated when we see the aged Michael and realize he has been flashing back to the past in the images we have just seen. The *Intermezzo* assumes an added function, that of psychodiegetic music, as it represents his internal projection of happier times. Meanwhile, the aesthetic movement in this use of the *Intermezzo* proceeds as a move towards silence, towards the absence of sound, where only instrumental music remains, without words or voices. One might say that the *Intermezzo* merges the film and Mascagni's opera through its use as soundtrack music.

The situation is different in *La Cérémonie*, where the aural remains culminate a progression towards sound and away from the effacing of sounds when the television is turned off. In contrast to the *Intermezzo*'s move to transcendence "beyond representation," the move to materiality in the Chabrol affirms representation. The aural trace in *La Cérémonie* keeps to the flat, ironic tone of the rest of the film. It retains the "quotation" status of the performance-within-a-performance embodied in the relay, and emerges as anti-climactic and wry, the exact opposite of the remains in the Coppola. Catharsis is denied the viewer, and we watch the rendering of the remains at an objectified distance.⁵⁶

The distance reflects the aesthetic distance of the event itself. The aural remains are a mechanical reproduction of another mechanical reproduction – the relay telecast – and take on a manufactured quality that keeps them at arm's length: another difference from the workings of the *Intermezzo*. In Walter Benjamin's terms, the aura of a live event or any semblance of it has been wiped out by the multiple layers of remove from the real thing. Subjective distance also results from Chabrol's staging of the aural playback. Consisting of almost the

entirety of “Deh vieni alla finestra,” the boombox playback unfolds over the final credits. It is as if Chabrol creates a new kind of credits–music genre. Mozart’s music sounds, but it is interspersed with heard gunshots and screams, seen images of Sophie immobile and the police listening to the tape, and Jeanne’s “On a bien fait” (“We did well”) heard as the credits conclude. Besides feeling like a coda, it exudes detachment because it competes with the dry listing of people who made the film. This takes us beyond the frame of the fiction and negates any dramatic frisson that the playback might supply. It allows Chabrol to contain the aural remains so that they do not assume emotional significance.

At the end of *Godfather III* we feel uplifted after the moving final sequence. After *La Cérémonie* we sense we experienced something profound, but it leaves us detached and disturbed. In these two famous works, which in many ways are representative of their respective national traditions, we see how French film may aspire to a different subjective universe from that of American film.

DON GIOVANNI AND FILM: CHABROL, LOSEY, SELLARS

In *La Cérémonie* Mozart’s opera is partial, reproduced, and crafted for the purpose of playing off the main plot and exposing bourgeois hypocrisy. While *Don Giovanni* is inflected by what happens in the film plot, one always feels that Chabrol respects the opera as he brings out its subversive qualities. *La Cérémonie* demonstrates that the opera has great social relevance and mirrors class tensions in the real world.

Class critique also informs two famous opera-films of *Don Giovanni*: the 1979 cinema film directed by Joseph Losey, and the 1991 studio film for television directed by Peter Sellars.⁵⁷ A brief comparison is revealing. The Losey, a landmark in the history of opera-film, conveys a strong Marxist tone. It sets the opera during emerging industrialization at the end of the eighteenth century and stresses how this leads to social decay. The director constructs a Don who is decadent, ghoulish, and cold, and does not take pleasure in anything. Over the title credits Losey shows Paris’s Palais Garnier opera house up in

flames: what amounts to a Marxist take on Boulez's call to blow up opera houses.⁵⁸ Chabrol suggests nothing of the kind. Furthermore, Losey pointedly works his montage against the music much of the time as a critique of Mozart's operatic enterprise. Chabrol creates irony between the music and the film plot, but respects the music whether he affirms or ironizes it.

Sellars's television studio film of *Don Giovanni* can be considered a mediation between the relay telecast and the cinematic film. Like Chabrol, Sellars respects Mozart's opera even as he exposes its violent underpinnings. The two directors make similar sorts of comments on the opera, although their means differ – Sellars by way of updating and resetting in American ghetto culture, Chabrol through interaction with another story. Sellars also resembles Chabrol in his insertion of reflective distance from the opera – Sellars by way of hip culture and the translations that grate against classical musical style, Chabrol through subjective camerawork and the main film plot. Losey's dark critique also establishes distance, but its disdain for the opera threatens to fling the viewer outside the Mozartian orbit and block any interplay between respect and criticism.

In the end, Chabrol's brand of Marxist exploration, with his signature "opacité," is much more successful. It leaves the viewer with something to think about when the film is over. *Don Giovanni* participates in what David Denby describes as a "metaphysical rumination on the inevitability of tragedy in an imperfect world": the magnificent film that is *La Cérémonie*.⁵⁹

PART III

Desire

5 | “An honest contrivance”: opera and desire in *Moonstruck*

Moonstruck isn't heartfelt; it's an honest contrivance – the mockery is a giddy homage to our desire for grand passion.

Pauline Kael¹

Pauline Kael captures the quirky but exhilarating quality of *Moonstruck*, the popular 1987 film that garnered three Academy Awards.² Roger Ebert also identifies something special

when he writes, “The most enchanting quality about *Moonstruck* is the hardest to describe, and that is the movie's tone.”³ One might characterize the film as a wacky marriage between Italian-American ethnic comedy and romantic idealism tethered to the magic of the moon. The combination should not work, yet it succeeds brilliantly, perhaps because both are rooted in exaggeration. Kael expresses the operative conceit as parody playing against what is being parodied, or contrivance against the real thing. We are dazzled by their juxtaposition and convinced by the rightness of each. The film's originality “is that the mockery doesn't destroy the overblown romanticism – it intensifies it.”⁴

Opera figures in this special tone. Puccini's *La Bohème*, one of the most popular and lush operas of the repertoire, plays a major role in *Moonstruck*. Excerpts feature prominently on the soundtrack, the protagonists attend a performance of *Bohème* and display affinities with the opera's characters, and *Bohème*'s connection with the Metropolitan Opera is underlined.⁵ In addition, the dualistic tone of the film is itself operatic and resembles an encounter between *opera buffa* and *verismo*.⁶ *Buffa* elements inhabit the plot, pacing, dialogue, ritual, and ensemble nature of the work; they also express themselves in composed ethnic music and folk arrangements of *Bohème* (Dick Hyman is the composer and arranger). Puccini's opera conveys the *verismo* strain in the film and intensifies hyper-romantic elements already present in the plot, dialogue, and imagery. *Bohème* as an opera contains comedy – for example, the bantering in the bohemians' unheated garret in Act 1,

and the flirtations of Musetta in Act II – but it forms a secondary element of the work. While a few comedic flourishes make their way into *Moonstruck*'s soundtrack, it is the *verismo* idiom of *Bohème* that has a stunning impact on the film.

The opera's impact goes beyond the surface of the soundtrack and plot. It saturates layers of narrative and representation in *Moonstruck*, and shapes our perception of the characters and their view of their lives. I am especially interested in the opera's participation in the construction and expression of desire, that effusive quality that washes over the film like the big white moon. I do not mean only romantic desire, although that is a major part of it, but desire more generally: the various wishes and obsessions of people, and the attractions and affinities between ideas.

This chapter explores the intersections of opera and film in *Moonstruck* and their impact on the mapping of desire, broadly conceived. It focuses on certain questions and issues. First, who are the protagonists, and what is their relationship to opera? Ronny Cammareri is a die-hard opera fanatic, Loretta Castorini an uncomprehending novice; how does opera affect their subjectivity and their passion for each other? Who do they represent in the opera-going public? A second issue concerns the guises and functions of operatic music in the film. Some of the cues use Puccini's vocal music verbatim, while others feature an instrumental arrangement. Where and why are these two types used, and what do the choices mean for desire?

The third and fourth sections discuss two major engagements with opera and their consequences for the film. First is the extended sequence of Ronny and Loretta's visit to the Met to see *La Bohème*. What does the pivotal event tell us about desire, and how does the opera inform secondary plots cross-cut with the main story? The second kind of operatic engagement involves the phonograph and Ronny's status as an opera audiophile. How is his passion for opera channeled into the playing of records? How does this obsession figure in the course of desire, and how does it affect Loretta? A complex interplay of narrative strands creates the climax of the film as Loretta is "operastruck" and forever changed. After that, an extended

kitchen scene that ties up loose ends, much like an ensemble finale in *opera buffa*, takes us to the end, where a burst of Puccini concludes the film.

The opera–desire connection in *Moonstruck* also generates larger questions. Claudia Gorbman notes that many postclassical Hollywood films foreground music in an operatic way.⁷ *Moonstruck* falls into this category. Does the film itself evince a desire towards the genre of opera-film? This urge is suggested by opera’s saturation of major elements of the film, by the elusive tone that is operatic, and by the ways in which Puccini’s music seeps into the subjectivity and consciousness of the characters.

Finally, what does *Moonstruck* say about Puccini’s opera? *Bohème* has a larger-than-life place in Western culture, well beyond the bounds of classical music and opera. Arguably the opera bears traces of kitsch. Does the movie foreground this quality? Does it intensify our desires, even ambivalent ones, for the kitsch qualities of *Bohème*? In such a reading, *Moonstruck* becomes more than a pleasant viewing experience. It performs important cultural work as it interrogates the elements that constitute the opera’s popularity and appeal. But it does so in a tongue-in-cheek way, with great affection, in accord with the general spirit of the film.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

The story takes place in Italian-American culture, mostly in Brooklyn. Loretta (Cher), a thirty-seven-year-old widow and no-nonsense book-keeper, becomes engaged to Johnny Cammareri, a mama’s boy. That evening he flies to Sicily to see his dying mother. The next morning Loretta carries out Johnny’s wish that she call his brother Ronny (Nicolas Cage) and invite him to the wedding. When she goes to the bakery basement where Ronny “shovels bread into a hot hole” in the wall, Ronny shows her his wooden hand and says it’s Johnny’s fault his hand got cut off in a bread slicer (“He made me look the other way”). His fiancée left him when she found out he was “maimed.” When Loretta says that it was not Johnny’s fault, Ronny launches



Fig. 5.1 Loretta (Cher) and Ronny (Nicolas Cage) at the Metropolitan Opera House in *Moonstruck*.

into a melodramatic tirade (“I lost my hand! I lost my bride”), whose charged theatricality Loretta ignores. She suggests they talk, they go up to his apartment, she tells him who he is (“a wolf”) and he tells her who she is, and they make love.

The next morning, despite Loretta’s guilt (and her famous “Snap out of it!” after he says he loves her), Ronny makes her agree to go to the opera with him. She dolls up during the day, and that evening they meet at Lincoln Center and see *La Bohème* at the Met (see Fig. 5.1). At the coat-check afterwards, Loretta runs into her father (Cosmo) who is with another woman, Mona; and Loretta and Cosmo trade accusations (“You’re married!,” “You’re engaged!”). Ronny takes her to his neighborhood afterwards, and when she protests that the opera was supposed to be their last time together, he delivers another melodramatic speech: about the magic of the stars and snowflakes (which start falling), about how we are here to ruin ourselves, and how the only thing that matters is that she come up to his bed. After tearful hesitation she does. Meanwhile, Johnny returns from Sicily, his mother recovered (“It was a miracle!”). When Loretta arrives home the next morning, the romantic bubble bursts; her mother (Rose) tells her that Johnny is back. Then each principal arrives in succession – Ronny, Cosmo, Aunt Rita and Uncle Raymond, grandpop who lives

in the house, and Johnny – and the imbroglios are resolved, in a manner similar to an *opera buffa*. Loretta and Ronny end up together, the family raises a joyous toast “Alla famiglia,” and the camera settles on family portraits, present and past.⁸

Ronny

Ronny is a fascinating character. Director Norman Jewison considers it the most difficult role in the film – this “tormented soul,” “poetic baker,” who is “consumed with opera.”⁹ Ronny is a working-class Italian-American whose opera passion seems to conflict with his class, and the mismatch renders him a bohemian of sorts. Operatic passion guides his personality as well, for his behavior can swing from one extreme to another. At first we see his bestial side. Sweaty and muscular, Ronny exudes primitive urges as he shovels bread into the oven when Loretta contacts him by phone. With the melodramatic line “What’s wrong can never be made right,” he hangs up on her, provoking the retort “What an animal!” We soon see the other side. Once in his modest apartment, amid art (posters of *La Bohème* and Verdi on the wall, strains of *Bohème* on the phonograph), Ronny starts to become another person. The transformation is complete when he appears at the Met to meet Loretta. Now he is so sensitive that it is hard to believe this is the crazed boor of yesterday. Puccini’s music on the soundtrack narrows the credibility gap, but does not eliminate it.

Ronny’s relationship to opera has further resonance. Ronny the bohemian shares similarities with Puccini’s opera. Early in the respective story Ronny has his oven in the basement, the bohemians have their stove for warmth. They all display ties with fire that suggest passion, or passion about to erupt. The bohemians sacrifice books and the like to keep warm. Ronny sacrifices his hand, not an artwork, although he has had to sacrifice his opera-going desires. Like Rodolfo he is a poet. He can wax eloquent, as in the snowflakes soliloquy, and can rail with grand operatic gestures, as in the bakery tirade.

This is high melodrama. It leads film scholar Kathleen Rowe to see Ronny as a “melodramatized male.” Although a common type

in postclassical Hollywood film, its appearance in *Moonstruck* is striking because the film takes a positive view of the feminizing quality of excessive emotion.¹⁰ Extending the analogy, we can consider many opera heroes, especially in late-Romantic Italian works, as melodramatized males. Rodolfo is doubly marked by feminizing traits because he is a poet. The character also bears traces of the feminine quality associated with Puccini's operas in general. Peter Franklin notes how the popular elements of Puccini's operas helped break down the historical divide with high art, and how the label of "feminine" was applied to his works as a sign of their inferior cultural status.¹¹ As for Ronny, his feminization through opera and emotion does not weaken him, but provides dramatic strength, embodying, perhaps, a new ideal of masculinity.

Ronny's link with opera is also sexually suggestive. Awestruck by Loretta's sexy outfit at the opera house, Ronny says, "I don't know, it's been a long time since I've been to the opera." Why the absence? Ronny clearly channels his opera desires into phonograph records, so an actual visit may be more of a frill than a necessity. Another reason may be the expense; if the budget is going to be sacrificed, at least have a good date to make it worth your while.¹² But a personal greeting by a nearby bartender after the performance suggests he is a regular. Perhaps Ronny used to go to the opera, with his fiancée, before his hand was cut off. His return, with Loretta, marks a re-connection: with the literal opera experience, but also with his castrated member that is now reconstituted sexually through a real love relationship. The theme is affirmed when he and Loretta re-enact the clasping of hands before them onstage in *Bohème* (Act III). The sexual reconstitution also refers back to Ronny's statement about shoveling bread in the hot hole, a crude way of expressing sexual displacement or impotence.¹³

There are further implications. Perhaps Ronny needs a date as a heterosexual cover to legitimize his opera desires. Single male opera fans are often presumed gay – gay culture is wild about opera, finds affinities with divas, and wallows in the spectacle and excessive emotion that resonate with gay experience. Wayne Koestenbaum and Mitchell

Morris respectively have “outed” the connection.¹⁴ As a related issue, does Ronny’s status as a straight, single, opera fanatic mark him as an outsider to opera culture? Is that why he has not attended the Met in a while? And is the heterosexual marker of a date needed to preserve the macho image of a single male in Italian-American culture, especially of the working class? While it can be risky to over-essentialize the connection between the single male opera fan and homosexuality, Ronny’s anxious desire to attend the Met with Loretta seems based at least partly on fears of being effeminized, or of being perceived that way. The sexual reconstitution by way of the heterosexual hand clasp also puts the inference to rest.

In the larger scheme, Ronny’s attraction to opera seems motivated by a genuine love for the art form. It goes beyond an obsession with voice.¹⁵ Ronny is smitten with the story, passion, music, and grandeur of opera. Unlike the ruthless social-climber of Woody Allen’s film *Match Point* (2005), for example, Ronny has no desire to improve his class position through opera or to live off its elitist cachet. Ronny’s desires are relatively pure, and the magic of his enthusiasm spills over into the rest of the film.

Loretta

Loretta is affected by the magic, but it takes a long time to make an impression on her. In many ways Loretta is Ronny’s antithesis. She is practical, unsentimental, and thrives on order and detail. She knows nothing about opera and seems to have no reaction the first time she hears it in the film, on the LPs in Ronny’s apartment. After she agrees to go to the opera she asks him, “Where’s the Met?” Later, getting her hair done at the Cinderella Beauty Shop (fairytale, anyone?), she generates buzz among the customers on whether they have been to the Met. We hear several “no”s. This is particularly interesting because the clientele is strongly ethnic-Italian. One woman reads an Italian-language newspaper while she sits under the dryer, and one beautician has an Italian accent. It seems surprising that ethnic Italians in Brooklyn have not gone to the major opera house in New York City.

But attending the Met is an elitist ritual. Although Italian operas, including *Bohème*, make up the lion's share of the Met's repertoire, ethnic Italians do not necessarily identify with the Met's culture.¹⁶ Loretta is deeply embedded in her ethnicity, and her non-familiarity with opera appears to conform to that culture. In this light, Ronny's desire to go to the Met seems even more extraordinary.

The crack in Loretta's ordered life is her belief that bad luck or good luck can flow from events. This irrational quirk opens the window for opera to enter her soul. The transformation begins in her preparations for the big opera date. The sequence at the hairdresser and the purchase of finery is fleet and witty. But the next scene marks the only mistake in the film: the desire to turn Loretta into Cher, or sort of. Cher emerges here, but afterwards she is still Loretta, glamorous hair notwithstanding. The sequence takes place at home. Loretta turns on purportedly sexy music on the radio – a kitsch cross between muzak and jazz – sips wine, holds the new dress against her full-length slip (we see some skin), fingers the red spike heels, and makes a pouty face in the mirror: narcissism on display. A golden visual tone suggests romance and passion. Besides the dissonance with Loretta's personality – she may feel sexy, but would not instantly turn into a sex symbol – this scene clashes with the narrative style of the film. Read operatically, the scene approaches a masquerade or a kind of dramatic cross-dressing that happens when a singer plays someone far from their usual fare. Cher playing Loretta-as-Cher becomes its own operatic spectacle. In this way, perhaps it sets up the diegetic opera scene to follow.

The film often links Loretta and her love-transformation with Musetta. The first night that Loretta has sex with Ronny an instrumental arrangement of Musetta's Waltz, "Quando m'en vo," underscores the moonglow of their bedroom. Preparations the next day intensify Loretta's tie to Musetta. Against a sprightly instrumental motive from Act II when Musetta is admired by shopwomen, the coiffed Loretta purchases a snazzy evening dress. Admiring comments by passersby are an obvious reference to the vocal exclamations in Puccini, although here they are by men, not women. In her finery, Loretta at the Met

visually resembles the striking Musetta of Act II. She wears red to the opera. Her ensemble mixes tones and textures and we mostly see the near-black velvet bodice and red satin stole, although her red pumps are also briefly seen.¹⁷ A wonderful visual sublimation occurs through this attire: red and velvet meld to fuse her with the red velvet of the hall.¹⁸ Loretta's garb identifies her with the ritual of opera and eases her passage into the pivotal internalization at the hand clasp.

Is Loretta, like Ronny, feminized by experiencing opera? Loretta's unsentimental nature can be considered a masculine feature, or at least not especially feminine. She undergoes a visual feminization in preparation for the opera encounter, and in the home transformation sequence we may be encouraged to believe she becomes a real woman by releasing her sexuality. Is the visual attire the sign of her emotional feminization, or does it help make it happen? Perhaps the answer is both. Moreover, does her decision to acquire such feminine clothes signal a willingness on her part to be feminized: a desire for emotion, and a desire to allow the opera to work its magic on her? As in many things, Loretta may be less naive about opera than she lets on. At the intermission before the hand-clasp moment she tells Ronny, "I just don't really get it." But maybe she does at some deeper level.

The birth of awareness probably takes place at the start of the film. The titles sequence flashes the façade of the Met and *Bohème* posters outside, but also shows Loretta crossing a street as a Metropolitan Opera Scenic Shop truck goes by. As Jewison notes, the encounter plants the idea that Loretta will be linked with opera later in the film.¹⁹ It also hints that opera's trappings and ritual will be important to the story – that the artifice of opera is central to the contrivance of the film.

THE MUSIC: *BOHÈME* AND MORE

In addition to excerpts from *Bohème*, *Moonstruck* includes composed music and other compiled music. Popular songs appear in some key places. The opening and closing credits use Dean Martin's folksy rendition of "That's Amore" (1959), whose lyrics deliver the point of

the film: "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, / That's amore!" Cosmo listens to Vicki Carr crooning "It Must be Him" on the living-room hi-fi and joins in on the consequent phrase "or I shall die" – death being Cosmo's obsession and part of the black humor of the film. The death connection recurs when Rose listens to the song later and has Johnny confirm that a man needs more than one woman because he fears death. Another striking use of song is an instrumental version of "Moonglow" heard in the background at a bar after the opera. In a mellow jazz arrangement that stands out from other music of the film, the unheard lyrics sound the film's theme: "It must have been moonglow / Way up in the blue, / It must have been moonglow / That led me straight to you."²⁰ The listener's familiarity with the words is obviously key to whether the song makes its full point. But regardless of the semantic impact, the style marks Ronny as a sophisticate and provides a transition from the elevated world of high art to his everyday life.²¹

Hyman's composed music emphasizes ethnic style. Three delightful instrumental numbers operate as leitmotifs and promote the *opera buffa* tone of the film. All evoke Old World nostalgia. First is a schmaltzy harmonized tune with exaggerated mandolin vibrato, not unlike the introductory gestures of "That's Amore." It represents Loretta's sentimental side, initially in a latent state (early on at the flower shop) and later in fully developed form (at the end after Ronny proposes). Another composed piece is the triple-meter dance-like number, in two sections (E minor, E major), that accompanies the grandpop when he walks his five dogs. Scored with accordion and mandolin, it features a well-placed Neapolitan-sixth chord that makes it memorable. The third composed theme, a tarantella in C major on clarinet and accordion, mostly accompanies the comings-and-goings associated with Johnny and expresses his buffoonish nature. It may seem a silly pun that a tarantella actually appears after the opening "That's Amore" mentions "a gay tarantella," but since the dance type is a common signifier of southern Italian culture, it becomes a natural choice for *Moonstruck*.²² Overall, the composed ethnic music is notable for its non-engagement with Ronny. He is associated mainly

with opera music, although it may appear in a folk arrangement that brings it closer to Hyman's ethnic idiom.²³

Bohème cues

Moonstruck contains twelve cues drawn from *Bohème* (see Table 5.1). They start with Ronny's introduction at the bakery a half-hour into the story and end at the conclusion of the film. Musical repetitions (or close variations) occur among the cues, and a few are composites of separate passages in the opera. Excerpts come from the first three acts of *Bohème*. Act iv is probably excluded because the dark tone of Mimi's impending death departs from the mood of the film. Some cues use the music intact from the opera, whether purely instrumental or with voice, while other cues are instrumental arrangements. To Hyman's credit the cues are not only well-chosen and well-coordinated, but reveal a keen sensitivity to the musical factors that make for a good beginning. For example, several cues start with 6–4 harmonies. Their suspended quality creates a sense of entering *in medias res* and smoothes the transition from pure speech to speech and music. This amounts to a variation on Rick Altman's notion of "audio dissolve" for the film musical: a musicalized noise such as clapping that smoothes the way into or out of a diegetic performance.²⁴ In *Moonstruck*, distinctions between diegetic and nondiegetic roles among the twelve *Bohème* cues are often blurred or collapsed. Supplementary interpretive systems become useful in this situation, and I will bring in intermediality and the idea of metadiegetic and psychodiegetic music.

The first cue, in the bakery basement, participates in the conversion of Ronny's violent theatrics into maudlin sentiment – into desires he believes, but whose exaggerated quality we have trouble accepting as real. After gesticulating about his hand and yelling "You want me to take my heartbreak, put it away, and forget it?" there is a mannered silence as the camera registers stunned reactions. Then, eyes rolled upward in longing, Ronny intones, "It's just a matter of time till a man opens his eyes – and gives up his one dream of happiness."

Table 5.1 *Musical cues from La Bohème*

Source of excerpt	DVD timing	Piano-vocal score	Film plot	Other
Act III	29:38–30:32	206 bottom; begins 6 mm. after rehearsal no. 21	Ronny in bakery basement	Instrumental arrangement
Act I	32:41–33:56	64–65; begins 7 mm. before reh. no. 30	Cosmo/Mona in café	Instrumental arrangement
Act III	34:06–34:25	216; begins 5 mm. before reh. no. 29	Ronny at phonograph	Vocal verbatim: “[ser]barla a ricordo d’amor”
Act I (composite)	38:52–40:06	81–82, 79–80; begins at reh. no. 42	Ronny/Loretta make love	Vocal verbatim (2nd section), order switched; 2nd section, “O soave fanciulla”
Act II	42:44–47:41	139f; begins at reh. no. 21	Montage of scenes of moon-gazing	Instrumental arrangement of Musetta’s Waltz
Act II	55:20–55:55	123–26; begins at reh. no. 16	Loretta at beauty shop, buying dress	Omits vocal exclamations
Acts III, I, II (composite)	58:08–1:00:13	179–80 (start of III), 80–81, 87–88	Ronny/Loretta at Lincoln Center Plaza; going into Met	Instrumental, with vocal parts omitted; 2nd section transposed
Act I	1:01:42–1:01:53	3	Opera performance begins	Actual start of opera
Act III	1:09:30–1:11:09	215/3/1–216; begins 5 mm. after reh. no. 28	Opera performance; Ronny/Loretta hand clasp	Vocal verbatim: “Bada . . . serbarla a ricordo d’amor . . . addio, senza rancor.”

Table 5.1 (cont.)

Source of excerpt	DVD timing	Piano-vocal score	Film plot	Other
Act I	1:17:55–1:19:10	64/2/2–65; begins 11 mm. before reh. no. 30	Ronny street soliloquy	Vocal verbatim: “Che gelida manina” preceded by instrumental music
Act I	1:25:26–1:26:55	79–81/2/2; begins at reh. no. 41	Ronny at phonograph, then Loretta on street	Vocal verbatim: “O soave fanciulla”
Act II	1:37:45–1:38:42	151f; begins 8 mm. after reh. no. 25	Happy ending, “Alla famiglia” toast	Vocal verbatim; recapitulation of Musetta’s Waltz

Page numbers refer to the Ricordi piano-vocal score, arranged by Carlo Carignani, with English version by William Grist and Percy Pinkerton. Copyright © 1906 and 1917, reprinted 1999 (Milan: Ricordi Edition 115494). Three numbers with slashes indicate respectively page, system, and measure. Rehearsal numbers appear in both the piano-vocal score and the full score. The DVD timings refer to the MGM “Deluxe Edition” DVD.

Enter Puccini’s music (see [Ex. 5.1](#)). It’s an instrumental arrangement with accordion, from Act III, starting on a D flat 6–4 chord, where Rodolfo sings, “A terrible cough shakes her slender breast, yet her pale cheeks are flushed.” Although this is said to Marcello, Mimì overhears Rodolfo, who wants to leave her because of her sickness. This situation suggests a tie-in with the film’s plot; Ronny had to give up his true love because he was maimed, or doomed, just as Mimì is doomed.

Hyman’s scoring of the cue nudges Puccini’s music into the realm of folk music and connects Ronny with his environment and the other Italian-Americans limned by music thus far. Yet an operatic sensibility characterizes the cue. The absence of the sung words allows the spoken script to become the new voiced partner of the evocative music. Instead of being merely nondiegetic, the instrumental music takes



Ex. 5.1 First *Bohème* cue, in bakery basement (29:30), adapted from six measures after rehearsal no. 21, p. 206.

on a new text and creates a new operatic-style number. Although Ronny's delivery approaches a performance, Ronny and the others do not see him as a literal performer in a literal performance, and hence it does not qualify as diegetic. The foregrounding of music to the point where it fuses with dialogue illustrates Claudia Gorbman's contention that many newer films use soundtrack music in operatic ways. Although literally an instance of textural melodrama – namely, music with spoken text – Ronny's mannered monologue resembles an aria, a quality that Gorbman sees in many postclassical films,²⁵ and that Norman Jewison identifies in many places of *Moonstruck*. The director even describes the cast as operatic types: "Cher is the lyric soprano, Nicolas Cage is the tenor, Danny Aiello is the baritone, and – Vinny Gardenia is the bass. And the aunt, the uncle, and the grandfather are the Greek chorus, and the mother Olympia Dukakis is the contralto."²⁶ Ronny's entrance as a character coinciding with the first appearance of operatic music seals the connection for the course of the film. It suggests that his desires are operatic – operatic in the sense that they are linked to the ritual and contrivance of opera.

