

# Introduction

## A Fundamental Continuity

“It Scares the Hell Out of the Slopes”

WAGNER’S “RIDE OF THE VALKYRIES” in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is emblematic of the complexity of the role played by classical music in modernist cinema. A complexity that is thus far underappreciated by modern film music scholarship and criticism. As Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) explains it in the film, he plays Wagner from loudspeakers attached to helicopters during an absurd mission to capture the surf break at “Charlie’s Point” because it inspires his men and “scares the hell out of the slopes.” But rather than intimidating the Vietcong, Wagner lets them know Kilgore and company are coming. Though the music makes victory seem inevitable for Kilgore’s cavalry, in the ensuing battle several helicopters are downed, and the enemy is only subdued when air support napalms the jungle perimeter. Kilgore wins the battle, but is less certain of winning the war. “Someday,” he muses shirtlessly before a surf, “this war is gonna end.”

The decision to use Wagner is often mistakenly credited to director Francis Ford Coppola and assumed to be an ironic allusion to D. W. Griffith’s 1915 racist historical epic, *The Birth of a Nation*, and its use of the same music during its climactic Ku Klux Klan cavalry attack on African Americans (Smith 221, M. Cooke 427). In fact, it was *Apocalypse Now*’s screenwriter and former NRA board member John Milius who chose Wagner for the film’s infamous helicopter assault sequence. Milius chose Wagner for his screenplay not just to satirize a war adrift or for the irony of the perceived contrast between the music and the machines,

but because of the similarity he felt he heard between Wagner's vanguard orchestral timbres and the sounds of helicopters (the emblematic modern vehicle for conventional military forces). An admirer of Wagner's music, Milius observed archly in an interview with Coppola, "Wagner just lends itself to helicopters for some reason."

Milius's idiosyncratic perception underpinning Hollywood's signature image of the Vietnam War is therefore both ironic—drawing attention to itself in a foolish and surreal spectacle—and appropriate—in the way the helicopters sound and act like Wagner's Valkyries as they administer "death from above." Similarly, Coppola's sequence based on Milius's screenplay, as a morally and politically ambivalent masterpiece and the film's true "heart of darkness," both satirizes and celebrates the war as a misguided excess of an empire. The Wagnerian soundtrack could not have been more fitting, for no other composer inspires harsher denunciations or greater reveries. Wagner's legacy remains bitterly contested, with some rejecting his music as fundamentally anti-Semitic and fascist. So, too, if Hollywood's mystification of the conflict is any indication, the United States has yet to come to terms with the bitter legacy of the Vietnam War. *Apocalypse*'s helicopter assault scene brings these disputes together without resolving or diminishing their arguments.

To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, Milius and Coppola used Wagner to capture the history of the Vietnam War not as it really happened—psychological operations ("psy-ops") involved playing rock music from helicopters, not Wagner—but as it flashes up in our cultural memory at a moment of danger ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 255). The moment of danger was the years just after the war ended when the struggle began to interpret it in Hollywood. Coppola's film contrasts with Hal Ashby's antiwar film *Coming Home* (1978), a love story set away from the battlefield among disillusioned, disabled veterans. Like Ashby, Coppola meant to criticize the war, but to Milius's amusement and Coppola's frustration, the film's signature helicopter assault scene has long since been repurposed as propaganda by the US military and has come to overshadow the film as a whole. As propaganda to inspire soldiers before battle, Wagner's music makes the scene that much more convincing and enjoyable, making victory a foregone conclusion and giving the audience a heroic theme to hum.