The next cue occurs as Cosmo and Mona enjoy afternoon coffee and pastry in a café. It is an instrumental arrangement, mainly on mandolin and clarinet, of Act 1's "Che gelida manina" and its lead-in. As Cosmo relates a business coup over Yuppies (a hilarious scene) and Mona coos "You have such a head for knowing" (he's a plumber), a muzak rendition of the Puccini sounds as diegetic recorded background music. It supplies a romantic mood, ties the couple to Loretta's discovery at the opera house of their affair, and offers a familiar tune (here turned kitsch) for Cosmo's crude attempt at poetic phrases about stars and birds. He clearly differs from Ronny, who will later

wax poetic on a similar topic to similar music. The desires of Cosmo and Mona are *faux* through and through, while Ronny's are sincere in his terms. The distinction further affirms that the opera music does not fuse with Cosmo's and Mona's lines but stays separate.

These contrasting cues exemplify respectively the two main types of intermediality. Ronny's operatic use of Puccini, which places the cue beyond diegetic and nondiegetic functions, constitutes overt intermediality. Although the *Bohème* music lacks the original text, the close tie between the quoted music and the new text and emotional gestures reinforces the ontology of opera and creates an entity that signifies "opera." While the background instrumental music could imply that it belongs to the filmic medial system, in this case the music signifies strongly as operatic. I believe this is true even if one does not know it is from an opera, for the cue has an operatic feel in its gestures and mood. The second cue, in contrast, is an example of covert intermediality, for the filmic signifiers are clearly dominant. The instrumental nature of the opera cue functions mainly as film music and signifies film more than it does opera. Semiotic traces of opera remain, especially if one recognizes the Puccini tune, but the interface with dialogue and image is one of disengagement from opera, not fusion as in the first cue.

The pair of opera cues in Ronny's apartment are key to the narrative arc of the film. The first, Ronny's manipulation of recorded *Bohème* music, will be treated below. The second cue joins two passages and marks a major moment in the film: Loretta and Ronny coming together and having sex (see Ex. 5.2). After he pulls her to him and she exclaims "Wait a minute," the gorgeous five-measure *Tristan*-like progression at rehearsal no. 42 is heard, in a faster tempo and without the vocal commentary (Ex. 5.2[a]). By *Tristan* elements I mean the thematic use of the half-diminished-seventh sonority and the chromatic voice-leading.²⁷ Hyman performs an arranging miracle when he sutures the E flat bass ending this passage to the E natural bass of the A 6–4 chord initiating "O soave fanciulla" (Ex. 5.2[b]). In the original the E flat behaves like an augmented-sixth chord and resolves down to D, continuing the stepwise bassline descent of the *Tristan* passage.

(a)

(b)

Ex. 5.2 Composite cue, in Ronny's apartment (38:52): (a) first half, adapted from rehearsal no. 42, pp. 81–82; (b) second half, adapted from rehearsal no. 41, p. 79.

In Hyman's arrangement it behaves like a half-diminished-seventh chord on D sharp and resolves accordingly. By reversing the direction and landing on a suspended 6–4 chord, as well as switching the order of the passages, Hyman re-composes the opera and provides a wonderful accompaniment to the expression of love.²⁸ The cue ends four measures into the climactic phrase “Ah! tu sol comandi, amor!,” where Mimì and Rodolfo sing high in their register in octaves. Music and text are verbatim from “O soave fanciulla” to the end of the cue.

The conversion of the *Tristan*-like passage to an instrumental cue brings it closer to the psychological core or “inner-action” function of Wagner's dramaturgy. As Ronny and Loretta kiss, the orchestral progression sounds their desire. It recalls the impact of the Prelude progression at key moments in Wagner's opera, and the *Tristan*-like climactic place in Bernard Herrmann's score of *Vertigo* when the reincarnated Madeleine, object of Scottie's obsessive desire, appears before him.²⁹

The second part of the composite starts with “O soave fanciulla” as Ronny yells “son of a bitch!” and carries Loretta into the bedroom



Fig. 5.2 Ronny (Nicolas Cage) carrying Loretta (Cher) to the bedroom in *Moonstruck*.

(see Fig. 5.2). The text is apt: “O sweet face surrounded by mild white moonlight, the dream I would always dream comes to life in you.” In bed, as they murmur about devouring each other, the musical climax at “Ah! tu sol comandi” is heard. Two different texts sound together: Mimi has “Ah! love, you alone may rule,” whereas Rodolfo sings “Already extreme joys are thrilling in my soul.” Then the tension level abates and lines are sung separately. The scene ends with a pan of the *Bohème* lovers on Ronny’s wall poster and a gradual fadeout of the music as it elides the start of the next scene, a family dinner at home (without Loretta).

What are we to make of this musical cue in terms of the standard framework of diegetic and nondiegetic functions? As we have already seen, this is still a useful template because departures can reveal new relationships between music and narrative. In part the cue appears to be psychodiegetic: planted in the memory or consciousness of the characters, and running through their affective minds as passion is literally expressed. The likely source of their memory is the recent hearing of the opera on the phonograph, although they did not hear this passage according to what we saw. Ronny could be accessing general familiarity with the work and relying on his memory of it. Loretta is not in a position to do this. Even if she knew the music from popular

arrangements, she would not be able to access its original form. Yet Loretta is as emotionally involved as Ronny in what is happening. For her the tie with the cue is more generalized and expresses what Royal S. Brown calls a parallel relationship for classical music used in film. The *Bohème* excerpt signifies desire, and as it sounds Loretta and Ronny are expressing desire. This constitutes a parallel relationship as it eschews the emphasis on imitation or amplification typical of the classical film score.³⁰ While the present cue is more than nondiegetic from Loretta's aural point-of-view, it does not reach Ronny's psychodiegetic (and more generally metadiegetic) status. Ronny seems to hear it in some direct way, although not through a visible source. Perhaps this qualifies as an *acousmètre*: a heard sound in the fiction that lacks a visible source.³¹ For both characters the signifiers of opera and of film are present and distinct, and constitute overt intermediality. But differences in memory and knowledge create different versions of how the overt status works for each person and their subjectivity.

The longest operatic cue is a repetitive instrumental montage of Musetta's Waltz that capitalizes on the tuneful, lush qualities of the piece to underscore the moon and its effect on the characters. After the moon is discussed at the dinner table by the older generations, varied scorings of the tune accompany four moon-gazing scenes: Rose looking out of her bedroom, Loretta and Ronny admiring it in his apartment, Raymond and Rita in their bedroom inspired to make love, and grandpop near the Brooklyn Bridge goading the dogs to howl at the moon. The tune is so well-known in general culture that one is tempted to read irony into its use here, especially in the wry final segment.³² However, it comes across as nondiegetic music that plays out the "honest contrivance" tone of the film. It may affirm melodrama or even kitsch for those in the know, but lovingly, and thereby avoids irony.

Act II also provides the next cue, a brief riff that accompanies Loretta's shopping and coiffing. It is extracted from pages 123 through 126 in the piano-vocal score, omitting certain measures as well as all the vocal comments. As it has already been discussed, I will only add a few comments. First, the connection with Musetta is quite literal.

The head of the passage in the score reads, “Enter from the corner of the Rue Mazarin an extremely pretty, coquettish-looking young lady.” Loretta enters the street coiffed and made-up, and attracts appreciative comments from male onlookers. Second, the scene closely resembles *opera buffa*. The similarity starts with the music’s lively rhythms and motivic construction, and extends into image and plot. Loretta is in disguise, as it were, and this is typical of the genre. In addition, she distractedly bumps into a group of nuns: a slapstick reference to her guilty act. For the vast majority of viewers, the cue functions as nondiegetic background music that sets a mood and accompanies the plot. More complicated roles will be discerned only by aficionados who recognize the music as coming from *Bohème* and associated with Musetta. This is transitional stuff, not a famous aria, and its stylistic similarity to a classical film score will lead viewers to hear it that way.

The next five cues involve the Met visit and its aftermath, and these will be treated below.

We jump to the *Bohème* excerpt at the end of the film. As the camera pans away from festivities in the kitchen, the recapitulation of Musetta’s Waltz, verbatim from the score, rings out as we close in on family photos. This is no ordinary recapitulation, as now Musetta shrieks giddy lines punctuated by other characters. The comical text concerns Musetta’s ruse to get rid of the old codger Alcindoro by faking pain from her shoe. The aural effect of her exclamations approaches hysteria. Among the lines are “The comedy is stupendous – the comedy is stupendous!” by Schaunard and Colline. Besides commenting on the film, the cue connects us to the theme of romantic desire brought out in the montage of Musetta’s Waltz that appeared earlier. The recapitulatory function of the final cue links romantic desire, now fulfilled for the protagonists, to the comic conceit of the whole enterprise. The excerpt musicalizes Kael’s point about *Moonstruck*’s ties between giddiness and “our desire for grand passion.”³³ It also re-inserts the opera qua opera into the film as it leaves plot and characters and foregrounds the music’s emotional quality: a memorable instance of overt intermediality.



Ex. 5.3 Start of composite cue, at Lincoln Center Plaza (58:08), adapted from the beginning of Act III, p. 179.

AT THE MET

We are here to ruin ourselves and break our hearts and love the wrong people
and die. Ronny, street scene after the opera.

The visit to the Met is a central event and occupies a fair amount of filmic time. *Bohème* excerpts occur not only in the actual performance but in surrounding vignettes that are as important as the real thing. As in the excerpts already discussed, these cues affirm Hyman's skills in selection, placement, and starting point. In some places they build on the larger dramatic functions of the music. For example, three excerpts near the beginning use act-opening music to punctuate a mini-drama about to unfold in the plot. It is like having three overtures instead of one, and the imbalance accords with the contrived tone of the film.

The first cue accompanies Loretta and Ronny's meeting at the fountain before the performance. It is entirely instrumental and contains three excerpts pasted together. As soon as Loretta's red shoe exits the cab, we hear a nondiegetic version of the instrumental start of Act III (see Ex. 5.3). While the rhetoric of the opening gesture, a forceful v–I cadence in D minor, conveys great drama, it creates irony because it sounds like a closing gesture (as it does in *Bohème*). Perhaps the irony reflects Loretta's uncertainty and confused desires, but William Day's idea that the shoe exit marks the end of Loretta's transformation suggests that endings and beginnings are under negotiation here.³⁴ As the cue continues with the haunting parallel fifths that have been compared to Debussy and Stravinsky,³⁵ Loretta and Ronny look for each other. The music establishes expectancy and isolation, although the



Fig. 5.3 Ronny (Nicolas Cage) and Loretta (Cher) at Lincoln Center Plaza in *Moonstruck*.

glitter of Lincoln Center is far from the bleakness of *Bohème*. The opening of Act III is appropriate for initiating the Met visit because it is only Act III (a small portion) that we literally see staged at the performance.

When Ronny and Loretta recognize each other (see Fig. 5.3), in a gaze as mannered as that in *Tristan*, the romantic music from Act I wells up in instrumental arrangement transposed from A major to C major. We heard the vocal version when they were making love. Hyman probably chose C major for the instrumental montage because it allows the music to retain the same evocative harmonic relationship to the preceding music as in the earlier cue with Puccini's music intact (when Loretta and Ronny make love, to the continuation of Ex. 5.2[b]). In Puccini, the A major at "Ah! tu sol" / "Fremon" comes after a B major dominant chord that should resolve to E. For that reason, the A major resolution sounds like a remote juxtaposition to add surprise. But as William Drabkin points out, the push towards E is only a temporary dominant elaboration in A major, and theoretically the arrival of A major is nothing unusual.³⁶ In Hyman's composite cue the opening passage ends on D major, and the selection of C major for the romantic theme preserves the supertonic relationship, or v/v , of Puccini's original (see Ex. 5.4).³⁷ One advantage of an instrumental version this time is that it offers a generalized space for desires



Ex. 5.4 Transition in composite cue, at Lincoln Center Plaza (58:50), adapted from fifteen measures after rehearsal no. 1, p. 180, and from eight measures after rehearsal no. 41, p. 80.

to be expressed. It becomes a memory of desire literally expressed by Loretta and Ronny, and in the larger scheme affirms *Bohème* as a framework related to that desire.

The third part accompanies Loretta and Ronny into the opera house. It is the exuberant instrumental music that opens Act II, shorn of choral interjections. In both cases there are festivities and crowds, and the music celebrates conviviality. The trumpet fanfares at the start formalize the sense of ritual and generate Loretta's star-struck admiration of the splendor of the entryway.

The Met tableau is cross-cut with other dramas: Rose and a professor at a restaurant in Brooklyn, and Cosmo and Mona at the Met. All center on desire and romantic connection, which is also the theme of *Bohème*. First come the rituals of settling in and finding seats. After Ronny admits he has not attended the opera in a while, the scene cuts briefly to Cosmo and Mona entering the hall. Soon Ronny whispers "Here we go," and we hear the lively instrumental opening of *Bohème*. After a few seconds it effects a transition to the Grand Ticino Restaurant. The cue progresses from diegetic signifier of the start of the performance to nondiegetic background music. In the latter role it marks the start of a second drama, this within the film's fiction, and hence links up with its initial role at the opera. The suture of the two scenarios through Puccini's music is very successful.

The restaurant drama is high theater as a college student loudly throws a glass of water on the older male professor at her table, and diners and staff watch the spectacle.³⁸ The professor, standing, announces, "sorry about that folks, she's a very pretty mental

patient,” the diners laugh, and he initiates a ritualistic cleansing of the table. The dynamic turns personal as the unsentimental Rose displays an operatic leakage of desire: she invites him to eat with her. It also stands out because the WASP professor lies outside the film’s ethnic world, and his desires are entirely different. Rose’s desires play the tensions between contrivance and the real thing, a sign of authenticity in the film, but the professor’s desires seem rational and one-dimensional. As a result they are hollow, and he will end up alone. Not surprisingly, he has nothing to do with the world of opera. The closest he gets to the spiritual heart of the film is his line describing fresh faces of female students as “moonlight in a martini.”

We are still a few scenes away from seeing stage action. At the intermission after Act II the conversation turns to opera. Loretta remarks on the large audience that shows up for opera; Ronny calls it “The best thing there is,” and Loretta says that she likes parts of it but doesn’t “really get it.” She finds the big red Chagall mural in the bar area “gaudy,” while Ronny responds “he was having some fun.” Thus up to this point Loretta is unmoved and mystified as to what all the fuss is about. A brief diegetic-turned-nondiegetic composed passage takes us back to the Brooklyn drama. Ethnicity returns as the grandpop walks the dogs to his signature tune. An embarrassing *opera buffa* encounter between him and the couple (Rose and professor) occurs at the intersection of two streets. The music stops dead on the Neapolitan-sixth chord, and after a pregnant pause each group continues on their way, with no musical resolution.

Back at the Met we finally see the performed opera. In Act III, the two instrumental measures before “Bada” (“Look”) open the cue. Mimi and Rodolfo are saying farewell, “senza rancor” (“without bitterness”), and she offers as a memento the pink bonnet he bought her. The scene is outdoors on a cold night and foreshadows the after-opera street sequence of Ronny and Loretta. Visually the camera cuts between the stage action and their reactions. Both grasp the parallel of the operatic scene with their situation, and she is moved to tears by what she sees (see Fig. 5.1). Their pivotal hand clasp, discussed earlier, is matched by a stunning harmonic shift in the staged music. At “Bada” the D flat tonality

The musical score is for a piece titled "Bada" from the staged *Bohème*. It is written in D major (two sharps) and 2/4 time. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "Ba - da sotto il guan - cia - le c'è la cuf - fiet - ta ro - sa. Se vuoi, se vuoi, se vuoi ser - bar - la a ri - cor - do d'a - mor!". The score shows a key change from D major to D minor (one sharp, one flat) in the second system.

Ex. 5.5 “Bada” to augmented-sixth resolution in the staged *Bohème* performance (1:09:30), adapted from five measures after rehearsal no. 28, pp. 215–16.

begins a detour into A major, enharmonically the flat-vi area. At “se vuoi” (“If you wish”), what is seemingly a dominant-seventh chord on A functions as an augmented-sixth chord that returns the music to D flat (see Ex. 5.5). The resolution is a 1 6–4 chord, and at that suspended moment Loretta and Ronny join hands and gaze at each other longingly. Mimì and Rodolfo have just clasped hands onstage. While this counts as diegetic music, the joining of the two situations suggests that it is not only performed music in the film’s fiction, but is the film fiction itself – in other words, the opera music becomes the main discourse. I will return to this in connection with opera-film.

After they leave the hall, the operatic experience plays itself out as desire in Ronny and Loretta’s relationship. At first, Loretta, in a highly animated manner, expresses her new-found experience of opera, saying how beautiful and sad it was, and that she couldn’t believe Mimì had died. But she is obviously still the no-nonsense Loretta, not some Cher sex-symbol: “She was coughing her brains out,” she exclaims, “and still, she had to sing all the time ...” This somewhat crude language stands in contrast to Ronny’s soliloquy in the climactic street scene, whose eloquence is almost Shakespearean.³⁹ Ronny offers his meaning of life and love, as captured in the epigram heading this



Ex. 5.6 Clarinet lines at start of cue, in Ronny's street soliloquy (1:17:55), adapted from 22 measures after rehearsal no. 29, p. 64.

section. He rhapsodizes about human imperfection. When he says "snowflakes are perfect. The stars are perfect," Puccini's instrumental music steals into the soundtrack (see Ex. 5.6). The off-balance view of love is matched by the exotic musical sounds as clarinets in thirds craft a memorable modal progression. The excerpt continues with the vocal version of "Che gelida manina," whose text is highly appropriate. Rodolfo offers to warm Mimi's frozen hand, Ronny extends his hand for Loretta to go up with him; Rodolfo invokes the moon, Ronny is under the spell of the moon and the stars. Although this is the first time Ronny and Loretta interact with this excerpt, it appeared earlier, in instrumental arrangement, as diegetic café music for Cosmo and Mona. Ronny and Loretta have no memory of this, but they do remember it from the opera performance, even though we were not exposed to that scene. Furthermore, the joining of hands on the street and in the sung text of the cue reinforces that pivotal action in the opera house.⁴⁰ The vocal cue strengthens the tie by literally voicing the desires and their resolution. Metadiegetically, it replays the desires circulating through the film and their engagement with *Bohème*.

Starting with the opera performance all the *Bohème* cues include their original vocal parts. *Bohème* has implanted itself firmly in consciousness and subjectivity.

AT THE PHONOGRAPH

Another link between desire and *Bohème* is played out at the phonograph. Twice in the film Ronny manipulates a recording of the opera at the turntable in his apartment. Each sequence uses big moments in the opera that appear at key points elsewhere in the film. I would like to suggest that this control of structure is part of a larger theme of control articulated through the use of the phonograph. While centered

in Ronny, this technological control has an impact on Loretta and on their individual and collective desires. In the larger scheme, it inserts distance so that the hyperemotional music does not overwhelm the delicate balance between honesty and contrivance that characterizes the film.

No. 1. Almost “Addio”

The scene in Ronny’s apartment after the bakery tirade opens with the camera panning down a *Bohème* poster of lovers standing together in the cold; the words “La Bohème” appear in bright red. Right away we have mediation. The mediation is not strong enough to produce a Brechtian alienation effect, but the sign inserts quotation marks and asserts the theatricalism of the opera. The image in the poster suggests Act III and is accompanied self-consciously by music from that part of the opera. We assume this is soundtrack music but soon see the LP spinning on the turntable. The brief excerpt starts with a D flat 6–4 chord as Mimì offers Rodolfo the bonnet as a memento, and before she has a chance to complete “Addio” Ronny removes the needle and stops the music. The passage foreshadows its appearance at the pivotal hand clasp and sexual reconstitution at the opera performance, discussed earlier. Although brief, the phonograph cue lays a foundation for our protagonists to have it in their memory when it recurs.

The staging of the phonograph cue is suggestive. Ronny does not allow the phrase with “Addio” to complete itself, and perhaps he is unwilling to acknowledge the idea of loss signified in the passage. After all, in the preceding scene he had ranted about the loss of his hand and his girl. But when Loretta suggests they go to his apartment and talk Ronny feels something stirring within. The deliberate stopping of the music at this place implies that he senses an opening, however small, for things to change. Later at the Met, however, the full phrase in conjunction with the hand clasp signifies renewal as he knows love again. Unlike the first time, Ronny can now face the literal enunciation of loss because desires have been fulfilled. He also has

the confidence to be the object of the musical stimulus instead of the person controlling what gets heard.

Ritual is foregrounded at the phonograph. Ronny stands directly in front of the apparatus, as if fused to it. He continues to be planted there even after he removes the needle and Loretta brings a cup of coffee. The *Bohème* poster adjacent helps create the sense of a shrine. We do not know how long he has been standing there, as we enter in the middle of a passage. The LP disk is nearing the end of a side when he lifts the needle. Perhaps he has been listening to all of it, for he would not be able to find the exact place on an LP. In this respect a phonograph record differs from a CD. Moreover, according to Robynn Stilwell, the analogue disk offers greater “narrative resonance” for film.⁴¹ From a performative perspective the act of manipulating the needle can hardly be matched by inserting a CD into a slot. And the visibility of the turning disk offers a spectacle that literally tracks the heard sounds.⁴² For Ronny, the big round disk might be his version of the big round moon at the heart of the film. This slice of theater extends the theatrical mode just seen in Ronny’s basement scene, although it is of a different kind.

The ritual also signifies control. The Puccini music could be rendered as soundtrack music, from some unseen source, but through the phonograph Ronny exerts control over the music and its implications for love and desire.⁴³ The manipulation of the phonograph also indicates male control. The media theorist Pamela Robertson Wojcik explains how audio technology was fully gendered as masculine by the 1950s and how it has allowed males to carve out a private space that encourages contemplation and a connection with high art.⁴⁴ Ronny is established here as a moody male poet with his own space centered on the phonograph, an attribute that buttresses his masculinity against the feminizing tendencies of opera. The connection also enacts a gendered move to gain sexual control over Loretta and reflects his unease as he senses an inkling of desire. His almost protective stance shows his possessiveness towards the apparatus and the source of his mastery. Loretta is excluded from this world.

Ah! tu sol co - man - di a - mor!

[so] - gnar! Fre - mon già nel - l'a - ni - ma

ff

Ex. 5.7 Climax of second phonograph cue (1:25:30), adapted from seven measures after rehearsal no. 41, p. 80.

No. 2. The climax

By the end of the second phonograph sequence Loretta is being allowed into this world. The cue creates an extraordinary moment, the film's climax in terms of plot and desire. In my view, opera and mainstream film have never worked better together.

The morning after the Met visit and their second night of love, Ronny is splayed out on a chair in his apartment as he listens to *Bohème*. He is alone, and we have just seen a shot of the spinning LP. The music is "O soave fanciulla," in its second appearance in the film. In both occurrences it accompanies love and passion in the film's plot, and the recapitulation effect is strong. The earlier cue took place in Ronny's apartment as he carried Loretta to the bedroom ("son of a bitch!"). Further resonance comes from the fact that the first phonograph cue preceded "O soave fanciulla" in the scene. The present iteration, however, is tied visually to Ronny only, who enacts a mini-drama as he methodically engages the technological apparatus. After a few measures he gets up slowly, walks into the other room – the fixed camera creating objectivity – stops in front of the phonograph and waits for something to happen. When the music reaches the dominant B major chord before the big resolution (see Ex. 5.7), Ronny does something special: he physically turns up the



Fig. 5.4 Ronny (Nicolas Cage) at the phonograph in *Moonstruck*.



Fig. 5.5 Loretta (Cher) kicking a can on a street in *Moonstruck*.

volume, creating a mechanical crescendo on top of the crescendo notated in the score (see Fig. 5.4). The loud sound level intensifies the strong push towards tonal resolution and behaves like a *Tristan*-esque erotic buildup. Precisely at the resolution on “Ah! tu sol comandi,” where Mimì and Rodolfo sing high in octaves and the harmonic resolution sounds remote (see above), the camera effects a wonderful cut to Loretta on her Brooklyn street, still in dress clothes, kicking a can with her red shoe (see Fig. 5.5). The timing of the cut is highly ritualistic. Too structured, too perfect, it comes off as contrived. Yet it is utterly honest. By this point in the film, after all the operatic

music, we are ready to believe in (and desire) the highly stylized visual move in the camera. As for Loretta, this marks desire fulfilled and her transformation into the realm of passion. Musically the passage recapitulates two related earlier appearances: at the height of their lovemaking two nights earlier (also following “O soave fanciulla”), and at the gaze of recognition before the Met performance (in instrumental arrangement). Thus it pulls together the romantically significant events of the film. Together with “O soave fanciulla” it exerts a structural control that resembles the powerful dramatic recall of the “Bacio” theme in Verdi’s *Otello*.

As in the first phonograph cue, Ronny’s ritualistic control over the apparatus is foregrounded. A famous phonograph scene in another film makes a revealing comparison. In Jonathan Demme’s *Philadelphia* (1993), gay AIDS victim Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks), a big opera fan, is waging a discrimination suit against his employer and fighting to stay alive. Well into the ravages of the disease, he invites his lawyer (Denzel Washington) to his house to go over strategy. Weak, full of lesions, attached to his intravenous pole, Andy goes into an ecstatic zone as he listens to a recording of Callas singing an aria from *Andrea Chénier*. As Marc A. Weiner notes in his perceptive study, in this opera scene “the status of the recording as a recording is increasingly deemphasized,” and phantasmagoria suspends differences of all kinds.⁴⁵ In *Moonstruck*, however, the situation is the opposite. Ronny’s ritualistic actions highlight the apparatus and its function as mediation. We do not enter an Adorno-defined phantasmagoria in which differences are effaced. We do not take the event as a naturally occurring phenomenon, and there is little risk that we will get sucked in beyond our rational control. Ronny’s deliberate manipulation of the volume of the cue implies he is not only part of the fiction, but also an extradiegetic agent, such as a sound editor, that controls the mechanics of the film. Ronny’s intervention and its timing foregrounds the studied relationship of the music to the characters and creates distance between the music and the plot. The control is needed to keep desire from fusing with its signifier, the music, and to preserve the film’s thematic gap between contrivance and the real thing.⁴⁶

The magical effects in image and sound at “Ah! tu sol comandi” have sexual connotations. The run-up in excitement followed by the striking musical resolution and camera cut suggests sexual climax: a sudden explosion that spills over into Loretta’s soul. It is as if she has been penetrated sexually by Ronny’s desires through the music. In this reading, Loretta hears the music even though no visible source appears in her scene. Ronny’s phonograph record is the real source, and his desire to have Loretta share the desires expressed in the music prompts him to turn up the volume so she can hear it miles away. The scene behaves like a blurred *acousmêtre*. Although the character hears music that lacks a visible source, that source had just appeared before us and generates musical continuity across the visual cut. The music functions metadiegetically for Loretta as it resonates with previous iterations that sounded phases of her desire.

Is Ronny exerting control over Loretta as the recorded music is blasted out to her? The text in Mimi’s part is “Ah! You alone will rule, love,” and even though Mimi is not similar to Loretta the female voice links them. The higher voice is also more prominent in the homorhythmic duet, and we will probably associate it with Loretta because she is the only person we see. But although the text glorifies the power of love, it also connotes the power of the lover if one interprets “tu” as Ronny instead of love in the abstract. This connection to Ronny through words reinforces his mechanical connection to Loretta through technology. Ronny the magician is running the show and he can imbue her with fulfilled desires through the remote sounding of *Bohème*: once again, a fascinating mix of contrivance and the real thing.

The pure joy we see in Loretta suggests that this control is not harmful. Throughout the film she has been independent and functioned as an individual with her own mind. Film scholars see her as an unusually strong female character in a genre in which women have been subordinate to men.⁴⁷ At “Ah! tu sol comandi” Loretta appears to have internalized the opera–desire connection and made it her own, even though Ronny instigated and controlled the music. Indeed, this place marks the first and only time in the film in which any of

the vocal opera music is associated with Loretta alone; previously it was connected to Ronny. The musical halves of the cue are linked successively to each protagonist, but joined desire underlies all of it. Loretta's transformation as the embodiment of the climactic resolution in the opera's music is a sublime moment in the film.

The "Ah! tu sol comandi" passage lasts about a minute and ends as Loretta waltzes into the kitchen and her mother brings her down to earth with news of Johnny's return. Does the cessation of the operatic voice mean the death of opera and the death of desire? Michal Grover-Friedlander posits that the voice in opera encodes expectations of loss, absence, and death when the voice stops. The very materiality of the voice embodies its absence, and this suggests that happy endings are rare or even foreclosed.⁴⁸ I do not see such a pessimistic outcome here. First of all, the vocal presence does not necessarily end after literal sound ceases. Desires stirred by opera's music continue to circulate in the psyche of the protagonists and thus constitute presence. Second, *Moonstruck*'s heightened romance shares the stage with ethnic comedy, and this precludes an emphasis on death and loss. It is true that Shanley's screenplay is full of references to death, comedy notwithstanding. Yet the cessation of opera's voice does not play out the death theme in any significant way. Desire is affirmed and will continue after the last literal sounding of the opera voice at the end of the film.

THE DESIRE FOR OPERA-FILM

Film has shown, historically, a desire to be used by opera. Jeremy Tambling⁴⁹

I wanted the film to feel like an opera. I kept telling the actors that opera pervades this whole style ... I said that it's all a little over-the-top. Norman Jewison⁵⁰

Moonstruck aspires to the genre of opera-film. The sheer amount of opera music, and from one particular opera, is striking. Of course, many mainstream movies use opera music, but rarely so much, and seldom from one work.⁵¹ The film also stands out because so many of the opera cues retain the vocal parts from the original, and as

Gorbman observes, classical film scoring has tended to avoid vocal music so as not to compete with the spoken dialogue.⁵² Moreover, the visit to the Met and to see *Bohème* occupies a central place in the story, and *Bohème* is foregrounded as ritual through signs, posters, and phonograph recordings. Other films may feature one or two of these elements, but not as many as here. Two that include opera visits demonstrate the difference.⁵³ In *Pretty Woman* (1990) corporate raider Richard Gere takes good-hearted call girl Julia Roberts to see *La traviata*, and the film draws a parallel between her and Violetta. In *The Age of Innocence* (1990) a performance of *Faust* at the opera marks the first time the protagonist (Daniel Day Lewis) sees his real love, Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), and it functions as a signifier of their gilded world. But neither film has an opera enthusiast as lead character, offers several soundtrack excerpts from that opera, parlays opera as ritual, or sports an operatic tone. *Moonstruck*'s operatic tone is subtle and pervasive, and the interplay of *opera buffa* and *verismo* is special.⁵⁴ As we have seen, its use of opera music exceeds traditional categories of diegetic and nondiegetic, and performs important meta-level functions for memory, consciousness, and desire. Moreover, most of the opera cues occur at high emotional points and thus behave operatically themselves.

Given the foregrounding of opera on so many levels, one can identify opera as the topic of the film and its plot. In this way *Moonstruck* approaches an opera-film. This reflexive relationship is obviously not the same as in films that explicitly feature opera in the plot. In *Meeting Venus* (1991), for example, a backstage story about a company preparing *Tannhäuser*, opera inhabits the outer surface of narrative and image. In *Moonstruck* many layers of opera and operaticness, explicit and implied, are put into play. As a result, *Moonstruck* offers a far more complex and compelling engagement with opera than other films of this sort.

My larger point concerns opera-film. *Moonstruck*'s own duality of contrivance and the real thing forms a parallel to the dual nature of opera-film. In that hybrid genre, accommodations in one or both media are necessary and common, including adjustments in pacing,

playback, camerawork, music, and shooting location, and many an opera-film will feature several kinds of music-image relationships.⁵⁵ Beyond their technical considerations, opera-films promote desires: musical desires related to style, voice, and closure; and filmic desires associated with utopian urges generated by the regressive nature of viewership.⁵⁶ A filmic device may pre-empt musical desire, or music may do the same with filmic desire.

In *Moonstruck*, key *Bohème* cues show an affinity for opera-film. Take the first cue, at Ronny's monologue in the bakery basement. We have seen how the instrumental arrangement is foregrounded so strongly that it fuses with the dialogue and creates a new operatic number. Another signifier of opera-film occurs when they make love, to "O soave fanciulla" and its continuation. The vocal cue becomes psychodiegetic for Ronny, and its acousmatic quality recalls the inherent acousmatic nature of opera-film. Simply put, the genre presents heard orchestral music that lacks a visible source, and lip-synching to playback that confounds a sense of an embodied vocal source.⁵⁷ *Moonstruck's* infiltration by opera music intensifies at the Met performance. In the "Bada" excerpts from Act III, the staged music becomes the main discourse of the film at the hand clasp. A fusing of plots, emotions, and discourses between protagonists and performed opera occurs, and distinctions between active subject and passive object dissolve. That the seen singers are lip-synching to playback, and are not even the voices we hear (Renata Tebaldi and Franco Corelli on a legendary recording), enhances the connection to opera-film. From this point all *Bohème* cues retain their vocal parts and operatic voice is accepted as the discourse of desire. These cues include the street soliloquy, where the hand clasp is reaffirmed, and Loretta's metadiegetic replaying of desire at the climactic camera cut.

The metadiegetic charting of subjectivity and desire through the operatic music resembles a practice found in some opera-films. As discussed in [Chapter 3](#), interior singing, whereby heard opera music is associated with a character but no moving lips are seen, figures prominently in many opera-films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle. It emphasizes individual consciousness, and as in *Moonstruck* it opens up an important

subjective realm. While most of the *Bohème* cues in *Moonstruck* entail voice and thus literally envoice consciousness, many of the purely instrumental cues also signify consciousness because the music fuses with the dialogue (the first cue), or, more often, a metadiegetic relationship forms with the absent words or another meaningful referent. The recognition section of the instrumental cue outside the Met functions in this larger way. Overall, as in interior singing in opera-film, the *Bohème* cues of *Moonstruck* reveal inner layers of subjectivity and desire, and expand interpretive possibilities for narrative and representation.

Released in 1987, *Moonstruck* appeared at a time when fully cinematic opera-films were flourishing. This is only Shanley's second screenplay, and perhaps he was moved to make Ronny an opera fanatic and have the Met a central element because of the impact of these films. Of course, such films reflect the general trend in the 1980s towards media convergence, as in the rise of MTV.⁵⁸ Director Jewison, who describes *Moonstruck* as an old-fashioned sort of movie, may have felt the time was right to do a film that foregrounds opera so extensively. There are numerous film precedents, of course, such as Visconti's *Senso* (1954) and Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy: Visconti with a scene from *Trovatore* at the start and an operatic use of Bruckner on the soundtrack throughout; Coppola with an operatic style in image and pacing throughout, and a staging of *Cavalleria rusticana* at the end (see [Chapter 1](#)). Yet as stated previously, *Moonstruck* stands out for the mix of comedy and *verismo*, the contrived tone, the focus on one opera, and the self-conscious and even ritualistic use of operatic signifiers that saturate the film. Perhaps the thriving of opera-film in this period also helps to account for the operatic relationship between soundtrack and diegesis that Gorbman finds notable in many post-classical films, which obviously includes *Moonstruck*.⁵⁹

Moonstruck's opera emphasis brings out the theatrical nature of the screenplay. Jewison notes that he felt he was adapting a stage play for film, and Shanley refers to specific spots as first act, second act, and so on.⁶⁰ Many opera-films also emphasize theater, for example Bergman's *Magic Flute* (1975). Perhaps Jewison was influenced by such theatrical

renditions and their ways of joining opera and theater. As we have seen, theatrical elements in *Moonstruck* play a major role in creating the contrived tone of the whole. Yet despite the opera-theater connection, opera music in *Moonstruck* helps convert Shanley's theatrical concept into a film through its performance of the narrative and semiotic tasks of soundtrack music. It vivifies images, fills in emotions, provides continuity across cuts and scenes, rounds out characters, and, notably here, limns a psychological component that is key to the story. The wacky duality that characterizes the film would not work without Puccini's music and the contrived nature of opera itself.

BOHÈME AS KITSCH?

One could think that *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, *Tosca* were created with the thought of imaginary potpourris that do not emerge until the last tear from the operatic catastrophes has dried up.

Theodor Adorno⁶¹

... the linking of the characteristic and the banal remains the task and paradox of all genuine kitsch music.

Theodor Adorno⁶²

Bohème has been moonstruck – magically rearranged and recomposed – and in that illuminating process the opera is revealed as kitsch. Or rather, *Moonstruck* brings the kitsch qualities already present in the opera to the surface. Unlike most opera/film encounters, the combination involves more than the opera's impact on the film. The loony duality of *Moonstruck* spills over into the opera.

As many have noted, kitsch is not easy to define and its characteristics depend on cultural use, time period, and art form.⁶³ The kitsch aspects of *Bohème* entail its strong sentimentality, its overuse in mass culture, and an accessibility that verges on triteness. These elements drain the work of some of its value – not necessarily in terms of quality as a good or bad work, but in terms of its ontological status as an opera. Cultural theorist Gillo Dorfles observes that kitsch can arise when a work of a given time undergoes changes in taste afterwards, and hence kitsch “concerns the use of art rather than its creation.” This may well happen when “a single element or a whole work of art is ‘transferred’ from its real status and used for a different purpose

from the one for which it was created.”⁶⁴ The tuneful parts of *Bohème* have circulated easily in mass culture, from advertisements to muzak to pop-chart hits (as in Musetta’s Waltz noted earlier). I am not suggesting that this debases the value of the opera, but that it adds a layer of meaning that inflects its operaticness with the attributes of kitsch. The popular places – those with the memorable tunes that have caught the popular imagination – signify kitsch more than other places. Sentimentality figures in such passages and inheres in the work as well as in its cultural use. *Bohème* is also linked with kitsch because the opera comes from the end of an era, a time when kitsch often materializes. And it self-consciously exploits lyrical melody, a belated feature by the 1890s, to maximize sentiment. This seductive quality furnishes a means of “aesthetic escapism” that Matei Calinescu identifies as a key element in kitsch, especially from the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

Joseph Kerman all but identifies kitsch in Puccini when he addresses belatedness in *Opera and Drama*. While overly harsh in calling Puccini a “master of operatic pretension” and his operas “false through and through,” Kerman offers a telling characterization of *Bohème*: “*La Bohème* stays so frankly on the surface that it will never lose its somewhat chlorotic charm.”⁶⁶ While the linkage of surface and charm amounts to a modernist stance on *Bohème*, it gets at the reality behind the broad appeal of the work.

Moonstruck represents a new setting for the opera music as it culls and rearranges material. Does it create kitsch? Does it have a negative impact on the opera? Jeongwon Joe and Mike Cormack separately engage related questions for pre-existing classical music in other films. Both Joe’s exploration of *Amadeus* and Cormack’s more general study assert that meanings change when a piece is used in a filmic context, and the effect can be positive.⁶⁷ Despite what I have sketched above for kitsch and the re-use of a work, a film setting does not automatically entail a kitsch-like debasing of the source music, unless the particular film imposes kitsch values on the music. In *Moonstruck* the duality of contrivance and the real thing imprint their stamp on Puccini’s music, but they do not create kitsch. Instead, they help affirm kitsch qualities

already present in the opera. Of course, *Bohème's* very transfer into a new medium opens the door to the revelation of added meanings, and *Moonstruck* exposes kitsch elements in *Bohème* that tend to remain below the surface when the actual opera is performed.

The first two *Bohème* cues, in instrumental arrangement, exude kitsch in their exaggerated emotion and folk-like scoring. The other cues usually appear in a straight or believable emotional environment when we hear them – in other words, the music is consistent with the emotions and events of the plot at the time. But the cues at high points, which recur – especially “Ah! tu sol comandi” from Act I and the augmented-sixth resolution before “Addio” from Act III – display the Puccinian *sviolinata* effect of excessive instrumental doubling that conveys lush sentimentality. This gives a false sense of fullness and generates utopian desires whose hollowness approaches kitsch.⁶⁸ The contrived duality of the film might be likened to the kitsch over-doubling of the melody. Throughout the film, however, all the *Bohème* cues are surrounded by contrivance: by *buffo* elements, melodramatic exaggeration, wacky lines, ethnic accents and speech, and ethnic composed music. This context makes the “serious” *Bohème* cues not quite straight, despite the seriousness of the desires set in motion. Some kitsch rubs off on them, or heightens the kitsch already present in the music.

We come back to Kael's statement on *Moonstruck* cited at the beginning: that its mockery “is a giddy homage to our desire for grand passion.” The mockery theme of the film's fiction and the mockery entailed in identifying *Bohème's* kitsch qualities both become part of our “desire for grand passion” – part of the reason why kitsch in general endures. As Eugene Goodheart notes, “There must be something in all of us that wants kitsch, that needs kitsch ... It is an appetite which everybody shares.”⁶⁹ So even though a statement such as the following by film-music theorist Caryl Flinn rings true – “tasteful people don't buy into, or rather, publicly admit buying into, the hamfisted pining of Rudolfo [*sic*] for Mimi [*sic*] in *La Bohème*” – the desire for the pleasures *Bohème* gives us has a chance to blossom in the dual environment of *Moonstruck*.⁷⁰ By the end, we sense that we have arrived

at a new place in our relationship with Puccini's opera and that the journey exposed something questionable in addition to its glories. To paraphrase a line from the script, "it's a miracle" that *Moonstruck* can turn kitsch to lovable use. Our desires for that ambivalent cultural phenomenon are beautifully fulfilled in *Moonstruck's* homage to *La Bohème*.

6 | The sound of desire: *Così*'s "Soave sia il vento" in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* and *Closer*

May the wind be gentle, may the sea be calm, and may the elements respond kindly to our desires.

"Soave sia il vento," in *Così fan tutte*¹

Mozart's *Così fan tutte* is one of the most sensuous operas in the repertoire.² With ravishing sonorities that linger in the imagination long after it is over, *Così* holds a special

place in the operatic canon and inspires awe-struck admiration in many opera lovers. The *Così* sound comes from a surfeit of thirds and sixths, which often function dramatically, and magical orchestration that assigns the winds a prominent role, especially the clarinet. Not surprisingly, desire looms large in the heightened aesthetic realm, and Mozart's opera centers on this rarefied quality. *Così* pays particular attention to the desire for ideal love, which drives the plot, and the consequences for the characters when that desire is denied. While the opera features many numbers that touch on desire, the trio "Soave sia il vento" embodies this quality more than any other, and it serves as a signature piece for the work.

We explore two major films that link "Soave" with desire: John Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) and Mike Nichols's *Closer* (2004).³ *Sunday*, which appeared shortly after Schlesinger's Oscar-winning film *Midnight Cowboy*, captures Britain's social confusion after the heady Mod culture of the 1960s.⁴ *Closer*, with a mixed Anglo-American cast, replays themes of sexual competition and psychic brutality from early Nichols movies, especially *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *Carnal Knowledge* (1971). Although *Sunday* and *Closer* might seem unlikely partners for exploration, their similarities make for a meaningful comparison. Both feature fluid romantic pairings, as in *Così*; both foreground sexuality and desire; and both use "Soave" early on to signal the painful desires in the story. As in the opera, "Soave" acts as a signature for each film.

After a brief introduction to *Sunday* and *Closer* the chapter turns to the Trio. Through a close reading of its styles and codes we see how the piece structures desire within a framework of reason and how the relationship is fundamental to the films. The core of the study builds on this relationship as it explores how the Trio functions in each film. Individual cues are discussed in detail for the ways in which music shapes desire and meaning in conjunction with image and plot. While each film receives individual treatment, comparisons along the way bring their respective approach into sharper relief. Overall, the focus on “Soave” and related music contributes to the understanding of each film at its deepest level, which like *Così* resides in those mysterious places of desire. It also illuminates the haunting Trio and its special place in Mozart’s opera.

The examination of one operatic number in multiple films tells us a great deal about the ways in which opera can function as soundtrack music. It also expands our sense of why directors choose a particular operatic piece, and how that piece contributes something fundamental to the film and provides access to its core. “Soave sia il vento,” that most magnificent of operatic pieces, opens a window into the heart and soul of desire and reveals how a single number can say the world about a film.

TWO LONDON FILMS

Sunday, *Bloody Sunday* and *Closer* both take place in London, some thirty-three years apart, and purport to show contemporary mores. Both involve a British creative presence: director Schlesinger for *Sunday*, and playwright Patrick Marber for *Closer*, whose hit West End play was the source for the film.⁵

Sunday concerns an unusual love triangle. Thirty-something consultant Alex Greville (Glenda Jackson) is in a relationship with the much younger Bob Elkins (Murray Head), a conceptual artist, who is also in a relationship with the fifty-ish physician Daniel Hirsh (Peter Finch). *Sunday*’s straightforward presentation of bisexuality and homosexuality, including passionate kissing between men, marked

a milestone in cinema when the film appeared.⁶ *Closer* also features kaleidoscopic shifts between couples, but the four lovers form heterosexual pairs: writer Dan (Jude Law), free spirit Alice (Natalie Portman), dermatologist Larry (Clive Owen), and photographer Anna (Julia Roberts). Although *Sunday* broke sexual ground, *Closer* is much more raw in its depiction of human desires. Cruelty figures in both movies, but in *Closer* it approaches sadism and is far removed from *Sunday*'s ethos of unintended consequences. Fierce macho competition permeates *Closer*. In *Sunday*, however, mature people indulge the foibles of their childish lover and, except briefly near the end, do not meet. They never cross swords. *Sunday*'s theme is resignation to what is. At the end Daniel says flatly to the camera that half-a-loaf, while not perfect, is something; then after a pause he utters, "We were something." *Closer*'s mantra is fight and destroy, consequences be damned. Despite their differences, both stories inhabit a closed world with symmetrical groupings and offer ambivalent endings that reflect life's disappointments. No one is happy, and some are emotionally devastated: features that also apply to Mozart's opera.⁷

The resemblance between *Sunday* and *Closer* goes further. Both have a mechanical reproducing device for the first iteration of "Soave." In *Sunday* we see a phonograph needle placed on an LP, while *Closer* uses a CD player – a difference that corresponds to the era of the film. Both use a complete statement of "Soave" over the final credits. In keeping with the aquatic imagery of the Trio and the seaside setting of *Così*, both movies assign water a prominent role. *Sunday* makes water a central element in Bob's artistic installations. The most obvious example is the snaking arabesque of tubes with viscous water that graces Daniel's yard. No mere ornament, the installation occupies Daniel's attention as it substitutes for Bob. At the end it provides a visual remnant of the young lover after he moves to America. *Closer* peppers its dialogue with references to fish. Fish belong to the symbolic universe of the aquarium, which crops up in key places. Anna tells Dan that his book on Alice's life should be entitled *The Aquarium*, a place Anna says she visits often. Although Anna does not explain, it seems to refer to Alice's aimlessness and instability. At the end, for instance, we learn

that Alice's name is not even Alice. More concretely, an aquarium becomes a real place in the film. Against the backdrop of the huge blue tank we see stirrings of desire between Anna and Larry when they first meet.⁸ An encounter resulting from Dan's impersonation of Anna in an internet sex chat with Larry, the ruse not only shows the brutality of the sex games in *Closer*, but reinforces the link between water and desire that flows through the film.

Sunday uses "Soave" six times. The only complete iteration occurs in the last hearing, over the final credits.⁹ Each of the other appearances has only part of the piece, and the portion and length vary from cue to cue. The first four times are spaced out fairly evenly in the first fifty minutes of the film. Then comes a big gap, of forty-five minutes, before "Soave" returns. Shortly thereafter, just after Daniel's speech to the audience, the entire Trio plays over scrolling credits.

Closer also uses "Soave" as a signature piece, but the Trio shares the stage with other numbers from *Così*. As in *Sunday*, "Soave" is introduced early in the film and closely linked with desire in the story. It follows other pieces in *Così*'s "Farewell complex" – the Quintet "Di scrivermi" (no. 9) and the intervening recitative. Once "Soave" starts we hear a big chunk of it, from its beginning to a few measures before the voiced music ends. The Trio returns, complete, over the final credits. These are truly the *final* credits, a detailed list of the crew and minor production figures. An initial list of stars, producers, and director comes before and uses a pop song, "I can't take my eyes off of you."¹⁰ In the film proper, music from *Così* makes a second appearance about two-thirds of the way through. From the lobby and bar of what appears to be an opera house we hear *Così* in the background. The music consists of the chorus "Bella vita militar" and the Quintet "Di scrivermi" from the Farewell complex, and snatches of the last two sections of the Act I Finale.

Sunday's loyalty to "Soave," to the exclusion of other *Così* music, renders the Trio a leitmotif – a signature theme that charts subtle changes when it reappears.¹¹ Yet the very fact of repetition implies obsession on the part of the characters and plays up their tenacity to hang on to an elusive love object. To use another musical analogy, "Soave" is like

a rondo theme signifying desire that marks off episodes of mundane plot events. In *Closer*, “Soave” acts as a signature theme of fluid desire, and after its first appearance it need not recur. Instead, *Così* can figure in the film in a variety of ways. The reappearance later on of the Farewell complex, although without “Soave,” creates a structural event – a recapitulation with important changes from the first cluster. Its setting in an opera house injects another operatic element into *Closer*, and we are reminded of the opera house in *Moonstruck*, explored in the previous chapter. It is important to note that despite the many ways in which *Così* informs *Closer*, the Trio “Soave” still represents what is at stake in the film: the fluidity and confusion of human desire.

“SOAVE SIA IL VENTO”

In *Così* “Soave” marks the end of the Farewell scene, which takes place fairly early. The cynical *filosofo* Don Alfonso has set his scenario in motion to test the fidelity of the women, the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella. If all goes well Don Alfonso wins his wager against the men. At this point Ferrando and Guglielmo have supposedly been called to battle, and the farewell numbers express a tearful goodbye. “Soave,” sung by the women and Don Alfonso, caps off the segment with a wish for the men’s safe passage at sea.

“Soave” has drawn a great deal of commentary, probably more than any number in *Così*.¹² It is admired for its striking mix of expressive, dramatic, and musical qualities, and critics find it unique in all of Mozart, and possibly in any opera. Scott Burnham’s perceptive study on the irony of beauty in *Così* calls the Trio “one of the most touchingly beautiful numbers in all of opera,” and considers it “a crux for this opera.”¹³ Mary Hunter insightfully identifies “Soave”’s beauty as a topical category that extends beyond the number and stands for *Così* itself. Beauty is so central that it rises to the level of an eighteenth-century artistic category, and in this way “Soave” renders *Così* a startling opera for its time.¹⁴

Così’s fate in the nineteenth century forms an interesting backdrop to our films. The ravishing surface of *Così* would seem to make

the opera attractive to Romantics, yet the nineteenth century had a difficult time with *Così*. It felt that Mozart wasted sublime music on an inane story, and the result was a horrible mismatch. Beethoven, Goethe, and Wagner held this view of *Così*, and the work was ignored until well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ From our perspective, "Soave"'s extravagant beauty and signature status underscore this theme of contradiction in the opera's reception. Behind its gorgeous music lie many contradictions, and they create irony that parallels the historical ironies of the opera's reception. They also offer rich fodder for the narrative ambiguities of our films.

Melancholy and loss are key elements of "Soave"'s irony. In Stefan Kunze's words, the Trio "bids farewell to something unrecoverable, without the characters themselves being aware of it."¹⁶ It posits a tension between the present of the story and a past no longer possible, and Kunze believes that the characters are not conscious of loss. I do not think the situation is so clear-cut. Mozart's music tells us that at some level the characters are aware of deep loss. The sisters sense emotionally that something is lost, although they do not understand what is lost and how it might affect them. For Don Alfonso the situation is different. Much of the number he sings homophonically with the women and appears to be in sync with their subjective position. Near the end a break-out line suggests independence. Then he states in a recitative that "Non son cattivo comico" ("I'm not a bad actor"). But the early portion of "Soave" implies that he is overcome at least to some extent by the music's evocation of loss, even if his understanding of loss is crass. It is also possible that Alfonso is musing on personal loss now that he is an old man. Perhaps he represents a later phase of Don Giovanni – the sexual predator now a cynic past his prime who still plays havoc with lives. In this reading, Alfonso becomes a fourth phase added to Kierkegaard's stages of desire in Mozart's operas: Cherubino, then Papageno, finally Giovanni, and now Alfonso.¹⁷ Viewed this way, "Soave" conveys Alfonso's farewell to his youthful desires, unmentioned in the opera, and extends its reach beyond the women's immediate situation.¹⁸

Alfonso's complex position in the Trio resonates in our films. *Sunday's* Daniel Hirsh is similar to Alfonso in several ways. Both are advanced in age, mature, and matter-of-fact. They accept life as it is and do not expect much. Both seem pastless. But while Alfonso manipulates others to demonstrate the true path, Daniel uses life experience to help others, especially as a caring physician. Yet reason plays a major role in the lives of the two and forms a powerful link between them through "Soave." In *Closer* the connection with Alfonso is less obvious, but it may surface in Anna, whose CD machine plays the Trio. Alfonso seems to function as an inner voice of reason that Anna chooses to ignore when she hears "Soave," which marks the moment when fluid desires stir her soul. Although much younger than Alfonso, Anna is an older character of the foursome (Larry is another) and she has experienced life. We do not find out about her past, however, and in this way she also resembles Alfonso.

Pastlessness is not far from timelessness, and "Soave" has been described as a number that confounds time. Nicholas Till calls it "a rare moment of stillness," while Edmund Goehring believes it aims to stop time.¹⁹ In [Chapter 3](#) we noted the freezing of time in Ponnelle's mimed staging of interior singing for the Count's aria in *Le nozze di Figaro*. In "Soave" the arresting of time resides in the sounded music, not in a film technique. The Trio's layered construction contributes to its static quality. One layer is the repetitive waves motion in the sixteenth-note circular patterns in the violins (see [Ex. 6.1](#)).²⁰ This becomes memorable not only through the hypnotic rhythm, but also the *sotto voce* timbre of the muted instruments. The floating undulations seem to defy division into time. Another layer consists of the *basso continuo*-like bass movement governed by the half-note pulse of the meter (♩). This sets up a floor characteristic of a Baroque musical framework, which accords with the old-fashioned *alla breve* time-signature.²¹ The vocal trio constitutes another layer. It is homophonic for most of the piece, but two departures become important. The first, in mm. 16–21, is an *a cappella* section whose motivic organization and invertible counterpoint contrast with the sustained lyricism of the rest (see [Ex. 6.2](#)). The second, in mm. 28–29, involves Don Alfonso

N° 10 Terzettino
Andante

Flauto I, II

Clarinetto I, II
in La/A

Fagotto I, II

Corno I, II
in Mi/E

Violino I
con sordino
p

Violino II
con sordino
p

Viola I, II
p

FIORDILIGI
So - a - - ve sia il

DORABELLA
So - a - - ve sia il

DON ALFONSO
So - a - - ve sia il

Continuo
(Cembalo,
Violoncello)

Violoncello e Basso
pizzicato
p

4

Clar. (in La)

Fag.

V. I

V. II

Va.

Fior. d.

Dor.

D. Alf.

Vc. & B.

ven - to, tran - quil - la sia - l'on - da,

ven - to, tran - quil - la sia - l'on - da,

ven - to, tran - quil - la sia l'on - da,

Ex. 6.1 "Soave sia il vento," mm. 1-6.

as he launches into an active descending gesture (see Ex. 6.3). Not only is it startling within the prevailing style, but it occurs against sustained notes of the women. Mozart wants us to pay attention to Alfonso.

The Trio's other layer consists of the wind coloring. Although the wind choir (without oboes) mostly doubles the voices, it has a key

16

Clar. I (in La)
Clar. II (in La)
Fag.
V. I
V. II
Va.
Fiord.
Dor.
D. Alf.
Vc. & B.

l'on - da, ed o - gui e - le - men - to be - ni - gnò ri - spon - da ai no - stri de -

l'on - da, ed o - guie - le - men - to be - ni - gnò ri - spon - da ai no - stri de -

l'on - da, ed o - gui e - le - men - to be - ni - gnò ri - spon - da ai no - stri de -

pizzicato

22

Fl.
Clar. (in La)
Fag.
Cor. (in Mi)
V. I
V. II
Va.
Fiord.
Dor.
D. Alf.
Vc. & B.

p

sir

sir

sir

Ex. 6.2 "Soave sia il vento," mm. 16–23.

role in shaping the work. Clarinets, especially as the soprano wind voice in the first half, supply a ravishing color that expresses the text and blends with the murmurs of the violins.²² The other notable feature is the introduction of flutes and horns at a critical place. At m. 22, after the *a cappella* detour, the fuller wind choir joins the return of the waves music, homophonic voices, and *basso continuo* line on what has

26

Fl. *cresc.* *f*

Clar. (in A) *cresc.* *f* *p*

Fag. *cresc.* *f* *p*

Cor. (in A) *cresc.* *f*

V.I. *cresc.* *f*

V.II. *cresc.* *f*

Va. *cresc.* *f*

Fied. —, be - ni - gno ri - spon -

Dor. —, be - ni - gno ri - spon -

D. Alf. —, ai no - stri de - sir, be - ni - gno ri - spon - da ai no - stri de -

Vc. & B. *cresc.* *f*

Violoncello coll' arco *p*

Ex. 6.3 "Soave sia il vento," mm. 26–29.

been described as "hair-raising" harmony on the word "desir" (see Ex. 6.2).²³ In place of an expected tonic resolution, a prolonged dominant pedal underpins a dissonant diminished-seventh chord above it. This breathtaking place exceeds verbal description.

"Soave"'s construction in layers is suggestive. The blocks of sound, along with the strong bass movement and *alla breve* pulse, recall

Baroque practices. One hears hints of the concerto grosso. Each layer stands for an instrument or a group, and sometimes all are present, sometimes only a few. For instance, the concertino stands out in the *a cappella* section when the *tutti* elements of instrumental bassline and violins' waves are absent. The winds actually continue to double the voices, but on my recording, at least, are barely heard.²⁴ I suspect that some conductors have them play softly to maximize the *a cappella* effect and dramatize the change at m. 22. The *a cappella* section, of course, signifies strongly as Baroque music in its motet style, tight counterpoint, recurring suspensions, motivic makeup, and dormant instrumental activity. One also notices a *ritornello* structure in "Soave," which becomes apparent when sound blocks return after an absence. This occurs when waves and bass come back after the *a cappella* section, and waves reappear after Alfonso's break-out line in mm. 28–31. "Soave" also suggests a trio sonata. Besides the texture of three voice parts, the larger texture recalls this Baroque genre. Homophonic voices (doubled by winds) and waves violins represent the two melody lines, and the bottom line fulfills the *basso continuo* function.

Of course, "Soave" is not confined to Baroque elements and is known for progressive features, especially its lush sonorites and its textual emphasis on desire (although literary structure and metaphors recall Baroque libretti). Many elements typify classical-era practices, including the large-scale tonal tension and slow harmonic rhythm. In short, "Soave" offers a fascinating mix of old and new elements, and this contributes to our sense that it is unique.²⁵

The old elements operate as a framework for the newer ones. I hear "Soave" as a subtle interaction between frame and surface, where ebb and flow between old and new make it hard to disentangle them. For plot and characterization, however, the old bears great dramatic import. It seems to represent reason, which was engaged in a struggle with feeling in the eighteenth century. Baroque music valued reason above all in its stress on a unitary emotional stance, and eschewed the messy diversity that came with the empiricism of the Enlightenment and its incorporation of feeling. Such "messy diversity" informs "Soave," but the frame of reason still prevails.

Dramatically, reason is represented in "Soave" by Don Alfonso, and he serves as the material embodiment of the old-style musical elements of the Trio. To be sure he functions as a modern man, a *filosofo*, in the opera's plot, but his demonstrational bent echoes the rationalist side of the Enlightenment. He tries to show that reason trumps feeling, and this echoes the musical elements of reason that underpin "Soave." In most of the piece Alfonso's intoning of desire creates irony, especially alongside the women's sincerity. But his break-out line ruptures the irony divide and tells us who he is. This use of a more straightforward language encapsulates what is happening in the piece. The break-out signifies rebellion against the pretense of intoning desire necessitated by his ruse. His reason, represented by the underlying framework, feels compelled to correct the surface utterances of music and text. The act may show a need to repudiate an intemperate past. As mentioned above, although Alfonso's past is a blank, the present cynicism may be a belated stage of an earlier life as a sexual predator. "Soave" could mark his repudiation of that past while expressing his ironic affinity for desires that accompany such a past.

Alfonso's complex relationship with reason opens a window on "Soave"'s role in *Sunday* and *Closer*. As in the opera, "Soave" in the films represents desire ironized. This is desire that contravenes social norms and cannot be realized because of the fluid nature of individuals and their desires. But the old-style conventions, which form the framework of the Trio, persist as an unwelcome reminder of reason, and reason is what the films' characters are trying to circumvent. So just as for Alfonso, for the films' characters desire intones against a framework of reason and tradition that ironizes the rapturous expression of desire but grounds it in ambiguity, melancholy, and pessimism. These characters do not rationally expect that things will turn out well; they probably do not think about future outcomes, existing instead in the moment. The presence of a palpable musical past in "Soave" ironizes their temporal stasis and implies the absence of a future, as do the musical waves that relentlessly go nowhere. At such a point reason can insert itself to quash emotional pain when desire is frustrated. This is what happens to Daniel and to Alex in

Sunday – Daniel with a reasoned acceptance of the way things are, Alex with a reasoned rejection of the situation. In *Closer* all remains open-ended and edgy, and reason occupies a shadowy existence after its participation in “Soave.” Just as Alfonso advocates reason in *Così*, the films use “Soave” to propose that reason is needed for surviving the disappointments of desire, and for resisting its temptations in the first place. A cynical message indeed.

“SOAVE” IN *SUNDAY*, *BLOODY SUNDAY*

Sunday, *Bloody Sunday* takes place over ten days, from a Friday to a Sunday the following week. Each day appears as a superimposed title that mimics divisions of a play. The highly praised script is by Penelope Gilliatt, a British author who was film reviewer at *The New Yorker* for a while.²⁶ The story unfolds mainly through alternating scenes between the pairs of lovers (see Figs. 6.1 and 6.2). Only near the end do the two strands converge. Alex and Daniel accidentally meet and fall into a civilized chat about Bob, who has left them to go to America. Earlier they almost cross paths when each drives by Bob’s apartment within seconds of the other.

Daniel and Alex form the linchpins of the movie, and we see Bob mostly through their eyes. Bob becomes an elusive object of desire, and his running off when things get messy paves the way into the next scene with the other lover. He reminds me of Cherubino: he is young and androgynous, awakens desires that echo Kierkegaard’s take on the character, and flits between lovers like a winged Eros. Daniel opens and closes *Sunday*, with revealing words for his character. At the start he touches a patient’s stomach to check for pain. His question “Do you feel anything?” acts as a tag-line for himself and the course of his relationship with Bob. At the end he summarizes his philosophy of desire when he says he’s been searching for someone generous and responsible, hasn’t found him with Bob, but is willing to settle for whatever they have together. Alex, the other lead, receives approximately the same amount of screen time as Daniel. She appears mainly at her sister’s house, but pops up at her



Fig. 6.1 Daniel (Peter Finch) and Bob (Murray Head) in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*.



Fig. 6.2 Alex (Glenda Jackson) and Bob (Murray Head) in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*.

apartment (very messy) and office. Unlike Daniel, she decides by the end that “Nothing is better than anything” if “anything” is unsatisfactory, and she breaks up with Bob. Both Alex and Daniel are guided by reason, but they process it towards different ends. “Soave” registers their immersion in desire and the course of that desire in their respective frame of reason.

The first cue

The initial iteration of “Soave” serves as exposition as it clarifies characters and relationships and juxtaposes them under the music. Fourteen minutes into the film “Soave” receives a highly ritualized entrance. In the preceding scene (Friday night) Alex is at her sister’s house. She hears the baby cry and gets out of bed (where Bob is sleeping) to see if anything is wrong. Niece Lucy is comforting it, and Alex feels useless as she returns to her room. Next comes a jump-cut to an extreme close-up of a phonograph needle being placed on an LP. After it engages the vinyl we hear “Soave.” A medium shot defines the space as Daniel’s living room and Daniel as the one who put on the record. Listening, he moves slowly around the tasteful room and ends up at the window. Still under the sonorous influence, he turns on Bob’s installation and watches the undulations of water in the tubes, which twinkle against the night sky. They visualize the waves in music and text, and our participation brings us close to Daniel’s subjective position as we share his gaze. Daniel’s smile acknowledges his pleasure in interacting with Bob’s stand-in, which is the best Daniel can do while Bob is with Alex. He senses Bob’s childishness in the free-spirited artwork. He also feels a connection between the music’s wistful undulations and the fragile relationship with Bob. “Soave”’s debut establishes Daniel’s distanced relationship with the love-object and his willingness to accept half-a-loaf – narrative positions that continue through the film.

After this sublime interaction a curious distancing is inserted. The music of the Trio continues, but we see Daniel taking out the garbage. The jolting image suggests that mundane reality must be attended to, even when beauty lures us elsewhere, and it reveals Daniel’s adherence to the code of reason that underlies life. It underscores the framework of reason behind “Soave” and demonstrates how the ironies of life resonate with the ironies of the piece.

Another jump-cut under the heard “Soave” takes us elsewhere. Suddenly we see a medium close-up of Bob’s head under a pillow. In continuity editing we would assume that Daniel is the source of

the gaze, but next we see Alex's face in close-up as the actual source. "Soave"'s music has sutured the two plot strands. More alternating close-ups of Bob asleep and Alex's loving gaze are shown, and it is interesting to compare the gazes in the two portions of the cue. In the first, Daniel displays a strong gaze that is clearly defined as coming from him, but the object of the gaze is absent and he settles on a substitute by way of artworks. He controls Bob's installation by switching it on, and "Soave" by engaging the LP. Daniel controls devices but has trouble with love. In the second part, the love-object is the explicit focus and clearly visible. Schlesinger's juxtaposed structure shows Bob as the fulcrum between the two older lovers, the apex of the triangle. Unlike Daniel, Alex engages directly with the love-object, not with a substitute. Yet our initial uncertainty over the source of the gaze means that Alex's subject position in the relationship is put into question. Daniel experiences Bob at a remove, but even when Alex has Bob she is compromised. Schlesinger seals Alex's weakness by showing Bob open an eye when Alex gazes at him, but not having him reciprocate the look.

In this cue across two scenes most of the Trio is heard, from the beginning to Don Alfonso's break-out line. The fulcrum point of Bob's face, seen a few times, occurs at the poignant sonority in m. 22. Schlesinger, who also directed stage opera, hit the sweet spot in aligning these places. As the Trio moves on it intones "ai nostri desir," and suddenly the viewer is aware of another brilliant effect: these words refer to the joint desires of Daniel and Alex for Bob, across scenes, and not just to Alex and Bob, the people we see now. The text comes alive with collective meaning. We have witnessed both older lovers and their ties with Bob, and the editing has shown us Bob as the pivot between the pairs. I also believe that as fashioned by Mozart, "ai nostri desir" takes on potential added meaning after the turning point at m. 22, and so it is open to broader interpretation. The cue fades out on Alfonso's break-out line, and we find ourselves in the light of morning as rambunctious children jump on the adults' bed.

The start of the cue is clearly diegetic. We see the needle applied to the source, hear the piece from its beginning, and watch Daniel listen

to it in the same space. The experience assumes a ritualistic function for him and accords with the ordered surroundings. The diegetic presence of the music is intensified by another aesthetic object that provides pleasure, Bob's installation. The rude shift to Daniel and garbage removes Daniel from this intensely aesthetic world. With it, the diegesis of the music becomes ambiguous. Perhaps Daniel can hear the music piping out his window, in which case it qualifies as diegetic. We do not see an open window, however, and the unchanged volume works against such an interpretation. A likely reading is that Daniel hears the Trio in memory, and it takes on the status of psychodiegetic music. The actual portion of "Soave" we hear when he is outside is not what he literally heard in his apartment. But as a cultivated aesthete and owner of an LP of "Soave," Daniel is capable of circulating the music in his mind's ear. In this mental playback, Daniel may sense the irony between the surface beauty of the piece and the mundane acts one has to perform. In other words, Daniel is tapping into the bittersweet irony embodied in "Soave" in its promotion of desire against an acknowledgment of reason.

A nondiegetic interpretation also makes sense, however. Considered this way, the scene of emptying the trash shows Daniel not hearing the music, either literally or in memory. "Soave" becomes aural commentary on Daniel's psychological state for our benefit. This changes the subjective target of the heard music. In his apartment, the diegetic music was intended for Daniel. Outside, the nondiegetic music is aimed at viewers, and Daniel gets shut out of the equation. He becomes object of our aural perception and in the process is reduced as a subjective agent. What makes this interpretation plausible is the viewer's shock when watching him remove the trash. Not only does it yank him or her from their previous aesthetic involvement, but it clashes with Daniel's presentation in the rest of the movie. The most persuasive interpretation may be Gorbman's category of metadiegetic status, which pertains to departures from the traditional functions. This allows several categories to co-exist in this case: diegetic, psychodiegetic, and nondiegetic status. It affirms that a particular place can be ambiguous, and that is probably the

point here.²⁷ Early in *Sunday* Schlesinger may want us to see someone who is unsure of what he is about, and we are to carry the impression through the film. He may also wish to complicate the meaning of "Soave," to further ironize it, so that it signifies great ambiguity when it appears.

The ironized staging acts as a transition to the second portion of the cue – Alex and Bob in her sister's bedroom. With intense longing and pain, Alex's gaze seems to recognize the ironies of her situation. The music becomes the sonic equivalent of the desire on her face and illustrates what Royal S. Brown terms a parallel situation for classical music in film.²⁸ The musical function in this scene is not diegetic, as no source appears. It is not obviously psychodiegetic, as we have no evidence that Alex has a memory of the piece or an interest in classical music. As noted, a psychological component plays a role, and it extends Brown's parallel idea while capturing Alex's inner life. One can consider the second portion a parallel to the first part – now it is Alex, before it was Daniel. Whether the literal source is actually present or outside the fiction may no longer matter. The point is that the desires stirred by "Soave" in the first part, through a verifiable device, transition to something whose source we cannot verify. The heard music floats, as does "Soave" itself in its undulations. "Soave" now exists beyond rational tethering, and this describes Alex's emotional state in the scene. Thus parallelism functions on two levels. Structurally it connects Daniel and Alex around Bob while pointing up their differences, and locally it limns the psychological box Alex finds herself in the entire movie.

Other cues

The final cue of the film is also a composite, reprising key features of the first cue and forming a frame for the movie. In between are three appearances of the Trio, and they also thematize aspects of the initial cue.

The second iteration of "Soave" focuses on Daniel and Bob. The first part centers on culture as they page through illustrations of art in

Italy; Daniel is trying to get Bob to agree to a trip there. This opening stress on art recalls the first section of the initial cue. Here, the scene cuts to them naked in bed at the special moment in m. 22, and they passionately embrace the next few measures. A ringing telephone interrupts the tryst at m. 25, where the diminished-seventh chord is re-scored. The spell is broken. This is not the first time the phone figures in the story. In fact, the ringing telephone is thematic across the film, interrupting bouts of desire or signaling missed communications. In a return to olden days, we frequently see an answering service with plug-in wires and a real person. The woman acts as an important link in Bob's communication with Alex and with Daniel, who both use her service. The narrative device materializes the elusive relationship between voice and communication that is implied by the ironies in "Soave." In this particular cue, further ironies come from the fact that the phone stops the music, the operator never answers the call (she dislikes Daniel), and Alex is trying to reach Bob.²⁹

The third appearance of "Soave" returns to the theme of Alex gazing at Bob. She has just quarreled with him, and "Soave" intones as she fixates on his naked body behind a shower curtain. The camera's love affair with her face reprises her needy subjective stance of the first cue. They embrace, and she apologizes for chiding him. The heard music extends from the start of the vocal music to the middle of the *a cappella* section, where it stops abruptly and a jump-cut deposits us at a trendy bar where Daniel chats with a female date. As elsewhere, "Soave"'s volume fluctuates in the cue. The piece begins softly, almost unnoticed, and becomes loud when the camera homes in on Alex's face. I find it interesting that the cue ends before we see Alex and Bob having sex. In fact, Schlesinger avoids linking "Soave" with heterosexual sex in the film. When this pair has sex, "Soave" is absent. When music accompanies the act – when Alex has sex with a business client and later lies naked with Bob – the soundtrack uses another piece, Schubert's *Impromptu* in G flat, Op. 90, no. 3. Alex has sexual control in the first encounter and the upper hand in the next because of Bob's jealous admiration, and Schlesinger uses a special piece for her elevated status. The only time "Soave" is linked with

heterosexuality is when desires are implied, not consummated. No such constraints characterize homosexual sex; "Soave" sounds when the men make love. This becomes a sonic equivalent of a director's "homosexual gaze": a term applied to Franco Zeffirelli, for example, in his idealization of male beauty on the screen.³⁰ The exclusion of male-female sex from "Soave"'s orbit spells a gay scoring practice that accords with the landmark homosexual openness of the film.³¹

The fourth "Soave" cue occurs at the midpoint of *Sunday*. Desire assumes a veiled guise in this hearing and hints at an end-point of a relationship, just as "Soave" in *Così* expresses farewell to ideal love. "Soave" extends from the start of the voiced music to the middle of m. 22. It begins softly as Alex, fully clothed, falls asleep in bed after Lucy's near-death from a truck in the street. Bob tends to her, then settles in a chair across the room. Once again the camera caresses her face, and we might think the gaze comes from Bob. But Bob shows little expression and becomes absorbed in a doodle on his sketchpad. Desire for Alex emanates from the camera, representing the director or the viewer, or what Jerrold Levinson calls the implied filmmaker: a nameless narrative agent running the show.³² The self-conscious emphasis on Alex's face tells us she is a caring soul who suffers, and the camera's desire becomes a substitute for the real love agent. "Soave" expresses the irony between this erotic relationship based in technology and Alex's wish for fulfilled desire. Bob interacts with "Soave" through his developing artwork. He improvises circular wavy lines around a "£" sign – a symbol of bourgeois society – and materializes the Trio's circularity of desire around a core of reason. The raised volume midway draws our attention to the parallels between music and image. Irony arises between Alex and Bob when he makes a phone call against the music. Bob effaces the aesthetic aura through a mundane act, while Alex continues in the womb of desire limned by "Soave" and the camera. As seen before, Alex's subjective position is compromised by the one-sidedness of the desire. Ironically, Bob's self-exclusion from desire allies him with the framework of reason behind the Trio.

The final cue is a composite like the initial cue, and their similarities form a frame for the movie. The first section, which makes up

most of the cue, comprises Daniel and Bob. After a few minutes of music-less plot, “Soave” continues where it left off. The second section, with Alex, is brief and could easily be missed. The cue as a whole begins after a big hiatus from “Soave,” which last appeared forty-five minutes earlier in real time. As Daniel goes upstairs after a hospital visit, “Soave” sounds from its beginning. Daniel finds Bob asleep in bed and looks lovingly at him. After a phone call from the hospital, Daniel has images of Bob deathly ill. The volume of “Soave” is low and we can hardly hear it. Bob awakens and Daniel climbs in bed with him, they speak of Bob’s leaving, and Daniel says he will miss him. Soon a mutual gaze replaces talk, and it is here that “Soave” becomes loud and underlines image. The screen gaze is special because for the first time Bob gazes on a love-object with desire. This registers Schlesinger’s “homosexual gaze” in the film – not idealized as in Zeffirelli’s films, but restrained as befitting Schlesinger’s style. It balances Alex’s intense heterosexual gaze at Bob earlier in the film and its ties with “Soave.” The music fades away, in the final vocal phrase, over a shot of Daniel the next morning (“Sunday”) gazing at Bob’s installation: yet another link with the first cue. Bob leaves for good, and his trace in the artwork is what remains for Daniel. The split disposition of “Soave” creates a decrescendo towards absence. Unlike the other composite cue, several minutes in real time elapse without music. Then, when Alex arrives at her sister’s house and sees Daniel eating inside, a faint echo-chamber rendition of the few remaining measures of “Soave” is heard. It suggests that Alex is left with almost nothing in terms of desire, and that whatever it is, it is illusory.

The progression to nothingness is confirmed by “Soave” over the final credits. This constitutes its only complete appearance in *Sunday*, and Schlesinger renders it as a void. Nothing happens onscreen, and all we see is blackness around small white letters. Desire has dissipated and ended up as absence, and the complete sounding of desire can only be visualized as a lack. We might say that “Soave”’s musical reason has won the day over its transgressive musical elements. Along these lines, it is interesting that the last scene of the story has Daniel listening to an LP, as he did when “Soave” was introduced,

but here it is to learn Italian. The reasoned discourse of words, in the same language as "Soave"'s text, replaces the unruly potential of music. A textual remnant is all that remains of desire. Moments later the sounding of "Soave" over the credits rings hollow and offers the ultimate irony of the film.

Intermediality

The use of opera in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* is striking in its repeated and exclusive use of one piece of music, and always in its original form. We hear the same performance each time, with singers Pilar Lorengar, Yvonne Minton, and Barry McDaniel.³³ These elements create an intriguing intermedial situation. The music sounds operatic and signifies strongly as opera, even if one is unaware that it comes from an opera. This suggests that "Soave"'s appearances function as overt intermediality, and I believe that the first engagement with the piece sets the stage for the pattern across the film. The ritual of dropping an LP on a turntable inserts quotation marks around the music, and this air of specialness stays with "Soave" when it recurs. The formality of its use and the self-conscious recall help to cordon off the piece from film-score music. The opera music in the film retains its medial integrity as opera and hence supports overt intermediality. Another factor affirming overt status is the sense of something being layered onto film when one hears the "Soave" cues, an impression that was set in motion when Daniel engaged the LP. We continue to sense adding-on in the other cues, and this added something acts as a medial layer in its own right. In other words, the "Soave" cues never feel subsumed under film and therefore preclude covert intermediality.

"Soave"'s fluctuating volume in some cues might affect intermedial status. The changing level appears to reflect characters' shifting consciousness of the piece's melancholy and guide viewers' undulating relationship with its complexites of desire. Thus the presence and impact of the operatic music may vary across the film, and this could imply that intermediality does not figure in those moments

of lesser volume, and certainly not constitute overt intermediality. I see such places as part of “Soave,” however, even when they are faint, for they still convey the music and may be no different from passages of soft dynamic level that normally occur in music. In addition, once the piece is secured in the minds of viewers and characters in the first cue, where the volume is strong, it may not have to be loud to be identified as the operatic music. Despite the soft moments, “Soave”’s appearances continue to function as overt intermediality.

As a final thought, one wonders if “Soave”’s repetitions flatten out the “operaticness” of the music as the film progresses – whether what was at first a distinct medium, opera, becomes naturalized over the film into the movie’s medial realm as film music. This is suggested by the prominence of “Soave” at key emotional moments, its parallel with a major theme of the film (desire), and the sheer number of times we hear it. The fact that the film has almost no composed music also contributes to this possibility. If we hear the later iterations as standard film music, then arguably we do not have an opera/film intermedial encounter in these places. My ears tell me, however, that even though “Soave” starts to approach film-music status as the film progresses, it remains a signifier of opera and represents one of the two media of overt intermediality, each with its dominant signifiers. The last cue, especially, reinforces that status in its resemblance to the initial cue, where “Soave” was established as opera.

“SOAVE” IN *CLOSER*

Like *Sunday*, *Closer* is a talkative film. It resembles Marber’s play rather closely, and the playwright worked with Nichols to develop the script.³⁴ The main difference between the two versions involves the beginning and the end. By adding a scene at the start and changing the final scene, the film features a frame in which Alice walks down the street in slow motion. First in London, later in Manhattan, she turns men’s heads and we sense a stress on looking. The core of the film, at Nichols’s insistence, adopts the play’s structure of long scenes,

each in a single location.³⁵ The few tableaux with intercut locations stand out and usually mark a major shift in the drama.

The plot is not easy to follow. Emphasizing the beginning and ending of relationships and omitting what happens in between, it leaves the viewer unsure of what is happening.³⁶ The story can be summarized as follows. Writer Dan and waiflike Alice hook up at the start as he tends to her when she is hit by a car. Then Dan falls for Anna when she photographs him for the cover of his new book (Alice is dumped). Soon Anna and dermatologist Larry start a relationship (and marry), having met after Dan's cruel impersonation of Anna on a sex-chat website. Dan goes back to Alice but still pines for Anna, and eventually Anna and Dan get together again (and Larry is dumped). Larry and Alice have a titillating encounter at a strip club where she works. Then Larry gets Anna back, through a devilish bargain in which he'll sign divorce papers only if she sleeps with him again; she does, and from then she is back with Larry. Larry humiliates Dan in a forceful thrust-and-parry meeting, Dan goes back to Alice, and Alice leaves Dan and returns to America. No one is happy at the end. Anna looks forlorn as she stares into the darkness while in bed with husband Larry, and Dan discovers Alice is a total sham (she used the name of a nineteenth-century woman). Larry seems satisfied in his fashion, even though he knows Anna is not happy; he says earlier that Anna does not want to be happy. Alice, sashaying down Broadway in Manhattan, remains a narcissistic blank who continues to adapt chameleon-like to her environment.

The extended time frame of four-and-a-half years leads to confusion. Big jumps co-exist with contiguous events and flashbacks, and no titles tell us where we are. The narrative unfolds in what Anthony Lane perceptively dubs "knots of desire, clumped together and hard to tease apart."³⁷ Situations rather than events, these knots render comprehension of the story more difficult. The film's dialogue contributes to narrative unease. Terse lines are typical, and insults, bullying, competitiveness, and self-absorption are frequent. Sexual explicitness pervades the text in the form of self-description, put-downs, and

ultimatums, and the brutal language places demands on the viewer. As opposed to *Sunday*, whose leads earn our respect even if not complete admiration, it is easy to dislike the characters in *Closer*, as it is in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Carnal Knowledge*. The absence of outside referents in *Closer* also keeps the viewer off-balance. Characters exist in a closed box that consists only of themselves. The film involves no other named characters, and the claustrophobia takes its toll. We feel uncomfortable. We get pulled into the box because there is enough that resonates for us, but we wish to resist its confines and brutality. The situation is made harder because the characters lack a past – something that would provide temporal logic and take the edge off their aimlessness. The film visualizes this fluid, ambiguous world by emphasizing surfaces, letting us know that appearances count for everything.³⁸

The “Soave” cue

The “Soave” cue marks the first knot of desire. As in *Sunday* it occurs quite early, ten minutes into the story. Unlike *Sunday*, “Soave” is the final portion of a composite cue that also includes nearby numbers of *Così*, namely the Farewell Quintet and part of the recitative that precedes the Trio. At the end of the cue we see the music rudely turned off by Anna at her CD player, and only then do we know that the music was diegetic throughout. The contrast with *Sunday* is stark in this respect. In that film, the character’s agency in setting the music into motion is stressed, while here we are unsure where the music comes from and whether someone has a hand in starting it. Another way of expressing the difference is that *Sunday* uses the music to start something, an affirmative sign, while *Closer* shows the music as the closing down of something, a negative sign.

The cue opens the second tableau and accompanies Anna photographing Dan in her studio. Not only does the scene serve as exposition to introduce Anna and show the first knot of desire, but it displays a completely different mood and style from anything to come later. It happens largely through “Soave,” in its sole appearance in the film

proper, and other elements that are unique to the scene. Romanticized lighting and natural light create a warm emotional tone. Time unfolds in slow-moving dialogue and gesture, and a sharp acceleration after the music ends makes the contrast quite noticeable. These elements create a strong aesthetic aura, a magical "time-out," that will never return in the no-holds-barred story. The sense of saying goodbye to something special occurs in *Così* itself, but here the something is the aesthetic aura created by "Soave" rather than a peaceful state-of-mind for the characters. In other words, in the absence of outside markers *Closer's* farewell at this point functions self-reflexively as it refers to this very scene, while the opera's farewell pertains to something in the characters' psyches.

Part of the formalistic character of the cue involves its close connection to voyeurism, which is thematic in the film. With the scene's focus on a photographer taking pictures, a very strong point-of-view is established. Nichols foregrounds Anna's camera as a voyeur in its own right – an agent that we might call a diegetic voyeur. Seen head on, it fills the frame and clicks ritualistically as the scene opens, and will recur as a structural element. Even though Anna is literally clicking the shutter (except for one major exception), the diegetic camera takes on a separate persona, akin to a character. In the larger scheme, Anna's close tie with the camera shows her immersion in art and in looking, and contrasts with the frivolous world of Alice, a stripper. Both jobs entail looking, but one involves control over the gaze, the other objectification through a gaze.³⁹ Moreover, the intense focus on visual voyeurism of the scene and the film contrasts with *Sunday's* brand of voyeurism – what we might call aural voyeurism, shaped by the frequent interruption of the telephone as an omniscient agent that intrudes on the narrative. This happens often in *Sunday* when "Soave" appears on the soundtrack. Indeed, "Soave's" leitmotivic recurrences in *Sunday* might themselves approach aural voyeurism as the Trio's sounds periodically engulf the story, especially when the volume is prominent.

Closer's scene with "Soave" begins with a startling jump-cut into a full-frame camera lens whose shutter is loudly clicking. The start

of the Quintet “Di scrivermi” sounds at a moderately low volume. We see that Anna is shooting Dan, some ten feet away in a seated pose against a neutral backdrop. All is stylized. The continuing music stays at the same level, and the reverberative quality might suggest it is emitted in this loft space, but we get no clarification. A skilled professional, Anna starts a conversation to loosen up her subject and cracks a smile when something is wry (smiles will disappear as the film progresses). Soon the talk becomes serious and personal as she asks about the book and its subject, Alice (it is a revealing book about her life as a stripper). “Di scrivermi”’s text about writing resonates for the conversation with a writer about what he has written. Anna accuses him of stealing a life – he says he is borrowing it – and this notion of stolen identity becomes thematic. It also relates to *Così* and its idea of stealing affections as lovers’ identities are borrowed in a game of deceit. Meanwhile, Anna stays in control of the situation. The recitative starts as we see a ritualistic view of her camera taking a shot, and Dan asks whether she thinks the book’s depiction of sex and love is accurate. She says “You wrote it,” he retorts “You read it,” and the biting repartee sets the tone for the film.

“Soave” starts when Anna crosses the space to adjust his collar, and a dance of seduction begins. Water imagery infiltrates their talk (she has returned to her camera). At “Soave”’s first statement of “desir” Dan says “Come here.” Nichols has a long-shot show their distant positions as she considers what to do. They kiss just as the resolution in m. 22 is heard (see Fig. 6.3). The camera shutter, again in close-up, clicks on its own as it takes their picture and makes their passion an object of the diegetic camera’s gaze. This equalizes the two characters and levels the playing field for the messiness to come. The involuntary snap makes them break the embrace. When Anna finds out that Alice lives with Dan, she abruptly strides over to the CD and shuts it off. Dialogue now proceeds in rat-a-tat rhythms, and Anna’s upset comes across in abrupt movements and resentful voice. The termination of “Soave” ends an aesthetic aura that will never be recaptured. As in *Sunday*’s cues “Soave” stops before its end, here amid the last vocal measures of the piece.



Fig. 6.3 Anna (Julia Roberts) and Dan (Jude Law) in *Closer*.

Just as in “Soave,” the scene plays out the tension between desires for ideal love and the realization of its impossibility. The aesthetic bubble created by “Soave” and “Di scrivirmi” becomes an ironic rapturous zone that contravenes the rough-and-tumble reality in the rest of *Closer*. When viewing the film in order, one might find the next scenes ironic in light of the photo-shoot. But as we progress, the specialness of the “Soave” scene emerges, and its ironic place in the film’s narrative takes hold in our consciousness. This probably happens to the characters as well, and the ironic desires of “Soave” may stay with Anna and Dan psychodiegetically through the film. These characters remain sensitive and soulful, and contrast with the free-swinging willfulness of the others. Anna and Dan are more likeable – or rather, less despicable – and their early association with *Così*’s music is partly responsible. As Anna escapes the safety of her camera’s gaze and walks a distance to Dan and desire, she becomes someone to identify with in the scene.⁴⁰ The physical crossing-over materializes “Soave”’s transgression of its framework of reason. Music and space mark her departure from reason and her entrance into the wild zone of feeling. Space soon evaporates and music takes over, and Nichols’s restrained camera can only observe their passion. The progression suggests that the myriad visual gazes cannot see or understand everything. Music, especially “Soave,” trumps vision,

and we encounter an effect that Slavoj Žižek theorizes in his assertion that often “we hear things because we cannot see everything.”⁴¹ In this regard, it is interesting that Marber’s play makes no mention of music here. Nichols creates a special music–image relationship for a pivotal scene that stays in memory and ironizes the whole movie.⁴²

More of *Così*

The “Soave” cue acts as the first of two operatic moments in the film, which together express the significance of opera for Nichols’s adaptation of the play into a film. He turns to *Così* because of its similarities with *Closer*’s plot and because its music, especially “Soave,” can achingly limn the vagaries of desire. Nichols may also use opera because it can take on film-music roles while simultaneously offering a parallel, in Brown’s terminology, to the narrative.⁴³ Actually, *Closer* features very little newly composed music – only a brief nondiegetic flourish appears now and then. Several existing works are used, however. Besides the opening and closing song – like *Così*, with text and quite noticeable – a variety of diegetic pieces serve as background music. The most important is Rossini’s Overture to *La Cenerentola*, heard complete, as prominent accompaniment to the smutty online chat between Larry and Dan (impersonating Anna). It appears directly after the photo-shoot and provides a huge contrast with the ethereal quality of the “Soave” cue. Besides the Rossinian acceleration that parallels sexual buildup and ever shorter messages, the piece itself, based on “Cinderella,” may represent transformed identity in Dan’s impersonation of someone else. It may also signal future transformations, as in the very next scene, when Anna and Larry hook up at the aquarium.

The second operatic moment, almost an hour after the “Soave” cue in real time, also involves Dan and Anna. Just as the “Soave” scene marked the start of their relationship, so this one signals its end: an interesting way to underline *Closer*’s emphasis on beginnings and endings. While we may not know at first – there is no opera



Fig. 6.4 Anna (Julia Roberts) and Dan (Jude Law) at the opera house in *Closer*.

poster, as in *Moonstruck* or *Godfather Part III* – the scene takes place in an opera house. In contrast, the comparable scene in the play occurs at a restaurant. We see Dan in a red-carpeted space of multiple levels, and when we notice music in the background we infer it is an opera lobby (see Fig. 6.4). The chorus “*Bella vita militar*” sounds in the background, from inside the hall. Omitted from the Farewell complex in the “*Soave*” cue, here it signals the bellicose competition in the filmic plot as Dan and Larry approach violence as they compete for Anna. Dan awaits Anna, who is late for the performance. After she arrives they go to the bar. She has just seen Larry, whom she has not seen in months, to have him sign divorce papers. Now “*Di scriv-er-mi*,” heard in the earlier cue, sounds as Dan and Anna discuss how things went. At this place the writing topic of the Quintet relates to Larry’s signing of the document. He did sign the papers, and the final “*Addio*” refers to the ending of the marriage. There is a sense of an inverted recapitulation with this music – earlier Anna asked Dan about Alice, now Dan asks Anna about Larry. The music stops. Anna flashes back to what really happened, which is that Larry insisted that she sleep with him “one last time,” otherwise he would not sign. She reluctantly agreed.

Back in real time, music from the Act I Finale sounds: the start of the recapitulation of the penultimate section, with the words

“Ah, tu sei l’alma mia Dea!” (“Ah, you are the goddess of my soul!”). Realistically this passage occurs much too far along in the score after “Di scrivermi” given the elapsed time in the film, even if we take account of the flashback. But the music serves as a brilliant choice in its strong parallels with the filmic plot. Ferrando and Guglielmo’s homorhythmic lines correspond to the joint desires of Larry and Dan for Anna, and the false identities of the operatic males mesh with the erotic deception in the film. As Dan confronts Anna with the truth, the final section of the Finale begins: “Dammi un bacio o mio tesoro, un sol bacio, o qui mi moro” (“Give me a kiss, my treasure, one single kiss, or I shall die on the spot”) – a reference to Larry’s ultimatum that she have sex with him. Amid brief flashbacks we see Anna and Larry post-sex as he signs the papers, and the continuing music sutures the scenes and connects the film to the imbroglios in the opera. As we return to the lobby the music ends, we hear applause, and crowds spill into the vestibule. Stunned, Dan and Anna seem oblivious to the operatic ritual around them. Yet as artistic figures they belong here more than Larry and Alice, who never appear with operatic music.

The opera-house tableau involves diegetic music, but as in the “Soave” cue the source is implied rather than explicit, at least at the start. Moreover, the sounding of music over the flashback creates a curious situation that is metadiegetic instead of either diegetic or non-diegetic. The scene at Larry’s could be playing out in Dan’s mind as he figures out on his own what happened. The “voice-over” music represents what he is hearing or imagining at the moment at the opera house, and also what it symbolizes in terms of the sex act at Larry’s.

Unlike the situation in *Moonstruck* or *Godfather Part III*, the characters at the opera house do not see the opera. Dan and Anna have only peripheral contact with opera, with its surface; we watch them hear it as they chat in the lobby and bar. Perhaps if they were to see the opera, they would directly confront who they are and the nature of their erotic relationships. By now we know that this is not the way of *Closer*, where characters exist in a world of surfaces, unwilling to face reality. The enactment of *Così* cannot materialize the four figures and their fluid desires.

Intermediality

The sense of surfaces is also apparent in the intermedial landscape of the "Soave" cue. Whether we call its music–film interaction overt or covert intermediality depends to a great extent on what sounds on the surface – whether music has a chance to be prominent, or whether dialogue occupies our attention. When dialogue takes center stage, operatic signifiers cannot assert themselves qua opera and they recede into a hazy category of background music. Such places count as covert intermediality. Elsewhere, when dialogue is minimal or absent, the music becomes noticeable and its signifiers achieve a dominance equal to those of film – clear instances of overt intermediality. The scene represents a fascinating example of how intermedial status can fluctuate within a cue.

The start of the cue, with "Di scrivermi," seems like overt intermediality because of the ritualistic elements that insert quotation marks into the aesthetic space. Even though the volume level is not high we notice the music, and its signifiers are as strong as those of film. As the number progresses, dialogue becomes prominent and the opera music recedes in our consciousness. Hence the situation changes to covert intermediality. Had the ritualistic opening not ushered in the cue, we might have called all of it music within the film's realm and ignored the concept of intermediality. But the quotation-marks effect creates a separate entity, opera, and we can track it as a medium in relation to another medium, film, and interpret the two in terms of intermediality. Earlier we saw how *Sunday* does much the same thing, through the phonograph, in its first cue. Both films make use of artistic ritual, by way of different art forms, to establish the subsequent relationship between opera and film in the movie.

"Soave" in the *Closer* cue brings change. As the Trio progresses the dialogue fades away and the sensual music gains prominence in the verbal void. At the culminating kiss when "Soave" reaches m. 22, opera emerges strongly in its own right. Thus the piece charts a progression from covert to overt intermediality, which remains until Anna shuts off the music. Once overtness is established, once opera

emerges as an independent agent, it has to be stopped. This suggests that operaticness, which can lead to sentimentality and explicit emotion, must be avoided. In contrast, *Sunday* allows “Soave”’s music to be indulged and opera’s contribution to be celebrated. Ringing telephones may interrupt cues, but outside forces cause the disruption, not characters in the scene. *Closer* aggressively forecloses opera while *Sunday* glories in opera, repeating the same number through the film. Ironies abound in both films, but *Closer* is characterized by a fundamental irony that resists the basic impulses of opera while it uses several aspects of opera, including a scene in an opera house and heard operatic music. Like Don Alfonso, *Closer* exudes cynicism, and that includes its view of opera.

TWO MOVIES AND AN OPERA

What do these films tell us about *Così*? To state the obvious, their spotlight on “Soave” emphasizes how the Trio serves as a signature for the opera and its ironized desire for desire that ultimately fails. The films’ use of “Soave” underlines the opera’s own resistance to clarifying desire: what it is supposed to mean, what it is meant to accomplish, and what it communicates to audiences. Just as “Soave” represents an ironic moment of idealism in the face of deception, so “Soave” in the films ironizes the impossibility of desire realized in the story’s fluid relationships. *Closer* deploys the Trio to ironize everything else in the film – as a magical moment that clashes with the brutality to come. This differs from the opera. Emotional deceit will leave the lovers devastated in *Così*, but other magical moments occur after “Soave,” as in the Act II duet “Fra gli amplessi” between Fiordiligi and Ferrando. *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday* is not as hard on its operatic music as *Closer* and seems to revel in the reiteration of “Soave”’s magic. But the many appearances may add a new layer of irony to the Trio: a unique moment threatens to become ordinary because the sincerity of the utterance is compromised through repetition.

This returns us to the irony in “Soave”’s construction. Its frame of reason acts as a persistent sounding board for transgressive style and

desire to play off. Our films have this melancholy frame of reason at their core, and it becomes something characters disdain or ignore in their desire to desire. This is where "Soave," and by extension *Così*, forms a brilliant choice for the films, and where Mozart's opera shines in depicting the complexities of adult relationships.⁴⁴ The three works end in ambiguity, and the coda-like appearance of "Soave" in the films leaves us uncomfortable towards what we experienced. Mozart's opera does not reprise the Trio at the end, of course, but the piece's irony stays with us nevertheless.

In the previous chapter we saw how *Moonstruck* is permeated with desire, and how opera circulates through narrative and genre to convey many forms of desire. In contrast, neither *Sunday* nor *Closer* is saturated with opera or operatic qualities, and neither approaches the genre of opera-film. *Closer* even tries to shun opera and protect itself from opera's seductive emotional elements. Daniel in *Sunday*, like Ronny in *Moonstruck*, is an opera fan, but his affection expresses itself as quiet admiration, not passionate obsession. Opera fills a circumscribed role in his genteel world. To be sure, *Sunday* and *Closer* involve desire in plot, dialogue, and especially in "Soave." But in contrast to *Moonstruck*'s contrivance and exaggeration, the films sport a flattened tone that confines opera's tie with desire to the places where "Soave" is heard (in *Closer* also to parts of the opera-house confrontation). Desire is much more localized, despite plot similarities with *Così*.

The ravishing sounds of "Soave sia il vento" turn *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday* and *Closer* into bittersweet journeys into the heart and soul of adult desire. As a result, these movies stay in memory a long time. We owe a great deal to John Schlesinger and Mike Nichols for breathing life into these films through this most beautiful of operatic pieces.

Epilogue

We come full circle to an idea implied at the beginning. [Chapter 1](#) opened with operatic qualities in film, and we saw what that meant in the *Godfather* trilogy. Operaticness, a related idea, has been mentioned elsewhere, most recently in [Chapter 6](#). Here I would like to close with a few remarks on this important concept. I hope this will help to fill in the picture of opera's involvement with film, and leave the reader with something to think about when opera and film are encountered again.

Operaticness implies that opera is foregrounded, that it is present in an obvious way that makes it recognizable. But what does that mean? It can suggest that essential qualities of opera are emphasized, especially artifice, exaggeration, and emotion. It can imply that opera is celebrated. By that I don't mean that opera is necessarily praised (although it can be), but that it is recognized as something significant or influential. Even opera-films can be assessed for operaticness. Among famous works, for example, Bergman's *Magic Flute* and Syberberg's *Parsifal* exhibit operaticness, while Rosi's *Bizet's Carmen* and Losey's *Don Giovanni* do not. Rosi's film does its best to minimize opera's essential qualities and cultural significance in a glorification of the common people. Losey also minimizes opera for the purposes of social criticism, but in the process opera itself is a target.

Operaticness ranges widely in our films. In *Godfather Part I* and *Godfather Part II*, operaticness arguably acts as the main aesthetic feature of the films. The movies luxuriate in this quality, and as I propose it is largely responsible for their success. *Godfather Part III*, however, unfolds with a distinctly non-operatic tone that collapses operaticness and leads to a disappointing film. At the end an opera performance restores operaticness and rescues the set – a sort of fanciful *deus ex*

machina that fulfills our desires to return to the aesthetic space we inhabited earlier.

While operaticness plays out in image, tone, and pacing in these films, *Moonstruck* offers another sort of operaticness through its pervasive exaggeration and artifice. Like *Godfather Part I* and *Godfather Part II* operaticness inheres in the very fabric of the work. Here we have a comedy, in the manner of *opera buffa*, and the aura of grand opera that suffuses Coppola's set is nowhere to be found. Perhaps it is no accident that works with such pervasive operaticness involve Italian-American culture, which has long been tied to operaticness. Idealization figures prominently in these works, and in *Moonstruck* I think that operaticness itself is idealized. This may be another way of expressing Pauline Kael's view of the film as a magical but "honest contrivance" that makes us giddy with desires. Moreover, operaticness figures so explicitly that the movie seems to aspire to the condition of opera-film. I would not say this about the *Godfather* trilogy because other features are also significant, especially violence. Even the set's idealization of Old World Culture, an operatic quality, does not suffice to instill an urge towards opera-film. But *Moonstruck*'s location at the rarefied intersection of honesty and contrivance cements its desire to be an opera-film.

At the other end of the spectrum we encounter *Closer*'s rejection of operaticness. Opera is used for irony, and the film's incorporation of one of the most beautiful operatic pieces for ironic purposes renders opera's status even more ironic. What a waste, one might say. But isn't this the sort of discrepancy that was attributed to Mozart's opera? In point of fact, *Così fan tutte* does not ignore or reject operaticness, but *Closer* does. This is not necessarily bad, for a film may have valid reasons to reject operaticness when it uses opera, and Nichols had that in mind for *Closer*. As the characters wander inside a closed environment they do not care about much of anything, and operaticness does not belong there. More generally, the use of opera to reject operaticness can tell us a great deal about opera's role in society and the ways it can affect lives.

La Cérémonie rejects opera's cultural position, but the status of operaticness is more complex. With a flat subjective viewpoint that

avoids emotional highs, Chabrol's filmic style stands even farther from operaticness than Nichols's. Yet Chabrol appears to endorse operaticness more than Nichols, and the French film notably spends considerable time on *Don Giovanni*. Although it criticizes the TV relay and minimizes the visual component, it gives the heard music more than a fair hearing. I am not suggesting that film time is proportional to operaticness. What I am saying is that Chabrol is strongly invested in opera even as he criticizes it – he respects Mozart's work a great deal – and hence operaticness, while stripped down, accords with the filmic viewpoint of *La Cérémonie*.

Sunday, Bloody Sunday, the partner of *Closer* in [Chapter 6](#), offers another interpretation of operaticness. With its repetitive cues of one piece of music, the film raises the question of whether operaticness is sustained when the same music intones in several places. The pattern risks neutralizing operaticness because something heard multiple times tends to lose its specialness as we become accustomed to it. In this case, however, opera's signifiers retain their strength through repeated hearings and "Soave" generates operaticness each time it appears. While the result might be different in a number that is less striking, in this case repetition seems to strengthen the sense of operaticness as the distinctiveness of "Soave" seeps into our aesthetic consciousness.

The films that explicitly involve opera – where it is the stated "topic" – exhibit interesting behavior. In Ponnelle's opera-films and the *Aria* segments, filmic techniques dilute operaticness to some extent. Ponnelle departs from straightforward presentation of opera through the use of interior singing, doubling, and sharp point-of-view and angling devices. Although some consider these devices mannered, they buttress film's presence and diminish operaticness in the process. As a result a new kind of artifice may emerge, but it is not operatic in character. It exploits film's capabilities to create new narrative approaches to opera, and operaticness as defined here is not augmented, but reduced.

While opera represents the starting point of *Aria*, hip techniques that are borrowed from MTV are intended to modify the genre. The

playfulness of *Aria*'s images, the disruption of continuity, the splintering of opera into small bits, and the absence of seen performers diminish a sense of operaticness. Indeed, *Aria* may be located so far from operaticness that the term holds little meaning for the film. On the other hand, as is the case with film-music categories, the recognition of differences can be extremely useful. Operaticness does not play a central role in the understanding of *Aria* and is not discussed in [Chapter 2](#). But in the larger framework of opera/film behavior, the application of the concept of operaticness to the work sharpens our sense of what is special about the film as it departs from it.

In the final analysis, operaticness does not function as a measure of a film's success. Instead, it provides a useful way of thinking about opera's place in film and how the two media serve each other. With respect to the present study, operaticness expands the vocabulary for interpreting how opera can contribute something fundamental to a film, and how film can do the same for an opera. Perhaps an exploration that is devoted to the concept is waiting in the wings. If current patterns offer a clue to future directions, the opera/film encounter is only going to increase. The more ways we can approach it the better will be our sense of opera's place in contemporary society, a culture in which media and technology are playing an ever greater role.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). Tambling's edited volume of 1994 also deserves mention, although it had a much more limited distribution: *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, ed. Tambling (London: John Libbey, 1994).
- 2 Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- 3 *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- 4 Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 5 For example, H. Marshall Leicester, "Discourse and the Film Text: Four Readings of *Carmen*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6/3 (November, 1994): 245–82; and Marcia J. Citron, "The Performance of Vision in Peter Sellars's Television Production of *Così fan tutte*," in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 213–30. The first stage also includes essential bibliographical tools, notably Ken Wlaschin's invaluable *Encyclopedia of Opera on Screen: A Guide to More than 100 Years of Opera Films, Videos, and DVDs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). For the state of the field and future directions, see Marcia J. Citron, "Opera and the Media," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 6 *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
- 7 Jerrold Levinson, "Philosophical Aesthetics: An Overview," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–24.
- 8 "Mainstream film" is used throughout the book to designate a movie that is not a full-length film of an opera but what we would consider a typical film. I considered the term "regular film," but this seemed

fraught with potential confusion. While “mainstream” implies something seen by many people, what I am calling mainstream film can run the gamut from more popular to less popular with audiences and hence be more mainstream or less mainstream. The main point is that a mainstream film is not an opera-film.

- 9 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 22–25.
- 10 See, for example, Robynn Stilwell, “The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184–204.
- 11 Alexis L. Witt, “Amadeus, Opera, and the Music of the Mind,” unpublished paper for my course “Opera on Film,” Rice University, Spring, 2006.
- 12 For the general issue of pre-existent music in film, see *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), especially the contributions by Gorbman, Joe, and Mike Cormack.
- 13 The only example I know of in opera and film is my essay on *Moonstruck*, which appears in revised form as [Chapter 5](#) in the present study. The original article is “‘An Honest Contrivance’: Opera and Desire in *Moonstruck*,” *Music and Letters* 89/1 (February, 2008): 56–83.
- 14 Bernhard Kuhn, *Die Oper im italienischen Film* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2005). My thanks to Professor Kuhn for kindly sending me a copy.
- 15 Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). I wish to express my gratitude to Lauren Holmes, who brought the book to my attention in 2005 when she was working at Rice University on her senior thesis on Virginia Woolf’s relationship to music.
- 16 There are other major studies on intermediality, such as Irina O. Rajewsky’s *Intermedialität* (Tübingen: Francke, 2002). With many more categories and subcategories than Wolf, Rajewsky’s approach is overly esoteric for the present study. Wolf’s later formulations, which Kuhn emphasizes, are similarly too complex and less useful than the earlier study. See Werner Wolf, “Intermedialität: Ein weites Feld und eine Herausforderung für die Literaturwissenschaft,” in *Literaturwissenschaft: Intermedial-Interdisziplinär*, ed. Herbert Foltinek and Christoph Leitgeb (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie

- der Wissenschaften, 2002), 163–192; and Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited: Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality,” in *Word and Music Studies: Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage*, ed. Suzanne M. Lodato, Suzanne Aspden, and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 13–34.
- 17 A perceptive study of *Fitzcarraldo* that pays attention to the opera-house scene is Richard Leppert, “Opera, Aesthetic Violence, and the Imposition of Modernity: *Fitzcarraldo*,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 99–119.
 - 18 See notes 1, 3, and 6, above, for full bibliographical details.
 - 19 For the *acousmètre*, see Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially 71–89.
 - 20 Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 226.
 - 21 This is a thematic concept in Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*.
 - 22 See Michel Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
 - 23 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).
 - 24 For the ramifications of the Met’s cinecasts, see W. Anthony Sheppard, “Review of the Metropolitan Opera’s New HD Movie Theater Broadcasts,” *American Music* 25/3 (2007): 383–87.

I OPERATIC STYLE IN COPPOLA’S GODFATHER TRILOGY

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “Operatic Style and Structure in Coppola’s *Godfather* Trilogy,” *The Musical Quarterly* 87/3 (Fall, 2004): 423–67. My thanks to Oxford University Press for permission to use it in revised form.

- 1 In order to distinguish the first film from the set in general, I will refer to it in the body as *Godfather 1*.
- 2 See, for instance, Manohla Dargis’s article on the history of the gangster drama, “Dark Side of the Dream,” *Sight and Sound* 6/8 (August, 1996): 16–18 (18).

- 3 Paul Giles, "Criminal Politics: Edwin O'Connor, George V. Higgins, William Kennedy, Mario Puzo, Francis Ford Coppola," in *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 464–503 (494).
- 4 Pauline Kael, "The Godfather, Part II: Fathers and Sons," in Kael, *For Keeps: 30 Years at the Movies* (New York: Dutton, 1994), 594–600 (599–600); originally in *The New Yorker* (December 23, 1974).
- 5 Pauline Kael, "The Godfather: Alchemy," in Kael, *For Keeps*, 434–39 (435); originally in *The New Yorker* (March 18, 1972).
- 6 Karen Jaehne, "The Godfather, Part III," *Cinéaste* 18/2 (1991): 41–43 (43). See also Helen H. Roulston, "Opera in Gangster Movies: From Capone to Coppola," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32/1 (Summer, 1998): 99–102.
- 7 Kent Jones, "Mythmaker Francis Ford Coppola: The Great Conductor of American Cinema," *Film Comment* 38/2 (March–April, 2002): 30–36 (30).
- 8 Bonus Disk from DVD set. This is the scene in *Godfather I* in which Connie and Carlo have a violent argument in their apartment. The reason given for the removal is that it is redundant, as it conveys quarreling that's already shown in the film.
- 9 Jonathan Rosenbaum, Review of *The Godfather Part II*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *Sight and Sound* 44/3 (Summer, 1975): 187–88 (187).
- 10 David Breskin, "Francis Coppola," in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), 2–50 (42–43).
- 11 Kael, *For Keeps*, 600. For discussion of the epic in *Godfather I* and *Godfather III* respectively, see Frédéric Vitoux, "Une Gigantesque Métaphore," *Positif* 146 (January, 1973): 77–79; and John Krapp, "Ideology, Rhetoric, and Blood-Ties: From *The Oresteia* to *The Godfather*," *Mosaic* 32/1 (March, 1999): 1–16.
- 12 Coppola knew that the alternating structure entailed risk, and he was warned not to attempt it. Most reviewers consider it a great success, however – especially Kael, "The Godfather, Part II." Some reviews are critical, as in the review of the DVD set, "Le Parrain I, II, III de Francis Ford Coppola," *Cahiers du cinéma*, Special Issue (December, 2001): 54; and Molly Haskell, "The Godfather Part II: The Corleone Saga Sags," *The Village Voice* (December 23, 1974), 88–89.
- 13 Among the many who agree is Robert Phillip Kolker, in his perceptive study "Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli: Francis Ford Coppola," in *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Coppola, Scorsese, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 139–205 (178).

- 14 For *Godfather I* see Vitoux, “Métaphore”; and “Le Parrain,” *La Revue du cinéma* 276–77 (October, 1973): 279–80. For *Godfather II* see Rosenbaum, “The Godfather Part II”; and “Le Parrain II,” *La Revue du cinéma* 309–10 (October, 1976): 275–76. Joël Magny discusses *Godfather III* as a portrait of America, in “Conseil de famille: *Le Parrain III*,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 442 (April, 1991): 22–25. For these themes in the entire set, see the review of the DVD collection, “*Le Parrain I, II, III*.” William Simon explores themes on three structural levels, in “An Analysis of the Structure of *The Godfather, Part One*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 16/1 (Spring, 1983): 75–90. For a study of the relationship between capitalism and family in the first two films, see Thomas J. Ferraro, “Blood in the Marketplace: The Business of Family in the *Godfather* Narratives,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 176–208. John Hess offers a Marxist analysis of social themes, in “*Godfather II*: A Deal Coppola Couldn’t Refuse,” in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 81–90.
- 15 Coppola’s voice-over commentary to *Godfather III* in the DVD set. Coppola speaks often of his personal identification with the aging Michael Corleone; in this commentary, for instance, he says that he used to be an innocent filmmaker, just as Michael was innocent at the start of the saga.
- 16 The *Odyssey* comment is from Coppola’s voice-over commentary to *Godfather II* in the DVD set, and the staging of murders on steps from his commentary to *Godfather III*.
- 17 Peter Conrad, for instance, discusses the problematic term, in “Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*: Realism or Ritual?,” liner notes to Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana* CD (1990), DGG 429568-2, 7–10. See also Roland Mancini, “Le Vérisme, existe-t-il?,” *L’Avant-Scène Opéra* 50 [issue on *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*] (1983): 4–13; and Matteo Sansone, “Verga and Mascagni: The Critics’ Response to *Cavalleria rusticana*,” *Music and Letters* 71/2 (May, 1990): 198–214.
- 18 Naomi Greene compares themes in Coppola’s set and in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, in “Family Ceremonies; or, Opera in *The Godfather* Trilogy,” in *Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather Trilogy*, ed. Nick Browne, Cambridge Film Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146–51.
- 19 “Entretien avec Francis Ford Coppola,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 442 (April, 1991): 26–30 (27).

- 20 Sarah Spencer, unpublished response paper on *The Godfather*, Rice University, April, 2003.
- 21 See n. 5. Judith Vogelsang compares the wedding scene of *Godfather I* with a symphony: “The main characters are introduced to the viewer much like musical statements are introduced in a symphonic overture. We see or hear characters we will be learning more about as the symphony unfolds and the themes mix together to create major movements or sequences.” Judith Vogelsang, “Motifs of Image and Sound in *The Godfather*,” *The Journal of Popular Film* 2/2 (Spring, 1973): 115–35 (118).
- 22 Quoted in Andrew Porter, “Verdi,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XIX (London: Macmillan, 1980), 641.
- 23 Royal S. Brown discusses the music in this sequence, which includes Bach’s *Passacaglia* in C minor, in *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 80–82.
- 24 See especially Leonard Quart and Albert Auster’s review of *Godfather II* in *Cinéaste* 5/4 (1975): 38–39; and Kael’s review of *Godfather II* in *For Keeps*.
- 25 Simon, “An Analysis of the Structure of *The Godfather, Part One*,” 77.
- 26 Norman Silverstein, “*The Godfather* – a Year Later: An Examination of the Movie’s Internal Structure,” *Italiana Americana* 1/2 (1974): 105–17.
- 27 An idea suggested by Davin Rubicz in his unpublished response paper on *The Godfather*, Rice University, April, 2003.
- 28 Kael, *For Keeps*, 435.
- 29 Roger Corman, “Critics’ Top Ten: *The Godfather*,” *Sight and Sound* 12/9 (September, 2002): 35.
- 30 “Entretien avec Francis Ford Coppola,” 29; and John Kane, review of *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *Take One* (March–April, 1972): 27.
- 31 Kael, “*The Godfather: Alchemy*,” 438.
- 32 For the connection with Welles and comparisons with *Citizen Kane*, see Leo Braudy, “The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, De Palma, Scorsese,” *Film Quarterly* 39 (1986): 17–28 (18); Jones, “Mythmaker Francis Ford Coppola,” 36; Quart and Auster, “*The Godfather Part II*”; and Silverstein, “*The Godfather* – a Year Later.”
- 33 Among the testimonials to Willis’s talents are Stephen Pizzello’s review of the DVD set, “*The Godfather DVD Collection*,” *American Cinematographer* 83/1 (January, 2002): 14–16, where he calls Willis’s style “some of the classiest cinematography ever committed to film”; and

- David Heurig, “Gordon Willis to Receive ASC Lifetime Achievement Award,” *American Cinematographer* 76/2 (February, 1995): 44–47.
- 34 See André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1945), in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 7th edn., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 159–63.
- 35 For a summary of Bazin’s theories, see Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, “Film Language,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th edn., ed. Braudy and Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–7 (2–4). On the connection between Bazin’s theories and Coppola’s set, see Kolker, “Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli,” 160–61; and Vitoux, “Métaphore,” 78.
- 36 Kolker, “Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli,” 161, explores the ambiguities in this sequence for the viewer.
- 37 Coppola comments on his use of long takes, in Breskin, *Inner Views*, 41. Film theorist Brian Henderson points out ambiguity in Bazin’s theories with reference to the long take, noting that almost no filmmaker constructs a film without edits, and that “expressive editing,” which Bazin appears to denigrate wholesale, does appear in films where the long take is emphasized; see Brian Henderson, “The Long Take,” in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 314–24. With respect to ancient Rome, it is interesting that Coppola himself wrote the lines in *Patton* in which the general muses on history and recalls what Roman generals did at particular battles (Coppola won the Oscar for his screenplay). This shows the director’s keen historical sensibility, and this awareness of the past is a significant element in the *Godfather* saga (more below).
- 38 Kael, *For Keeps*, 438; and David Denby, “Going to the Movies: The Two *Godfathers*,” *Partisan Review* 43/1 (1976): 113–18 (118).
- 39 For tensions between the two media, see Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1–19.
- 40 Todd Gitlin, “On the Popularity of *The Godfather*,” *Performance* 4 (September–October 1972): 37–42 (37).
- 41 Braudy, “The Sacraments of Genre,” 19. Other sources include two essays by Thomas J. Ferraro, “‘My Way’ in ‘Our America’: Art, Ethnicity, Profession,” *American Literary History* 12/3 (2000): 499–522; and “Blood in the Marketplace.” See also Giles, “Criminal Politics.”
- 42 Voice-over commentary for *Godfather II* in the DVD set.

- 43 Judith Vogelsang, "Motifs of Image and Sound."
- 44 Deborah Anders Silverman paraphrases writer Don Fiore's ideas on the outdoor "festas" in the New World: "[they are] southern Italian imports, bringing street processions, Italian symphonic bands, carnivals, and an aura of celebration to the Irish-dominated American Catholic Church, which felt these festas bordered on paganisms." See Deborah Anders Silverman, "Coppola, *Cavalleria*, and Connick: Musical Contributions to Epic in *The Godfather, Part III*," *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack (The Journal of the Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association)* 1 (1992): 26–40 (33), citing Don Fiore, "Religion and the Festa," in *Italian-American Ways*, ed. Fred L. Gardaphé (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 85.
- 45 It's interesting to mention other uses of opera in the saga. In *Godfather 1*, the amateur brass group goes into Verdi's "Libiamo" drinking song from *La traviata* at the wedding celebration of Michael and Apollonia. Much earlier in the film we heard a (poor) vocal rendition of Cherubino's aria "Non so più" at Connie and Carlo's wedding reception. Both of these occur in the outdoors and extend the idea of outdoor ritual as a basic part of the ethnic culture.
- 46 Coppola notes that Willis sometimes went too far towards darkness, and they had many discussions about this and other matters of shooting.
- 47 Dargis, "Dark Side of the Dream," 17.
- 48 On *Godfather* as a gangster genre, especially *Godfather 1*, see Kolker, "Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli," 166–67; William S. Pechter, "Keeping up with the Corleones," *Commentary* 54 (July, 1972): 88–91; and Dargis, "Dark Side of the Dream."
- 49 Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, rev. edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 4–10, in which analogies are made with poetry and drama. Kael uses the same phrase to describe *Godfather 1*, stating, "The abundance is from the book; the quality of feeling is Coppola." See Kael, "*The Godfather*: Alchemy," 434.
- 50 Gitlin's statement about long and boring conversations in *Godfather 1*, cited above (n. 40), needs qualification here. He is right that there are long and boring stretches of conversation, but these conversations concern the details of the crime business, not what I am calling quotidian or ordinary concerns. And because the conversations are nested in such an exaggerated style, they take on the exaggerated attributes of that style. Hence the distinction with the quotidian.

- 51 For the thematic effects of the Sicilian elements in Coppola and in Puzo, see Jim Marino, "'I Wanted to Be a Good American': *The Godfather* Paradox," *Voices in Italian Americana* 9/1 (Spring, 1998): 17–28, and especially 27 for Old-World phrases.
- 52 James Monaco, from *American Film Now*, as quoted in Franco Minganti, "The Hero with a Thousand and Three Faces: Michele, Mike, Michael Corleone," *Rivista di studi Anglo-Americani* 3/4–5 (1984–85): 257–68 (257).
- 53 Coppola contends that "For me, *The Godfather* wasn't mainly a gangster film: it was conceived like a film on the Borgias." "Entretien avec Francis Ford Coppola," 26. The autobiographical connections between Coppola, his family, and the characters permeate Coppola's interviews, and his voice-over commentary for the DVD set. Coppola also thinks of cast and crew as an extended ethnic family and encourages bonding before the shooting through communal meals and improvisations at the given location. Furthermore, Coppola placed several family members in the trilogy. They include father Carmine as the piano player in *Godfather I* at the newspaper montage, Carmine as the co-composer of *Godfather II* and the arranger for *Godfather III*, uncle Anton as the opera conductor for *Cavalleria rusticana* in *Godfather III*, grandfather Francesco's musical mini-drama *Senza mamma* in a Vito segment from 1917 in *Godfather II*, mother Italia in the party scene in *Godfather III*, his young son as the young Santino in *Godfather II*, sister Talia Shire as Connie in all three, and daughter Sofia in the major role of Michael's daughter Mary in *Godfather III*. Sofia drew criticism for her acting abilities, and many faulted the director for the sentimental casting, which becomes more meaningful given Coppola's remark that he identified personally with the aging Michael Corleone.
- 54 The idealized roaming resembles the start of Act III of Francesco Rosi's film *Bizet's Carmen*, which takes place in a similar hilly terrain, in Andalusia. For a discussion of the movie see Citron, *Opera on Screen*, Chapter 5.
- 55 Thomas Ferraro's ideas are quoted and extended in Jim Marino's study, "I Wanted to Be a Good American," 22–24.
- 56 For idealization of the immigrant saga in *Godfather II*, see Kolker, "Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli," 178–85; Frédéric Vitoux, "Les Commentaires de la guerre des gangs ou l'Amérique ordinaire," review of *The Godfather, Part II*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *Positif* 173

(September, 1975): 60–62 (61), where he compares the nostalgic longings to those in Elia Kazan's immigrant saga, *America, America*; and Denby's criticism of the sentimentality, in "Going to the Movies: The Two *Godfathers*," 116–17. For the Sicilian nostalgia in *Godfather I*, see Gitlin, "On the Popularity of *The Godfather*," 37–42 (37–40); Marino, "I Wanted to Be a Good American"; Franco Minganti, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces"; and Vincent Canby, "Bravo, Brando's *Godfather*," *The New York Times* (March 12, 1972), Section 10: 25.

57 Kael, *For Keeps*, 438.

58 Of course there are exceptions, such as American opera; opera set in the twentieth century or beyond; or opera with a modernistic musical style, for example Berg's *Wozzeck*, which one would not describe as inducing affective nostalgia for European culture. In addition, staging can affect the nostalgia factor in earlier opera, as in an updated production or one that criticizes traditional themes of the work.

59 See Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For a discussion of filmic regression in film-opera, in relation to Franco Zeffirelli's *Otello* (1987), see Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 96–106.

60 In an Italian radio broadcast Rota said that Coppola told him to orient the music towards southern Italian melody ("melodie meridionali"), "even to seem Arabic: because it would recall with greater nostalgia the very distant origin of those people who are then united in America." This is part of the fifth installment of the program *Voi ed io* (no date given), as quoted in Pier Marco De Santi, *La musica di Nino Rota* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1983), 96.

61 "Entretien avec Francis Ford Coppola," 26.

62 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 175.

63 Voice-over commentary in the DVD set.

64 *Fortunella* was directed by Eduardo De Filippo and produced by Dino De Laurentiis. Francesco Lombardi describes how Rota's score was pulled from the Academy Awards' competition after an anonymous telegram was sent to the Academy stating that the Love Theme was pre-existent music. This disqualified *Godfather* from consideration for

best original score. Lombardi adds that De Laurentiis hoped to profit monetarily from Rota's tune, but that did not happen because he and Rota had never signed an official contract. See Francesco Lombardi, *Fra cinema e musica del novecento: Il caso Nino Rota – dai documenti* (Venice: Leo S. Olschki, 2000), 152. I am grateful to the composer's daughter, Nina Rota, for her help in identifying the title of the earlier film and supplying additional information on her father.

- 65 One should keep in mind that Rota's compositional oeuvre includes several operas and large-scale dramatic works. An opera that closely precedes the *Godfather* project is Rota's *La visita meravigliosa*, composed between 1965 and 1969 for his own libretto based on H. G. Wells. That the opera premiered in Palermo at the Teatro Massimo is interesting in light of Coppola's staging of *Cavalleria rusticana* there at the end of *Godfather III* (see below). For a detailed catalogue of Rota's music in and out of film, see De Santi, *La musica di Nino Rota*, 179–216.
- 66 According to Lombardi, Rota's themes were often accused of sounding derivative, and some thought that the Love Theme was plagiarized – something obviously not possible because he himself had written it earlier (Lombardi, *Fra cinema e musica*, 152). See also previous note.
- 67 The respective official names are “The Godfather Waltz,” “Michael's Theme,” “Speak Softly, Love (Love Theme),” and “*Godfather II*.” They appear, for example, in *The Godfather Trilogy: Musical Highlights from I, II, and III* (Piano Vocal / Piano Solos; HL00313034) (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., n.d.).
- 68 The author wished to include notated examples of the four musical ideas, but unfortunately their appearance is precluded because of the *Godfather* music's complex copyright situation with respect to international rights and the high permission fees sought for the world-wide distribution territory of this book.
- 69 Silverman, “Coppola, *Cavalleria*, and Connick,” 30. This may be the only published study devoted solely to the music of the *Godfather* films.
- 70 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 221–22.
- 71 See [Chapter 4](#) for the use of Mozart's opera in Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*.
- 72 Voice-over commentary for *Godfather II* in the DVD set.
- 73 Ideas applied to Rosi's film *Bizet's Carmen* by H. Marshall Leicester, “Discourse and the Film Text: Four Readings of *Carmen*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6 / 3 (November, 1994): 245–82.
- 74 Kael, *For Keeps*, 435.

- 75 Jaehne, “*The Godfather Part III*,” 41.
- 76 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 81.
- 77 Voice-over commentary to *Godfather III* in the DVD set.
- 78 A perceptive study of the role of women in the Verga sources (story and play) and the libretto by Targioni-Tozzetti and Menasci – as well as Zeffirelli’s film of the opera, discussed briefly below – is Daniela Bini, “*Cavalleria rusticana* from Verga and Mascagni to Zeffirelli,” *Forum Italicum* 33/1 (1999): 95–106.
- 79 An engraving of the first La Scala production, in January, 1891, shows these similarities, as reproduced in Michele Girardi, “*Cavalleria rusticana*,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. 1, 782.
- 80 Coppola views *Cavalleria rusticana* “as the basis of so much of what we did in the first two *Godfathers*, musically as well as in the drama; thus it’s an appropriate way to end number 3,” presented in the voice-over commentary to *Godfather III* in the DVD set. It’s interesting that some critics see the opera as one of the reasons why the film failed. Deborah Silverman, for instance, writes, “Coppola mistakenly assumed his audience would realize the opera musically reinforces the film’s themes, just as he assumed that viewers would comprehend the intricate plot, which dwells on a moody, introspective Michael Corleone in his King Lear phase of life.” In Silverman, “Coppola, *Cavalleria*, and Connick,” 37.
- 81 Voice-over commentary to *Godfather III* in the DVD set. For the opera sequence, see the perceptive charts of the literal, cultural, and dramatic organization of the scene, in Lars Franke, “*The Godfather Part III*: Film, Opera, and the Generation of Meaning,” in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 31–45.
- 82 Edmond Grant, “*Godfather III*,” *Films in Review* 4/2 (March–April 1991): 102–07 (106). Someone else critical of both is Roger Ebert, Review of *The Godfather III*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *Chicago Sun-Times* (December 25, 1990).
- 83 These are my own numbers, added for convenience to indicate relative ordering. Mascagni’s score does not assign numbers to pieces.
- 84 For an insightful analysis of the scene, see Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 80–81. An interesting detail of the sequence, which I haven’t come across in the literature, is a possible reference to Hitchcock’s 1955 remake of *The Man who Knew Too Much*. It stages an assassination attempt in the Royal Albert Hall as a choral performance is taking place,

and we know that the big crash of the cymbals is the designated time for the shooting; Hitchcock even sets this up in the opening credits. In the *Godfather III* opera sequence there is a quick view of a cymbals player in the pit, and it could be a deliberate reference to the Hitchcock.

- 85 Michal Grover-Friedlander, “‘The Phantom of the Opera’: The Lost Voice of Opera in Silent Film,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11/2 (1999): 179–92 (181).
- 86 Michel Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 103.
- 87 In the voice-over commentary to *Godfather III* in the DVD collection, Coppola notes that sound editor Walter Murch changed what was originally a vocalized scream to a silent scream, believing it would be more effective as a mute image.
- 88 Space does not permit an exploration of the meaning of Michael’s wearing of dark glasses in *Godfather III*, and when and why he takes them off and puts them on. Peter Sellars makes fascinating use of the conceit in his video version of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, which is discussed in my chapter “The Performance of Vision in Peter Sellars’s Television Film *Così fan tutte*,” in *Music, Sensation, Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 213–30.
- 89 See especially Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry*; Grover-Friedlander, “The Phantom of the Opera”; Stanley Cavell, “Opera and the Lease of Voice,” in *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 129–70; and contributions by Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
- 90 Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry*, 103–04.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 37–40. Later in the study (78–79), Poizat notes how vocal lines in post-Wagnerian opera in Germany and Austria drew closer to the cry, examples being in Richard Strauss and Alban Berg.
- 92 “*Le Parrain I, II, III.*”
- 93 Girardi, “*Cavalleria rusticana*,” 782. Mascagni wrote the words “Imitando la Preghiera” on the manuscript of the Intermezzo, as shown in the Dover reprint of the orchestral score.
- 94 A major exception is the lengthy Interlude in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* at the start of Act II, Part 2.
- 95 Psychodiegetic was coined by Alexis Witt in an unpublished paper, “*Amadeus*, Opera, and the Music of the Mind,” Rice University, Spring,

2006; for metadiegetic see Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 22–23. Robynn Stilwell discusses the ambiguities between diegetic and nondiegetic status, including the subjective space that involves characters' memory, and rightfully cautions against too strict an application of terminology; see "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184–202.

- 96 It is interesting that Mascagni includes instrumental numbers in the middle of many operas, a point driven home by the appearance of such pieces in Scorsese's film *Raging Bull* (1980), which uses the Intermezzi from *Cavalleria* and *Guglielmo Ratcliff* (1895), and the Barcarolle from *Silvano* (1895). While the two later works appear in the middle of the film, *Cavalleria*'s Intermezzo occurs over the opening and final credits. Known for favoring existent music over composed music, Scorsese essentially uses only the waltz section of the piece. In the title sequence, the music evokes Jake LaMotta's dreams of glory as we see him in idealized lighting and slow motion in the boxing ring. Its location at the beginning precludes the sentiment and catharsis it produces in *Godfather III*. When the music reappears at the end it can only be considered ironic, for Jake has become a self-destructive failure. One wonders if Coppola used the Intermezzo in reference to Scorsese's film. Space precludes exploration here, but it is a suggestive thought. With respect to irony, Deborah Anders Silverman writes that "As the family mourns Mary's death, the opera's peaceful Intermezzo is heard, an ironic use of that music for such a scene of carnage ..." (36). I see this as a wrong-headed interpretation. Silverman misses the point that the music serves nostalgic and cathartic purposes, and that it reinforces, not contradicts, the similarity of affect in the film and the music.
- 97 Cavell, "Opera and the Lease of Voice," 136.

2 OPERA AS FRAGMENT: "LIEBESTOD" AND "NESSUN DORMA" IN *ARIA*

- 1 Roger Ebert, Review of *Aria*, produced by Don Boyd, *Chicago Sun-Times* (July 1, 1988).
- 2 The best study of the entire film is Jeongwon Joe, "Don Boyd's *Aria*: A Narrative Polyphony between Music and Image," *Journal of Musicological*

- Research* 18/4 (1999): 347–69. Nicholas Cook offers a detailed exploration of Jean-Luc Godard's segment on Lully's *Armide*, in *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 215–60. An article on the genesis and working problems of the venture is Guy Phelps, "Omnibus, or 'What's Opera, Doc?'," *Sight and Sound* 56/3 (Summer, 1987): 188–89, 192. Perceptive reviews include Ebert's; Richard Corliss, "Opera for the Inoperative," review of *Aria*, produced by Don Boyd, *Time* (May 2, 1988); and the negative notice by Michel Chion, "Opéra, sirènes et sorcières," *Cahiers du cinéma* 398 (July–August, 1987): 50–51. A special source is the documentary feature "Composing *Aria*" on the recent PAL DVD version of the film, with insights by producer Boyd and several of the directors, and Boyd's running commentary over the film on the same disk; *Second Sight* 2NDVD 3163 (2009). Given the passage of time, however, one should exercise care in accepting the comments at face-value, for some appear to contradict information from the era of the film's release.
- 3 Jeremy Tambling, "Introduction: Opera in the Distraction Culture," in *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, ed. Tambling (London: John Libbey, 1994), 3–5.
 - 4 Of interest is James Sewell's ballet "Opera Moves," originally from 1991 and revised in 2007, which *The New York Times* characterizes as "a collection of 11 sketches to opera highlights from Monteverdi to Weill, some in famous recordings." One of them is to the "Liebestod," sung by Jessye Norman. "Vesti la giubba," another portion of *Aria*, also appears in the ballet. See Alastair Macauley's dance review, "Dramatic Tension Building and, Oh Yes, Can You Name That Soprano?" *The New York Times* (October 18, 2007).
 - 5 For tensions between the two media, see Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1–19.
 - 6 Six MTV-like visualizations are included: the "Jewel Song" from *Faust*, "Musetta's Waltz" from *La Bohème*, "Non mi dir" from *Don Giovanni*, "Care compagne" from *La sonnambula*, and "Song to the Moon" from *Rusalka*. The disk is *Anna Netrebko: The Woman – The Voice*, directed and choreographed by Vincent Paterson, DGG DVD B0003705–09 (2004).
 - 7 For general characteristics of MTV see E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987); and Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

- 8 We should note that a brief section of Temple's *Rigoletto*, which is one of the longer segments of *Aria*, showcases "La donna è mobile" in a parodic rendition by an Elvis impersonator who sings in a nightclub where the lead couples (who switch partners) are dancing. Because the aria forms only an incidental part of the segment, which uses a variety of music from the opera, this represents an entirely different situation from our featured segments.
- 9 See Marcia J. Citron, "'Soll ich lauschen?': Love-Death in *Humoresque*," in *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 167–85.
- 10 For connections with the World Cup and Pavarotti, see Jonathan White, "Opera, Politics, and Television: *Bel canto* by Satellite," in Tambling, *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, 267–96. To gauge the continuing strength of "Nessun dorma"'s tie with Pavarotti, one need only visit the *YouTube* website and see the thousands of hits for his performances of the piece.
- 11 Tambling, "Introduction," 3–5, makes this claim. He does not see any restorative benefits in *Aria* for opera, only evidence of its death.
- 12 See especially William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- 13 See, for instance, Janet Maslin's laudatory review in *The New York Times* (November 2, 1979). More informally, customers' comments on the film at Amazon.com are consistently positive.
- 14 Phelps, "Omnibus," 189.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 16 Joe, "Don Boyd's *Aria*," 353–54.
- 17 For the workings of the filmic flashback, see Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989). It is interesting that Roddam's *Quadrophenia* also begins with a flashback set up with a quick image – a problem noted by Maslin in her *New York Times* review. And it also ends with teen suicide, according to Maslin an awkward fit with the rest of *Quadrophenia*.
- 18 Roeg's lengthy segment on *Un ballo in maschera* inserts a few intertitle pages to add a comic-book element to the film.
- 19 One is reminded of a similar shot that has become iconic in cinema history. It occurs at a climactic moment of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, in the infamous bell-tower south of San Francisco. As hero Scottie (James

Stewart) attempts to climb the stairs to stop his lover Madeleine (later Judy, both played by Kim Novak) committing suicide, he is prevented from reaching the top by his vertigo. Hitchcock visualizes the condition with a point-of-view shot that zooms in and tracks out at the same time, a push-pull that I liken to the effect in the Roddam. In truth, Fred Elmes's shot in *Aria* is actually push-push, but when one of the push elements slows down it creates the effect of a pullback.

- 20 Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 226. Kramer also discusses the “Liebestod” in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 147–65.
- 21 See, for instance, the interpretation of *Moonstruck* in Chapter 5.
- 22 For the relationship between music and image in opera-film, see the discussions of individual works in Citron, *Opera on Screen*, as well as of the aesthetics of the two media (1–19).
- 23 See *ibid.*, 112–60.
- 24 In film studies, “soundtrack” literally denotes all sound in a film, which encompasses music and everything else, and therefore the narrower term “music track” is more precise. In opera / film studies and film-music research, however, “soundtrack” has evolved as a convenient term to denote the music in a film. For example, recent book titles that use it this way are the collection *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and the single-authored study by Jeongwon Joe, *Opera as Soundtrack* (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming).
- 25 From Joseph Horowitz, *Post-Classical Predicament: Essays on Music and Society* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 23, as quoted in John C. Tibbetts's lengthy and informative chapter on Russell in *Composers in the Movies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 156. See also Kay Dickinson, “‘It’s Not Only Trivial, It’s Bad, Vulgar’: Ken Russell’s Composer Biopics and the Uneasy Realignment of Work and Culture,” Chapter 3 of her monograph *Off Key: When Film and Music Won’t Work Together* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81–118. For an excellent overview of Russell’s life and works see Hal Himmelstein’s entry on the website of The Museum of Broadcast Communications: www.museum.tv/archives/etc/R/htmlR/russellken/russellken.htm (accessed March 28, 2008). Among Russell’s

many writings, most useful for the present purpose is his book *Altered States: The Autobiography of Ken Russell* (London: William Heinemann, 1989), especially 250–59. And for Stanley Kubrick's sophisticated use of music, see Claudia Gorbman, "Ears Wide Open: Kubrick's Music," in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 3–18.

26 Russell, *Altered States*, 251–52.

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28 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini's Turandot*, 31, 102.

29 *Ibid.*, 31. It is interesting that the authors place quotation marks around the term each time it appears. This is not explained, and one gathers that they recognize it is not standard terminology and that it applies to portions of *Turandot* but perhaps not much else.

30 Across *Aria*, the various directors identify the segment at its start in different ways. Roddam, for example, merely has "Richard Wagner" over "Franc Roddam," dispensing with the name of the number or title of the opera. Russell adds the aria's translated title, in the middle of the screen, and keeps the names of director and composer on one side as in the other segments. It is interesting that he makes a slight but important change to the wording, which should be "None shall sleep." The lower-case "and" following ellipses at the beginning implies a mythic meaning for the phrase, as if it is taken from some larger proverb, as do quotation marks around the whole.

31 Kaplan, *Rocking around the Clock*, 144.

32 *Ibid.*, 144–45.

33 To some extent this can be characterized as the tensions between second-wave and third-wave feminism. For their connection to classical music, see Marcia J. Citron, "Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research," *Women and Music* 8 (2004): 47–60.

34 Kaplan, *Rocking around the Clock*, 145.

35 A term widely discussed in film-music scholarship, "mickey-mousing" receives a useful definition in Royal S. Brown's classic study, *Overtures and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 16.

36 The issue of viewers' knowledge is discussed in two essays in Powrie and Stilwell, *Changing Tunes*: Mike Cormack, "The Pleasures of

- Ambiguity: Using Classical Music in Film” (19–30); and Jeongwon Joe, “Reconsidering *Amadeus*: Mozart as Film Music” (57–73).
- 37 Paul Robinson, “Is *Aida* an Orientalist Opera?” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5/2 (1993): 133–40. His article is spurred by Edward Said’s broad-brush approach in his extremely influential volume, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). Said responds to Robinson’s criticisms in a later book, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 111–32. Ralph Locke adds his voice to the debate in “Beyond the Exotic: How ‘Eastern’ is *Aida*?” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17/2 (July, 2005): 105–40; and “A Broader View of Musical Exoticism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 24/4 (Fall, 2007): 477–521.
- 38 The Fracassi, along with Russell’s segment and two other films, is discussed in my Keynote Address, “Affirmation and Resistance: Operatic Exoticism on Film,” presented at the conference “Opera, Visual Culture, Exoticism: The *fin-de-siècle* and Its Legacy,” Institute for Advanced Study, University of London, September, 2008; forthcoming in the proceedings from the event. For a more positive view of Fracassi’s film, see Bernhard Kuhn, “The Film-Opera *Aida* (1953): Intermediality and Operatics,” *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance Studies* 2/1 (2009): 19–33.
- 39 The two other films I discussed in London that also use exoticism to fine advantage are Rosi’s Bizet’s *Carmen* (1983), where the exoticized upper class lacks authenticity in comparison to the common people (gypsies, etc.); and Powell and Pressburger’s *Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), where exoticism constructs dazzling ballet-opera in the Tale of Giulietta. For more see Chapters 4 and 5 of Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 112–41, 161–204.
- 40 The DVD is RCA 74321-60917-2. Zhang Yimou has other associations with opera, notably as director of Tan Dun’s opera *The First Emperor* at the Metropolitan Opera in 2006; for the HD broadcast production see W. Anthony Sheppard, “Review of the Metropolitan Opera’s New HD Movie Theater Broadcasts,” *American Music* 25/3 (2007): 383–87. More recently, Zhang directed the opening and closing extravaganzas at the Beijing Olympics in August, 2008. He has also directed many Chinese films, for example *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). As seen in the Beijing *Turandot*, the Tan Dun opera, and the Olympics ceremonies, he loves to use massed groups of figures in precise formations and movements to capture Chinese imperial tradition.
- 41 The video appears on the DVD *Sarah Brightman – Diva: The Video Collection*, Angel 0946 3 10132 9, [n.d.]. Brightman played the lead in the

original-cast production of the musical. Another video of Russell's from the show appears on the disk *Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again*. Like many of Brightman's numbers in the collection, the visualization is sappy, bland, and undeserving of further comment.

- 42 Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 201–20.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 225–28.
- 44 For another slant on film's potential to reveal something important about Puccini's music, see the discussion in Chapter 5 on *La Bohème* and kitsch in the movie *Moonstruck*.
- 45 Michal Grover-Friedlander does exciting work on the notion of the operatic afterlife. See her *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and a forthcoming volume, *Operatic Afterlives* (New York: Zone Press, 2011). I use the concept in a later portion of the present book, in the study of Claude Chabrol's film *La Cérémonie* (Chapter 4).
- 46 An example of super-fast montage in connection with opera occurs in the *Tosca* sequence in the 2008 James Bond movie, *Quantum of Solace*. See Ann Midgette, "Spy vs. Spy on an Operatic Scale: *Quantum of Solace*," *The Washington Post* (November 14, 2008), C1.
- 47 See the chapter "A Stroll through History," in Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 20–68.

3 SUBJECTIVITY IN THE OPERA-FILMS OF JEAN-PIERRE PONNELLE

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Subjectivity in the Opera Films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle," *Journal of Musicology* 22/2 (2005): 203–40. © Regents of the University of California.

- 1 James Levine, for one, praised Ponnelle's musical talents in an obituary of the director: "He was the only director I ever worked with who directed from the full orchestral score. He knew the music, he knew the text, and he understood the technical as well as the subliminal relationship between the two. And he cared how it sounded! He had an innate feeling for the colours of the score, the shape of the phrase, the core of the musical communication ..."; James Levine, "Jean-Pierre Ponnelle (1932–1988): An Appreciation," *Opera* 39 (1988): 1284–86 (1284).

- 2 General sources for Ponnelle include the catalogue of his career, *Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, 1932–1988*, ed. Max W. Busch, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 2002); my thanks to Jürgen Maehder for bringing the catalogue to my attention and kindly sending me a copy. See also a full-length interview by Imre Fabian, *Imre Fabian im Gespräch mit Jean-Pierre Ponnelle* (Zürich: Orell Fussli, 1983); Wolfgang Willaschek, ed., *Jean-Pierre Ponnelle: Arbeiten für Salzburg 1968–1988* (Salzburg: Salzburg Festspiele, 1989); Kristina Bendikas, *The Opera Theatre of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004); Stephanie von Buchau, “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle: The Sensual Stylist,” *Opera News* (September, 1979): 13–16, 19; Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker, “Retheatricalizing Opera: A Conversation with Jean-Pierre Ponnelle,” *Opera Quarterly* 3/2 (Summer, 1985): 25–44; and Alessandra Lippucci, “Social Theorizing on the Operatic Stage: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s Postmodern Humanist Production of Verdi’s *La traviata*,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12/3 (July, 1992): 245–73.
- 3 A revealing documentary of Ponnelle shooting his last opera-film, *Così fan tutte* (1988), appears on the DVD of the film, DGG B0006373-09. Over thirty minutes long, it is entitled “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle Rehearses *Così fan tutte*” and offers a fascinating look at his virtuosic command of music, languages, and direction.
- 4 For Franco Zeffirelli’s practices in his film *Otello*, see Marcia J. Citron, “A Night at the Opera: Zeffirelli’s *Otello* and the Genre of Film-Opera,” *Musical Quarterly* 78/4 (Winter, 1994): 700–41; and Chapter 3, “A Matter of Belief: *Otello* on Film and Television,” in *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 69–111. Jeremy Tambling offers a Marxist reading of the opera-film *La traviata*, in *Opera, Ideology and Film* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 176–93; while Roxanne Elizabeth Solomon does a frame-by-frame study, in “A Critical Study of Franco Zeffirelli’s *La traviata*,” (D.Ed. diss., Columbia University Teachers College, 1987).
- 5 Sound and voice in Ponnelle’s *Le nozze di Figaro* are explored in Marcia J. Citron, “The Elusive Voice: Absence and Presence in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s Film *Le nozze di Figaro*,” in *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133–54. Sanda Chiriacescu-Lüling studies *Figaro* alongside other *Figaro* films, in *Herrschaft und Revolte in Figaros Hochzeit: Untersuchung zu*

szenischen Realisationsmöglichkeiten des sozialkritischen Aspekts in W. A. Mozarts Die Hochzeit des Figaro anhand von sechs videogezeichneten Inszenierungen (Erlangen: Lüling, 1991). Vera Calábria looks at his methods, in “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera: Anmerkungen zu Ponnelles Umgang mit den Medien,” in *Das Musiktheater in den audiovisuellen Medien: Vorträge und Gespräche des Salzburger Symposions 1999*, ed. Peter Csobádi, Gernot Gruber, Jürgen Kühnel, Ulrich Müller, Oswald Panagl, and Franz Viktor Spechtler (Anif/Salzburg: Mueller-Speiser, 2001), 276–94. In the same collection see Helen M. Greenwald, “Issues of Authenticity in Two Films of *Madama Butterfly*: Ponnelle (1974) and Mitterand (1995),” 295–305; Kii-Ming Lo, “Der Opernfilm als Erweiterung der Bühne: Versuch einer Theorie an Hand von Jean-Pierre Ponnelles *Rigoletto*,” 254–63; and Brian Large, “Gespräch mit Brian Large über Probleme der Oper im Fernsehen,” 44–59.

- 6 My translation is from Fabian, *Imre Fabian im Gespräch*, 52. Similar statements appear in Ponnelle’s interview with Heinz Oepen that accompanied the laser disk release in Britain, DGG 072 403-1.
- 7 Christopher Alden, protégé of Ponnelle, asserts that “Ponnelle directed the music. He expressed the musical shape of a work, literally choreographed it. The fact that music was always the foundation for him freed him up to approach a piece from a less rational base, and to bring out the symbolic elements of the piece.” See “Interview with Christopher Alden,” *Opera Cues* [Houston Grand Opera Magazine] 39/2 (Winter, 1999): 17.
- 8 For Coppola see [Chapter 1](#) in this study.
- 9 Brian Large, the leading director of televised opera from the opera house, comments on Ponnelle’s limited number of cameras in his opera-films, in Large, “Gespräch mit Brian Large.” See also Calábria, “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera.”
- 10 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 5th edn. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 105. See also Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Approaches to Semiotics 66 (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984).
- 11 Helen M. Greenwald, “Picturing Cio-Cio San: House, Screen, and Ceremony in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12/3 (November, 2000): 237–59 (256).
- 12 For the intersubjective relationships possible in POV, see Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema*, especially 73–102; and Vivian Sobchak,

- “Phenomenology and the Film Experience,” in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 36–58.
- 13 As Bordwell and Thompson observe, “the problem of audience ‘identification’ with a point-of-view shot remains a difficult one in film theory” (*Film Art*, 268). A perspective I have shied away from so far is that the camera itself is a subjective agent. See James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 211.
 - 14 Greenwald discusses how Ponnelle’s staging of the death scene departs from Puccini, in “Picturing Cio-Cio San,” 258, and brings out the ceremonial nature of Ponnelle’s filming of the death scene, in “Issues of Authenticity in Two Films,” 304–05.
 - 15 For interior singing in the film, see Citron, “The Elusive Voice,” 147–48 for “Non so più.”
 - 16 For example, in Figaro’s aria “Non più andrai,” Cherubino is described as “Narcisetto, Adoncino d’Amor,” or “Little Narcissus, little Adonis of Love.” For Cherubino’s narcissism in the opera, see Wye Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 96–99; and Brigid Brophy, *Mozart the Dramatist* (New York: Da Capo, 1988), 105–08.
 - 17 John Belton, “The Bionic Eye: Zoom Esthetics,” *Cinéaste* 9/1 (Winter, 1980–81): 20–27.
 - 18 For differences between tracking shots and zooms, including perspective, see Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 80–82, 203–07.
 - 19 Typical uses appear in Stuart M. Kaminsky, “Use and Abuse of the Zoom Lens,” *Filmmakers Newsletter* 5/12 (October, 1972): 22–23.
 - 20 Calábria remarks that this circus-like pan stems from Max Ophüls’s film *Liebelei*, of 1933. See “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera,” 290. Ponnelle’s emphasis on Pinkerton’s dislike of Butterfly’s family probably comes from Belasco’s play and the original version of the opera (1904).
 - 21 For musical ties between *Don Giovanni* and Verdi’s opening party scene, see Pierluigi Petrobelli, “Verdi and *Don Giovanni*: On the Opening Scene of *Rigoletto*,” in *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers*, trans. Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 34–47.
 - 22 Tim Carter discusses the similarities and differences between them in the opera, in *W. A. Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 113–15.

- 23 Some writers contend that the film contains other anti-American references, while the director claimed this was not the case; see von Buchau, “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle: The Sensual Stylist,” 15.
- 24 Wolfgang Osthoff proposes the idea of characters who mirror Rigoletto in the opera, in “The Musical Characterization of Gilda,” *Verdi: Bollettino dell’ Istituto di Studi Verdiani* 3/8 (1973): 1275–1314. For mirroring in the play as well as opera, see Gianni Iotti, “Le metamorfosi di Triboulet,” in *Il senso del nonsenso*, ed. Monique Moretti, Mireille Cappellati, and Odile Martinez (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1994), 299–304.
- 25 Peter Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1996), 300. Gerhard Persché objects strongly to the double casting, in “Lauter Mesalliancen? Welche Oper für welchen Film?” *Opernwelt* 25/12 (1984): 64–65 (65). For the musical relationship between the two characters see Martin Chusid, “Rigoletto and Monterone: A Study in Musical Dramaturgy,” *Report of the 11th IMS Congress, Copenhagen 1972*, ed. Henrik Glahn, Søren Sørensen, and Peter Ryom (Copenhagen: Edition W. Hansen, 1974), 325–36. Ponnelle practices double casting in other operas, including his controversial doubling of Erik and the Steersman in *Der fliegende Holländer* at San Francisco Opera (1979).
- 26 As quoted and translated in Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi. Volume 1: From Oberto to Rigoletto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 479.
- 27 For theatrical qualities in opera-film see Chapter 4 of Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 112–60.
- 28 Osthoff, “The Musical Characterization of Gilda,” 1278.
- 29 The line “Sparafucile, mi nomino” (“My name is Sparafucile”) is the most explicit statement. In Act III, when Sparafucile asks Rigoletto the victim’s name, Rigoletto responds, “Egli è Delitto, Punizion son io” (“He’s crime, I’m punishment”). Furthermore, Rigoletto refuses to disclose his name to his daughter, in Act I, Scene 2.
- 30 Osthoff, “The Musical Characterization of Gilda,” 1278–79.
- 31 See Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 205–48, for a study of Sellars’s three Mozart telecasts. The trope of seeing inside and outside the fiction is explored in Citron, “The Performance of Vision in Peter Sellars’s Television Film of *Così fan tutte*,” in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 213–30. Williams summarizes major theories of film spectatorship in the “Introduction” to *Viewing Positions*,

- 1–20; Sobchack proposes a flexible relationship between viewer and film, in “Phenomenology and the Film Experience.”
- 32 One major element of Hugo’s play that drew Verdi to the project is the dual nature of Rigoletto’s (Triboulet’s) character. In a letter to Marzari, head of Teatro la Fenice, of December 14, 1850, Verdi writes: “To me there is something really fine in representing on stage this character outwardly so ugly and ridiculous, inwardly so impassioned and full of love. I chose the subject precisely because of these qualities ...”; quoted and translated in Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 481.
- 33 Linda and Michael Hutcheon discuss physical deformity in the opera, in *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 73–80. See also Jean-Michel Brèque, “Quand le théâtre de Hugo s’accomplit en mélodrame lyrique,” *L’Avant-Scène Opéra* 112–13 (September–October, 1988): 80–83.
- 34 For general criticism of Ponnelle’s addition of characters to his productions, see Kristina Bendikas, “Opera Productions of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle: The American Years (1958–1987),” Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1999, 52. Losey’s *Don Giovanni* film famously adds a mysterious Valet in Black; see Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 178–79. One wonders whether Ponnelle’s valet is a sly reference to Losey’s Valet, both of whom serve womanizers.
- 35 Lo, “Der Opernfilm,” 271, comments on the dramatic importance of the jester’s stock.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 268–69, discusses the connection and sagely notes that Triboulet’s daughter is named “Blanche” in Hugo’s play.
- 37 For criticism of the device, in an otherwise positive review, see Lon Tuck, “A Million-Dollar TV *Figaro* that Improves on the Original,” *The Washington Post* (October 5, 1977).
- 38 Freud’s essay appears in *Art and Literature*, ed. James Strachey and Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 335–76. Lawrence Kramer discusses Freud’s views on the double, in “‘As If a Voice Were in Them’: Music, Narrative, and Deconstruction,” in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 176–214.
- 39 Slavoj Žižek, “‘I Hear You with My Eyes’; or, The Invisible Master,” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 90–128 (94).
- 40 *Ibid.*

- 41 Perceptive comments about the Count's portrait appear in Chiriacescu-Lüling, *Herrschaft und Revolte*, 137–38.
- 42 Ponnelle discusses the advantages of interior singing, its relationship with gesture and facial expression, and the ways it can reconfigure different types of arias, in Fabian, *Imre Fabian im Gespräch*, 53.
- 43 For an exploration of these traits, see Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 140–45.
- 44 Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death*, 273.
- 45 Calábria, "Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera," 291. Greenwald, describing Ponnelle's scene as "lusty," sees Japanese rituals and the absence of the Western whore–virgin dichotomy in Butterfly's portrayal in the Love Duet, in "Issues of Authenticity in Two Films," 302–03.
- 46 Calábria considers the last "one of the great moments of this scene, and perhaps of the film," in "Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera," 293.
- 47 Although there are major differences, not least the absence of her child, this pose recalls the Madonna-with-Child position discussed earlier.
- 48 Greenwald discusses the centrality of screen and shoji to these themes and notes how well Ponnelle foregrounds them in the film, in "Issues of Authenticity in Two Films," 304–05.
- 49 For further insights on Pinkerton and his psychology in the film see *ibid.*, 304–05; and Greenwald, "Picturing Cio-Cio San," 258.
- 50 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 11 and *passim*.
- 51 Bendikas, "Opera Productions," 52, who also describes the similar (but not exact) staging of the Prelude as the setup to a flashback in Ponnelle's 1973 San Francisco stage version of *Rigoletto* (43–44). Lo writes about the filmic events of the Prelude, in "Der Opernfilm," 268–69.
- 52 Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 23.
- 53 Greenwald, "Issues of Authenticity in Two Films," 300.
- 54 Ponnelle Interview with Heinz Oepen, in DGG 072 403-1.
- 55 My translation of Ponnelle interview in Fabian, *Imre Fabian im Gespräch*, 54.
- 56 *Rigoletto* was screened at the Cannes Festival in 1987. With respect to television, *Rigoletto* won an Emmy Award in 1985.
- 57 For example, Ponnelle remarks that "the camera lets me show things I can't show on a stage," in the interview with Oepen, DGG 072 403-1. Calábria reports that Ponnelle knew the orchestra score from memory (private communication, January, 1999).

- 58 For the filmic *auteur* from a musicological perspective, see Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 76–77.
- 59 Calábria, “Jean-Pierre Ponnelle und die Kamera,” 293–94.
- 60 Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film*; Jeongwon Joe, “Opera on Film, Film in Opera: Postmodern Implications of the Cinematic Influence on Opera” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1998); Citron, *Opera on Screen*; and Joe and Theresa, *Between Opera and Cinema*. See also the collection *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: John Libbey, 1994); and Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

4 DON GIOVANNI AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CLAUDE
CHABROL’S *LA CÉRÉMONIE*

- 1 The French title of Rendell’s novel is *L’Analphabète* [“The Illiterate Woman”]. Chabrol explains how he ended up with *La Cérémonie*:

I tried to give a title equivalent to [Rendell’s] original [*A Judgement in Stone*], but it got complicated: the English title is clear but difficult to translate. It also refers to the stone statue in *Don Giovanni*. I didn’t want to give everything away in the first reel by calling it *L’Analphabète*. I found *La Cérémonie*: the women behave truly as in a capital execution; the Lelièvres dress as if to go to the opera. Two other films are called *La Cérémonie* – that of Oshima, and the only film of Laurence Harvey, both of which treat a capital execution. (Pierre Berthomieu, Jean-Pierre Colas, and Claire Vassé, “Entretien avec Claude Chabrol,” *Positif* 416 [September, 1995]: 8–14 [9] [my translation])

Chabrol refers to the fact that the term “la cérémonie” was used in France to refer to capital execution.
- 2 Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 1. “Pompidolien” refers to the period when Pompidou was President of France, 1969–74.
- 3 Frédéric Strauss, “Lesdits commandements,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 494 (September, 1995): 24–26 (26); and Editorial in same issue, 22.
- 4 For a valuable summary see Austin, *Chabrol*, 127–32.

- 5 See, for instance, Jean-Claude Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” trans. Annette Michelson, *October* 98 (Fall, 2001): 77–92 (81–84). The case was later written up by Lacan, and Jean Genet based *The Maids* (1947), his first play, on it. There have been other movies adapted from the Rendell, including the British film *The Housekeeper* (1987), directed by Ousama Rawi and starring Rita Tushingham.
- 6 Chabrol uses the term “opacité” in Marie-Anne Guérin, “Entretien avec Claude Chabrol,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 494 (September, 1995): 27–32 (30). It is also used by Isabelle Huppert, in Marie-Anne Guérin and Camille Taboulay, “La Connivence: Entretien avec Isabelle Huppert,” *Cahiers du cinéma*, Special Issue on Chabrol (October, 1997): 66. See also Joël Magny, “Chabrol–Huppert: Absence et omniprésence,” *L’Avant-Scène Cinéma* 551 (April, 2006): 23–24. Chabrol’s admiration for Hitchcock dates from the 1950s, when he co-authored a book with Eric Rohmer on the master of suspense; for details of Hitchcock’s influence on Chabrol see Austin, *Chabrol*, 9–10, where Fritz Lang’s influence is also discussed. More generally, the New Wave was enamored of Hitchcock (François Truffaut also wrote a study of him), and the American director had a major impact on the movement as a whole.
- 7 Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 8 Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” 86.
- 9 Isabelle Huppert, quoted in Guérin and Taboulay, “La Connivence.”
- 10 Comment by Chabrol in documentary “The Making of *La Cérémonie*” in DVD of the film, Home Vision Entertainment CER oro, 2004.
- 11 See, for instance, Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” 87; and Strauss, “Lesdits commandements,” 24–25.
- 12 Quotations from Royal S. Brown’s review of the movie, *Cinéaste* 22/4 (1997): 50–51 (51). Since 1982, Matthieu Chabrol has composed the scores for his father’s films. While his style is not always atonal, it usually has a disquieting effect and is held in check, appropriate to Chabrol père’s objectified style. Pierre Jansen was Chabrol’s favored composer on earlier films, and his scores are similarly modernist and contained.
- 13 The edition of the Rendell book referred to in the chapter is Ruth Rendell, *A Judgement in Stone* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); the first printing is London: Hutchinson, 1977.

- 14 Polack, for one, believes Chabrol is more successful than Rendell “in rendering the physical and moral pain of Sophie’s exile within the world of the written word”; Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” 86.
- 15 Guérin, “Entretien avec Claude Chabrol,” 27.
- 16 Quoted statement from Strauss, “Lesdits commandements,” 25.
- 17 Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” 89. Another film that criticizes the vacuous power of television is Sidney Lumet’s *Network* (1976), with an Oscar-winning screenplay by Paddy Chayevsky.
- 18 Florence Jacobowitz, “*La Cérémonie*: ‘The Last Marxist Film’ by Claude Chabrol,” *Cineaction* 39 (1995): 36–43 (43).
- 19 Berthomieu, Colas, and Vassé, “Entretien avec Claude Chabrol,” 11.
- 20 For political interpretations of *Don Giovanni* see John Bokina, “The Dialectic of Operatic Civilization: Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*,” in *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 41–64; and Nicholas Till, “*Don Giovanni*,” in *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart’s Operas* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 197–228 (especially 212–19).
- 21 The production is directed by Michael Hampe and conducted by Herbert von Karajan, and was recorded at the Salzburg Festival in July, 1987. It was aired on American television in October, 1989 (I recorded it on home video). It is available on DVD, as part of the “Legacy for Home Video Series” of Herbert von Karajan: Sony Classical, SVD 46383, c. 2000. Samuel Ramey performs Don Giovanni, Anna Tomowa-Sintow is Donna Anna, Gösta Winbergh is Don Ottavio, Julia Varady is Donna Elvira, the magnificent Ferruccio Furlanetto is Leporello, Alexander Malta is Masetto, and Kathleen Battle sings Zerlina.
- 22 Janet Maslin, “Maid is Hired: Danger is Served,” review of *La Cérémonie*, directed by Claude Chabrol, *The New York Times* (December 20, 1996), http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?_r=1&res=9CoDEoDE1431F933A15751C1A960958260&scp=1&sq=la%20ceremonie%20movie%20review&st=cse (accessed April 20, 2007).
- 23 The two musical examples in the chapter come from W. A. Mozart, *Il dissoluto punito ossia il Don Giovanni*, Klavierauszug; BA 4550a. Piano reduction based on the Urtext of the New Mozart Edition by Hans-Georg Kluge (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005). In my discussions, the English translations of quoted Italian text are by Avril Bardoni, from the booklet accompanying the London CD set of the opera, London 455 500-2 (1997). In a few places I alter the translation to make it more literal.

- 24 See Wye Allanbrook's brilliant discussion of the Act 1 Finale, in *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 275–87. Julian Rushton also offers interesting observations, in *W. A. Mozart: Don Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 109–11.
- 25 In addition to the visual influence of Hitchcock, Chabrol's camerawork has been influenced by Fritz Lang's expressionistic use of shadow in his films. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, liner notes to *La Cérémonie*, directed by Claude Chabrol, DVD (2004). Home Vision Entertainment CER 010.
- 26 Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 280. Allanbrook goes on to say that the combination emphasizes "both the isolation and the earnestness of the trio." She refers to a comic side that we see in the number, "only because we know the maskers, [our] having had occasion before to judge their earnestness as a stiff and complacent credulity." This is another way of identifying the irony I find in the number – that it is much less pure than appears at first glance or first hearing.
- 27 A famous Hitchcock shot that is similar occurs in *Suspicion*, when Cary Grant slowly mounts the steps with a glass of milk we suspect he will use to poison his wife (Joan Fontaine).
- 28 It is mentioned in many discussions of the film. See, for example, Deborah Thomas, "'Knowing One's Place': Frame-Breaking, Embarrassment, and Irony in *La Cérémonie* (Claude Chabrol, 1995)," in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 167–78 (173–74); Polack, "Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed," 91–92; Anna Gural-Migdal, "La Représentation de la femme dans le cinéma français des vingt dernières années: *Sans toit ni loi*, *Nelly et M. Arnaud*, *La Cérémonie*," *Women in French Studies* 9 (2001): 193–206 (203); and Strauss, "Lesdits commandements," 26.
- 29 I find it fascinating that Chabrol makes the patently false claim that he "always followed Rendell's musical indications"; in Guérin, "Entretien avec Claude Chabrol," 32.
- 30 Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 275–77.
- 31 For a summary see Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 30–31.
- 32 Magny, "Chabrol–Huppert," 24.
- 33 Berthomieu, Colas, and Vassé, "Entretien avec Claude Chabrol," 11.

- 34 For libertarianism and “Viva la libertà” see Bokina, “The Dialectic of Operatic Civilization,” 61; Till, “*Don Giovanni*,” 212–13; and Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 286–87. Director Peter Sellars singled out the line for comment in terms of Mozart’s political transgressiveness, in his introduction to the American broadcast (1991) of his television film of the opera. He notes that it is “yelled out thirteen times, at the top of their lungs, this rallying cry of the French Revolution, before that Revolution even took place.” Unfortunately Sellars’s remarks are omitted on the commercial VHS and DVD versions.
- 35 For a perceptive discussion of the Trio, see Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, rev. edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 63–68.
- 36 Space precludes discussion of the lesbian implications in the film. See, for example, Desson Howe, “*Cérémonie*: Maid to Order,” review of *La Cérémonie*, directed by Claude Chabrol, *The Washington Post* (January 10, 1997); and Polack, “Chabrol and the Execution of the Deed,” 85.
- 37 For more on the French meaning see n. 1 above.
- 38 Joël Magny, “C’est Mozart qu’on assassine,” *Cahiers du cinéma*, Special Issue on Chabrol (October, 1997): 78–81 (81).
- 39 Some films have become legendary for juxtaposing classical music against horrific violence, especially Stanley Kubrick’s controversial movie *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). For perceptive insights on its score, which features the music of Beethoven, a composer idolized by the sadistic protagonist, see Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 444–47.
- 40 Thomas, “‘Knowing One’s Place,’” 176.
- 41 Ponnelle’s early films, from the 1970s, use many filmic effects – some would say too many, leading to a “more-is-less” situation. This is a common reaction among undergraduates, who generally find his methods mannered and overly obvious. For these viewers raised on more current film techniques, Ponnelle is deemed a poor film director. Obviously I disagree, hence my enthusiastic study of his work.
- 42 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 157.
- 43 Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*, 8.
- 44 For a study of opera’s role in a film as a critique of modernity, see Richard Leppert, “Opera, Aesthetic Violence, and the Imposition of Modernity: Fitzcarraldo,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in*

- Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 99–119.
- 45 For portability see Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 14–18.
- 46 For cultural and aesthetic aspects of the relay, see Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 45–50, and various portions of Chapter 3, “A Matter of Belief: *Otello* on Film and Television,” 69–111.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 48 Rendell has *Don Giovanni* come from arguably the most prestigious operatic venue in Britain, the Glyndebourne Festival, which itself has a glorious pedigree in Mozart. In the book Rendell refers to it as “a Glyndebourne film of *Don Giovanni*,” and this makes it unclear whether she means an actual film or a televised broadcast, especially considering the date of 1977. However, there are commercial videos of Glyndebourne transmissions from the late 1970s, and in fact a 1977 video version of *Don Giovanni* first shown on television (directed by Peter Hall, conducted by Bernard Haitink). This could be what Rendell is referring to, not a film made with film stock.
- 49 See Michael P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology, 1890–1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 50 Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell, eds., *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). See Mike Cormack, “The Pleasures of Ambiguity: Using Classical Music in Film,” 19–30; and Jeongwon Joe, “Reconsidering *Amadeus*: Mozart as Film Music,” 57–73, where a few pages are devoted to the use of *Don Giovanni* in the film.
- 51 See Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 96–99. See also John Ellis, “Broadcast TV as Sound and Image,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th edn., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 385–94.
- 52 Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*, especially the overview on 5–7. A fascinating take on the story, told from Eurydice’s viewpoint, is Sarah Ruhl’s play *Eurydice*, which debuted in 2003.
- 53 Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*, 117.
- 54 For permanence, repeatability, and other qualities of recorded sound, see Chapter 1 of Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 8–47.

- 55 Grover-Friedlander, “Fellini’s Ashes,” Chapter 6 of *Vocal Apparitions*, 131–52. See also [Chapter 2](#) of the present study for comments on the vocal afterlife in the “Vesti la giubba” sequence of *Aria*.
- 56 For the lack of catharsis in this film and Chabrol’s output generally, see Thierry Jousse, “Cinq motifs pour Claude Chabrol,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 494 (September, 1995): 34–35 (34); and Brown, review of *La Cérémonie*.
- 57 For Losey’s film see [Chapter 5](#), “Opera *al fresco*: Rosi’s *Bizet’s Carmen* and Losey’s *Don Giovanni*,” in Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 161–204; and for the Sellars see Chapter 6, “A Matter of Time and Place: Peter Sellars and Media Culture,” in *ibid.*, 205–48.
- 58 From an interview with Pierre Boulez, “Opera Houses? Blow them Up!” *Opera* 19/5 (1968): 440–50; English translation of “Sprengt die Opernhäuser in die Luft!” *Der Spiegel* 40 (1967).
- 59 David Denby, “Cold Maids,” review of *La Cérémonie*, directed by Claude Chabrol, *New York Magazine* 30 (January 20, 1997): 60–61 (61).

5 “AN HONEST CONTRIVANCE”: OPERA AND DESIRE
IN MOONSTRUCK

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “An Honest Contrivance: Opera and Desire in *Moonstruck*,” *Music and Letters* 89/1 (February, 2008): 56–83. My thanks to Oxford University Press for permission to reprint the article in revised form.

- 1 Pauline Kael, “*Moonstruck*: Loony Fugue,” review of *Moonstruck*, directed by Norman Jewison, *The New Yorker* (January 25, 1988); reprinted in Kael, *For Keeps: 30 Years at the Movies* (New York: Dutton, 1994), 1162–64 (1164). All music examples are adapted from the vocal score of *La Bohème*, no. 115494, arr. Carlo Carignani (Milan: Ricordi, ©1906 and 1917, repr. 1999).
- 2 Cher won the Oscar for Best Actress (as Loretta), Olympia Dukakis for Best Supporting Actress (as Rose, Loretta’s mother), and John Patrick Shanley for Best Screenplay. Shanley’s screenplay regularly appears very high in the rankings of the best Hollywood screenplays ever written. Director Norman Jewison and the film were both nominated but did not win.
- 3 Roger Ebert, review of *Moonstruck*, directed by Norman Jewison, *Chicago Sun-Times* (January 15, 1988), available online at www.rogerebert.com (accessed May 24, 2006).

- 4 Kael, “Loony Fugue,” 1163.
- 5 *La Bohème* is the most performed opera in the Metropolitan Opera’s history; see Joseph Volpe, *The Toughest Show on Earth: My Rise and Reign at the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 99.
- 6 See [Chapter 1](#), on the *Godfather* films, for another look at opera in Italian-American culture.
- 7 Claudia Gorbman, “Ears Wide Open: Kubrick’s Music,” in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 3–18 (8). Postclassical is generally defined as beyond the studio era – that is, the 1960s and later.
- 8 The other cast members are Vincent Gardenia (Cosmo), Danny Aiello (Johnny), Feodor Chaliapin (grandpop), Anita Gillette (Mona), Julie Bovasso (Aunt Rita), and Louis Guss (Uncle Raymond).
- 9 Norman Jewison, on Audio Commentary of *Moonstruck* DVD, “Deluxe Edition,” MGM 14312 (2006).
- 10 Kathleen Rowe, “Masculinity and Melodrama in Postclassical Romantic Comedy,” in *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 191–212 (especially 201–09).
- 11 Peter Franklin, “Movies as Opera (Behind the Great Divide),” in *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: John Libbey, 1994), 77–112. Alexandra Wilson also discusses the charge of femininity in the reception of Puccini, in *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), for instance in connection with *Tosca* (82–85).
- 12 Michel Poizat conveys actual conversations about scrimping and saving by opera fanatics so they can afford to go to the Palais Garnier (before Opéra Bastille was built), in *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 12–28.
- 13 William Day explores these sexual connections, in “Moonstruck, or How to Ruin Everything,” in *Ordinary Language Criticism: Literary Thinking after Cavell after Wittgenstein*, ed. Kenneth Dauber and Walter Jost (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 315–28.
- 14 Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993); and Mitchell Morris, “Reading as an Opera Queen,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184–200. For a critique of the effusiveness

of the Koestenbaum book, see David J. Levin, “Is There a Text in This Libido? *Diva* and the Rhetoric of Contemporary Opera Criticism,” in *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121–32. Poizat’s interviewees (see n. 12) also bring up the gay connection: “Clearly opera is systematically associated with the homosexual world” (Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry*, 20). And, as discussed in [Chapter 6](#) of the present study, Daniel Hirsh, the opera lover in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, is gay.

- 15 Vocal obsession in gay culture forms a major theme of Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*. The film *Diva* centers on a voice-obsessed male opera fan, but ignores sexuality; see Levin, “Is There a Text in This Libido?,” especially 124–29.
- 16 The former Met general director Joseph Volpe discusses the class structure of Met culture, and how ethnic Italian-Americans play no part in it, in *The Toughest Show on Earth*.
- 17 The power of red shoes to lure a woman into art is a major theme of the Powell and Pressburger film *The Red Shoes* (1948), where red toe shoes lead to the death of Vicky, the ballerina heroine.
- 18 Joseph Volpe describes the décor at the Met as “modernist plush – with acres of red velvet,” in *The Toughest Show on Earth*, 42.
- 19 DVD Audio Commentary track. The director adds that originally the titles sequence was to show a conductor directing *Bohème*, but the production team thought that would be boring and would produce “an artsy-fartsy film.”
- 20 Words and music by Will Hudson, Eddie DeLange, and Irving Mills, original copyright in 1936, but popularized later in the film *Picnic* of 1956. Copyright © Mills Music and Columbia Pictures Music Corp. ASCAP.
- 21 Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell offer a perceptive summary of the implications of the audience’s musical knowledge or lack thereof for the impact of pre-existent music in film, in the Introduction of *Changing Tunes*, xiii–xix. See also the essay by Mike Cormack in the same collection, “The Pleasures of Ambiguity: Using Classical Music in Film,” 19–30.
- 22 A tarantella figures prominently in the extended wedding tableau that opens *The Godfather*; see [Chapter 1](#) of the present study.
- 23 I agree with Anahid Kassabian’s contention that Ronny’s love for *Bohème* encourages individuation – that is, separation from his Italian culture – and that the opera does not signify Italian culture in the film. Kassabian

believes it signifies New York. While I see connections between the city and the work, I believe the chain of signification is more complex and involves the Met as a particular cultural institution and with certain class associations. See Anahid Kassabian, “Songstruck: Rethinking Identifications in Romantic Comedies,” www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr_18/AKfr18a.html (accessed May 10, 2006). My thanks to the author for informing me of the essay.

- 24 See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 62–73. For audio dissolve in terms of Francesco Rosi’s opera-film *Bizet’s Carmen*, see Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 196–202.
- 25 Gorbman, “Ears Wide Open,” 8.
- 26 Jewison on DVD Audio Commentary. Jewison’s commentary continues: “And you each have your own arias. But at the end of the film, we will bring you all together, on the stage at the same time, and we will create this incredible crescendo at the end of the film, and it will be a giant crescendo that will just grab everybody.”
- 27 William Drabkin points out *Tristan*-like sonorities in the opera, particularly in Mimi’s transformed theme in Act IV, in “The Musical Language of *La Bohème*,” in *Giacomo Puccini: La Bohème*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 80–101 (95).
- 28 Jeongwon Joe explores the larger issue of the integrity of pre-existent classical music when it is significantly modified as part of the soundtrack, in “Reconsidering *Amadeus*: Mozart as Film Music,” in Powrie and Stilwell, *Changing Tunes*, 57–73.
- 29 Eva Rieger comments on the connection: “Als Judy in vollkommener Madeleine-Imitation auf Scottie zukommt und sich ihm vorstellt – sie steht symbolisch für Begehren und unerfüllbare Liebe – erinnert Herrmann an Richard Wagners Musik zu Isolde’s Liebestod aus der Oper ‘Tristan und Isolde’” (“When Judy walks up to Scottie as the perfect imitation of Madeleine and presents herself to him – she is a symbol of desire and unfulfilled love – Herrmann recalls Richard Wagner’s music for Isolde’s ‘Liebestod’ from the opera *Tristan und Isolde*”); Eva Rieger, *Alfred Hitchcock und die Musik: Eine Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Film, Musik und Geschlecht* (Bielefeld: Kleine, 1996), 182. See also Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1976), 299, 330.

- 30 Brown observes that in many films since the 1960s, the excerpts of classical music compositions that replace the original film score no longer function purely as backing for key emotional situations, but rather exist as a kind of parallel emotional/aesthetic universe ... Put another way, the music, rather than supporting and/or coloring the visual images and narrative situations, stands as an image in its own right, helping the audience read the film's other images as such rather than as a replacement for or imitation of objective reality.
- See Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 239–40.
- 31 Michel Chion explores the *acousmètre* in “Part I: Mabuse: The Magic and Power of the Acousmètre,” in *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 17–57; and “The Acousmètre,” in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129–30. I discuss it in terms of voice-image relationships in opera-film, in “The Elusive Voice: Absence and Presence in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s Film *Le nozze di Figaro*,” in Joe and Theresa, *Between Opera and Cinema*, 133–54 (especially 136–39).
- 32 “Don’t You Know,” the hit song of 1959 recorded by Della Reese, with words and lyrics by Bobby Worth, is probably the most famous popular version of Musetta’s Waltz; it begins, “Don’t you know? / I have fallen in love with you, / For the rest of my whole life through.” For the complexities of musical diegesis and irony, see Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 23–25.
- 33 Kael, *For Keeps*, 1164.
- 34 Day, “Moonstruck, or How to Ruin Everything,” 324.
- 35 See, for example, Julian Budden’s entry on the opera in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. 1, 520; and Edward Greenfield, “The Music of *La Bohème*,” in *La Bohème: Giacomo Puccini, ENO Opera Guide* (London: John Calder, 1982), 27–32 (28).
- 36 Drabkin, “The Musical Language of *La Bohème*,” 98.
- 37 The chordal relationship is similar to the second example from *Tristan und Isolde* that is cited in [Chapter 2](#) (Ex. 2.2, mm. 2–3), although the supertonic member in the Wagner is a dominant-seventh chord while here it is a triad without a seventh. Although the root movement is the same, the mobility of the seventh chord gives the Wagner a different feel.

- 38 In the credits and script the professor's name is "Perry," but his name is never mentioned in the film.
- 39 On the DVD Audio Commentary, screenwriter Shanley calls the speech the climax of the film. Day explores the literary and philosophical implications of the soliloquy, in "Moonstruck, or How to Ruin Everything."
- 40 The gesture of the man holding out his hand to the woman to grasp is a trope in cinema. A famous example occurs in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) on Mt. Rushmore and later, as a joke, in a sleeping compartment of a train. Other Hitchcock films that involve the device, although not necessarily in a romantic context, are *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*.
- 41 Robynnn Stilwell, "Vinyl Communion: The Record as Ritual Object in Girls' Rites-of-Passage Films," in Powrie and Stilwell, *Changing Tunes*, 152–66 (158). Stilwell is mainly addressing the voice here.
- 42 We should keep in mind that the CD was a relatively recent technology when the film was made (released in 1987). Nonetheless, it was widely available to the general public. Hence Ronny's decision to stick with the phonograph is significant.
- 43 Ronald Rodman summarizes denotative and connotative functions for the soundtrack, in "The Popular Song as Leitmotif in 1990s Film," in Powrie and Stilwell, *Changing Tunes*, 119–36 (especially 123–25).
- 44 Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "The Girl and the Phonograph; or, The Vamp and the Machine Revisited," in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, ed. Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 433–54 (especially 435–39).
- 45 Marc A. Weiner, "Why Does Hollywood Like Opera?" in Joe and Theresa, *Between Opera and Cinema*, 75–91 (especially 79, 81).
- 46 See [Chapter 6](#) for the role of the phonograph in John Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971).
- 47 Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, "Italian American Women as Comic Foils: Exploding the Stereotype in *My Cousin Vinny*, *Moonstruck*, and *Married to the Mob*," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 13 (2002): 157–61.
- 48 While only a brief description, this captures the main theme of her major study. See Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 49 Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 41.

- 50 Director Norman Jewison, Audio Commentary of DVD.
- 51 Useful sources on films that use opera music are Ken Wlaschin, *Encyclopedia of Opera on Screen: A Guide to More than 100 Years of Opera Films, Videos, and DVDs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Richard Fawkes, *Opera on Film* (London: Duckworth, 2000); David Schroeder, *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film* (New York: Continuum, 2002); and the website, www.bohemianopera.com. Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 63–64, discusses famous recent examples.
- 52 Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 19–20.
- 53 See also [Chapters 1](#) and [6](#) for respective opera visits in *The Godfather Part III* and *Closer*.
- 54 The tone of *Prizzi's Honor* (1985, directed by John Huston) is also a mix of *opera buffa* and *verismo*. But unlike *Moonstruck*, it is a satire and the plot does not focus on opera qua opera. For *Prizzi's Honor* see Mary Hunter, "Opera in Film – Sentiment and Wit, Feeling and Knowing: *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Prizzi's Honor*," in Joe and Theresa, *Between Opera and Cinema*, 93–120 (especially 93–96, 106–19).
- 55 See Citron, *Opera on Screen*, especially 1–19, as well as [Chapter 3](#) of the present study.
- 56 For viewers' regressive urges instilled by opera film, see Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 96–106, in relation to Zeffirelli's *Otello*.
- 57 For further discussion see Citron, "The Elusive Voice," 137–39.
- 58 See [Chapter 2](#) for an investigation of the film *Aria* (1987) in the context of MTV.
- 59 Gorbman, "Ears Wide Open," 7–8.
- 60 Audio Commentary on DVD.
- 61 Theodor W. Adorno, "Music in the Background" (1934), trans. Susan H. Gillespie, in *Adorno's Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 506–10 (509).
- 62 Theodor W. Adorno, "Kitsch" (1932), trans. Susan H. Gillespie, in Leppert, *Adorno's Essays on Music*, 501–05 (503).
- 63 Major sources include Adorno's two essays cited above; Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, rev. ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969); and Thomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
- 64 Dorfles, *Kitsch*, 16–17.

- 65 See Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 237.
- 66 Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, rev. edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 208, 211–12.
- 67 Joe, “Reconsidering *Amadeus*,” and Cormack, “The Pleasures of Ambiguity.”
- 68 For empty spaces and desires as part of kitsch, see Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 251.
- 69 Eugene Goodheart, from symposium “On Kitsch,” *Salmagundi: A Quarterly of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 85–86 (Winter–Spring, 1990): 221–26 (222).
- 70 Caryl Flinn, “Embracing Kitsch: Werner Schroeter, Music, and *The Bomber Pilot*,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (New York: Continuum, 2001), 129–51 (130).

6 THE SOUND OF DESIRE: *COSÌ*’S “SOAVE SIA IL VENTO”
IN *SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY AND CLOSER*

- 1 Adapted from the translation by Diana Reed (1974) in Decca CD of the opera, CD 444 174-2, © 1996.
- 2 Peter Sellars’s television film of the opera brings out its sensuous qualities through visual means; see Marcia J. Citron, “The Performance of Vision in Peter Sellars’s Television Film of *Così fan tutte*,” in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. Linda Austern (New York: Routledge, 2002), 213–30.
- 3 No doubt there are several others, but one interesting example is the recent French film *Comme une image* (2004; in English distribution *Look at Me*), directed by Agnès Jaoui, who plays a lead role. “Soave” occurs several times, in a variety of guises: sometimes as singers rehearse it (Jaoui plays a vocal teacher at the Paris Conservatoire), sometimes as full-blown soundtrack music, and sometimes in a complex blend of the two. The music also includes the lengthy melisma on “Amore” in the sisters’ duet (no. 4), heard in the background as Jaoui and her fictional husband disagree (they will split by the end), but made complex by the fact that it’s apparently sung by neighbors practicing the music – an instance of overheard “courtyard” music that recalls the practicing in *Rear Window* across from James Stewart’s apartment.
- 4 See especially Alexander Walker, *National Heroes: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties* (London: Harrap, 1985), 15–18.

- 5 Marber's play debuted in London in 1997 and won the Critics Circle and Laurence Olivier Awards for best play that year. It bowed in New York in 1999 and garnered the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best foreign play. A fascinating glimpse into *Closer's* adaptation into film appears in "Interview with Patrick Marber," *Creative Screenwriting* 11/6 (November–December, 2004): 34–35.
- 6 A quality noted by many writers, including Pauline Kael, "A Movie Classic Is Not Nothing," review of *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, directed by John Schlesinger, *The New Yorker* (October 2, 1971), reprinted in Kael's *Deeper Into Movies* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1973), 289; Robert Hatch, review of *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, directed by John Schlesinger, *The Nation* (October 18, 1971): 382; and Philippe Pilard, "Cinéma britannique: la fin des tabous?" *L'Ecran amoureux* (2003): 123–29 (127).
- 7 For the symmetry and closed system in *Così*, see Andrew Steptoe, "Cosi fan tutte and Contemporary Morality," in *The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural Background to Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 121–39; Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 229–57; Edward Said, "Cosi fan tutte at the Limits," in *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 48–72; and Niklós Dolinszky, "'O cambio felice': Bruch und Isolation in *Così fan tutte*," *Musik und Ästhetik* 8/29 (2004): 15–33.
- 8 One is reminded of similar images in another Nichols film. In *The Graduate* (1967), the protagonist Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) frequently stares close-range at a fish tank, shot to fill the frame. In another memorable scene, he stands submerged in scuba gear at the bottom of his parents' pool. Unlike the situation in *Closer*, where the images signify fluidity, the tank and pool in *The Graduate* function as psychic escape, a return to the womb, as Benjamin flees the claustrophobic lavishness of his parents' lifestyle.
- 9 Scott D. Paulin discusses "Soave" in *Sunday*, in "Unheard Sexualities? Queer Theory and the Soundtrack," *Spectator* 17/2 (1997): 36–49.
- 10 The actual title is "The Blower's Daughter," performed and written by Damien Rice.
- 11 Another classical piece appears on the soundtrack, Schubert's G flat *Impromptu*, Op. 90, no. 3 (D899, no. 3), which I will discuss below.

Elsewhere, another famous work tied to desire is mentioned in the script, when a precocious niece of Alex's says she knows that her parents keep the pot (marijuana) behind a recording of *Tristan und Isolde* – a sly way of saying that *Tristan* makes you “high,” but also recognition of Alex and Bob's sexual activity in the family's house that weekend.

- 12 Among the most perceptive interpretations of “Soave” are Scott Burnham, “Mozart's *felix culpa*: *Così fan tutte* and the Irony of Beauty,” *The Musical Quarterly* 78 / 1 (Spring, 1994): 77–98; Edmund J. Goehring, *Three Modes of Perception in Mozart: The Philosophical, Pastoral, and Comic in Così fan tutte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 184–96; Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 285–98; Stefan Kunze, *Mozarts Opern* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 503–11; Michael Zywiets, “‘Meeresstille’ und ‘Glückliche Fahrt’: Das Terzettino ‘Soave sia il vento’ aus Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts *Così fan tutte*,” *Acta Mozartiana* 47 / 3–4 (2000): 72–84; and Bruce Alan Brown, *W. A. Mozart: Così fan tutte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 103–07.
- 13 Burnham, “Mozart's *felix culpa*,” 83.
- 14 Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 286–87, 296–98.
- 15 See, for instance, Brown, *W. A. Mozart: Così fan tutte*, 170–72; and Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, rev. edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 92.
- 16 Stefan Kunze, “Über das Verhältnis von musikalisch autonomer Struktur und Textbau in Mozarts Opern: Das Terzettino ‘Soave sia il vento’ (Nr. 10) aus *Così fan tutte*,” *Mozart-Jahrbuch 1973–74* (1975): 217–32 (220).
- 17 Søren Kierkegaard, “The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic,” in *Either/Or*, Part I (1843), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 45–135.
- 18 Peter Sellars's television film of *Così* strongly implies a past for Alfonso. It is not of a faded rake, but of a jaded, bitter man – a Vietnam vet, according to the director – who has not gotten past earlier emotional wounds, including a failed relationship with Despina. See Citron, “The Performance of Vision.”
- 19 Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 230; and Goehring, *Three Modes of Perception*, 186–87.
- 20 The musical examples come from W. A. Mozart, *Die Sieben großen Opern: Così fan tutte*, ed. Faye Ferguson and Wolfgang Rehm. *Urtext der*

- Neuen Mozart-Ausgabe, Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005).
- 21 For the meaning of the *alla breve* meter in Mozart's operas and the late eighteenth century, see the brilliant insights in Wye Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 17–23.
 - 22 Clarinets also do special dramatic work in the other Da Ponte operas. In *Figaro* the instrument is pegged to Cherubino's Eros-like desires and the Countess's affective laments. In *Don Giovanni* the instrument is frequently associated with Donna Elvira, and it colors her as a rich character with complex desires.
 - 23 Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 291.
 - 24 Conducted by Sir Georg Solti, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, with Renée Fleming (Fiordiligi), Anne-Sofie von Otter (Dorabella), and Michele Pertusi (Don Alfonso), Decca CD 444 174-2 (1996).
 - 25 For a perceptive discussion of how convention organizes the Trio, see Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 285–98.
 - 26 The screenplay is published: Penelope Gilliatt, *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971). Probably her best-known literary work in a corpus that includes novels and short stories, *Sunday* won Best Screenplay awards from the New York Film Critics Circle, the Writers Guild of America, and the Writers Guild of Great Britain.
 - 27 For insightful discussion of ambiguity in the categories, see Robynn Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184–202.
 - 28 Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 239–40.
 - 29 Michal Grover-Friedlander explores the intersection of voice and telephone in Poulenc's opera *La Voix humaine* and Rossellini's film *Una voce umana*, in "Opera on the Phone: The Call of the Human Voice," in *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 113–30.
 - 30 See William van Watson, "Shakespeare, Zeffirelli, and the Homosexual Gaze," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20/4 (1992): 308–25.
 - 31 For queer scoring in *Sunday* and other films, see Paulin, "Unheard Sexualities?" On a personal note, director Schlesinger was gay and

is known for showing aspects of his own life in his films. In *Sunday*, for example, ambivalence towards his Jewish background informs Daniel's character, in addition to his status as a cultured, aging homosexual.

- 32 Jerrold Levinson, "Film Music and Narrative Agency," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 248–82 (253). The concept comes from Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 33 No orchestra or conductor appears in the final credits, and I have not been able to ascertain the information. Lorengar and Minton are known for their big voices – Minton frequently sang Wagner – and this performance, unfortunately, is plodding and heavy. The very slow tempo contributes to this quality. Otto Klemperer, known for slow tempos in his Mozart recordings, recorded *Così* in London in 1971 with the New Philharmonia Orchestra, but except for Minton the cast does not match. I suspect that *Sunday's* "Soave" was conducted by Klemperer in a special recording session, especially since the year of the commercial recording matches the film's date so closely. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* notes that Klemperer's slow tempos characterized his last years (he died in 1973), and that the absence of nimbleness in his Mozart performances led to many detractors in Britain. See Peter Heyworth, "Klemperer, Otto," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), Vol. II, 1006.
- 34 A "writerly attention to detail" and the use of good scripts are hallmarks of Nichols's style that are mentioned in a notice of a retrospective of his works at the Museum of Modern Art; see Charles McGrath, "Mike Nichols, Master of Invisibility," *The New York Times* (April 12, 2009), Arts and Leisure section: 1, 9.
- 35 "Interview with Patrick Marber," 34.
- 36 According to Marber:

The play and the film are constructed around a very simple premise, which is that you see the beginning and the ending of every relationship. That might not be an apparent structure, but that's what it is. I suppose the thinking behind the play was that the beginning and the ending of a relationship are the truly significant events, so I just thought I'd cut the middle out. ("Interview with Patrick Marber," 34)

- 37 Anthony Lane, "Partners," review of *Closer*, directed by Mike Nichols, *The New Yorker* 80/39 (December 13, 2004): 107.
- 38 See especially Richard A. Blake, "Surfaces," review of *Closer*, directed by Mike Nichols, *America* 192/3 (January 31, 2005): 14–15.
- 39 The issue of who is in control – the stripper, or the leering john – is of course debatable, and I am presenting a more conventional feminist interpretation of the power relations in such a situation. For instance, some commentary on the film contends that in the scene between Larry and Alice in the private "paradise box" where she strips and shows body parts at his behest, it is ultimately Larry who is objectified by his neediness. While I see the point, I believe that the bottom-line relationship has the john in control and the stripper objectified. For the counter-view, see Blake, "Surfaces," 15.
- 40 A controlling female gaze in film – much more the exception than the rule – has been theorized by feminist scholars. See, for instance, Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). For a general study of the gaze in film, see the edited collection of Linda Williams, *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997). Nichols's strong focus on the controlling gaze of the apparatus itself brings to mind Michael Powell's startling film *Peeping Tom* (1960), where the male photographer's voyeuristic camera trained on women literally kills as a protruding knife slits their throat. The film was so controversial that it reportedly ruined Powell's career as a director. For a stimulating study, see Elisabeth Bronfen, "Killing Gazes, Killing in the Gaze: On Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 59–90.
- 41 Slavoj Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes'; or, The Invisible Master," in Žižek and Salecl, *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, 90–128 (93).
- 42 Nichols has had an intimate knowledge of classical music since his boyhood years in Europe, as mentioned in McGrath, "Mike Nichols," 9.
- 43 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 239–40.
- 44 *Così fan tutte* forms the basis of a *roman à clef* mystery featuring the Italian detective Aurelio Zen, in Michael Dibdin, *Così fan tutti* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). Notice the change of gender in the title, which takes in men as well as women. In addition to intriguing parallels

with the opera's plot and characters, each chapter title features a quote from the libretto. While the Contents lists them in English, each chapter head presents its quote in Italian. So, for instance, the title of the third chapter is "Bella vita militar" (Contents: "It's a great life in the forces").

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Aria (1987), produced by Don Boyd, directed (in alphabetical order) by Robert Altman, Bruce Beresford, Bill Bryden, Jean-Luc Goddard, Derek Jarman, Franc Roddam ("Liebestod"), Nicolas Roeg, Ken Russell ("Nessun dorma"), Charles Sturridge, and Julian Temple. Image Entertainment DVD 4701LY, 1999. (A recent PAL DVD version of *Aria* includes two important features: the documentary "Composing *Aria*," with comments by Boyd and many of the directors, including Roddam and Russell; and a voice-over commentary of the film by Boyd. Second Sight 2NDVD 3163, 2009.)

La Cérémonie (1995), directed by Claude Chabrol, with Isabelle Huppert, Sandrine Bonnaire, and Jacqueline Bisset. Home Vision Entertainment DVD CER 010, 2004. Includes the featurette "The Making of *La Cérémonie*."

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Madama Butterfly (1973), directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, conducted by Herbert von Karajan (Vienna Philharmonic), with Mirella Freni, Plácido Domingo, and Christa Ludwig. Decca DVD 071 404-9, 1990 (© 1974 Unitel).

Moonstruck (1987), directed by Norman Jewison, with Cher, Nicolas Cage, and Olympia Dukakis. Deluxe Edition. MGM DVD (2 disks) 14312,

2006. Includes a commentary track with Jewison and screenwriter John Patrick Shanley.

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