When we enjoy *Apocalypse Now*'s signature scene, the pleasure is similar to the ambivalent fascination with Wagner's life and music. "Our love of Wagner," music critic Joachim Kaiser argues, "is as infected as the wound that is suffered by Amfortas," the sinful but ultimately redeemed leader of the knights of the grail in Wagner's *Parsifal* (quoted in Geck xvii). The same could be said for the American public's fascination with

Hollywood films about Vietnam. The love for such films is infected by the tragic consequences of the conflict itself. Like Wagnerians who go on loving his music despite his anti-Semitism and his music's co-optation by the Nazi regime, filmgoers enjoy films about Vietnam despite the troubling facts about the US intervention there. They enjoy them despite the fact that the war was fundamentally about preventing the democratic unification of Vietnam after its war of independence, despite the millions of lives lost in Vietnam and neighboring countries during the war, and despite the ongoing environmental damage from the use of chemical weapons and from aerial bombings campaigns of unprecedented scope (Hirschman et al.).

*Apocalypse Now's* violent spectacle to procure a surf spot is a microcosm for these depressing underlying truths. But in its irrational use of Wagner's music that all but foils the attack, it also traffics in myths about why the US military was defeated that so many films about the Vietnam War perpetuate: that the US military lost because of its own missteps; and that US forces were really fighting themselves. Wagner's presence in the helicopter assault scene allegorically embodies a variation on these myths: the US military was only playing at war in Vietnam, as when Kilgore relishes his Wagnerian spectacle, and never really fought with everything it had.

Complex examples like Coppola and Milius's Wagnerian helicopter assault show that classical music's part in modernist cinema merits closer inspection. To borrow a metaphor from Kafka, classical music is an ax to break a frozen sea of assumptions about modernist cinema and vice versa: modernist cinema reminds us of underlying truths about classical music. Classical music is often perceived as stuffy and conservative. This is misguided. If there is an elitism to it, it is the democratic kind, an elite status earned by musicians who put in the work to master it. In principle, it is accessible to anyone who starts at a young age and is diligent about practicing. Good examples of classical music's populism are the heralded Sistema program in Venezuela, where any young person can take lessons and join an ensemble through government subsidy; or the now imperiled music programs in US public schools, where I and many others first learned to play.

With the music itself, it is the most original works that endure, not the conservative ones. The canon is composed of the works that test and defy audiences' and musicians' expectations while also remaining recognizably part of the tradition. Modernist cinema's appropriations of canonical classical music remind us of its original vanguard impulse. Such appropriations remind us that, as Arnold Schoenberg noted, canonical classical music remains new music. "In all great works of the great," he

writes, “we will find that newness which never perishes, whether it be of Josquin des Pres, of Bach or Haydn, or of any other great master. *Because: Art means New Art*” (“New Music” 114–15).

### Film Music Studies Newsreel

Modern film music scholarship and criticism has enhanced the discussion of classical music in film in three interrelated ways. First, it calls for greater appreciation of the diversity and complexity of emotions and meanings resulting from the interaction between cinema and classical music.<sup>1</sup> Second, it describes the long, complicated relationship between opera and cinema.<sup>2</sup> Third, in the most fraught line of inquiry, scholars focus on how the New German Cinema uses ironic appropriations of classical music to critique Germany’s Nazi legacy.<sup>3</sup>

These lines of inquiry merit a response that deepens and complicates them. First, of course, the sheer diversity of uses of classical music in films is undoubtedly a point of fact. But in several important, recent studies, the authors and anthology editors state or describe this fact in place of an argument or theory that might suggest how we comprehend the diversity (Joe 24, Stilwell and Powrie xix). While this attention to diversity is admirable and well-intentioned, declining to attempt a more definitive theory can itself become a problem. “All observation,” Charles Darwin once noted, “must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service” (quoted in Eldredge and Gould 85). Otherwise one winds up endlessly collecting data (“counting pebbles” in Darwin’s image) or, perhaps worse, unwittingly having a theory without knowing or acknowledging it. Along the same lines, Charles Rosen points out that even a bad theory is arguably better than none at all. “A bad theory,” he writes, “often provokes an interesting and useful response” (*Sonata Forms*, “Preface”).

Second, while the opera and cinema connection is a crucial one, instrumental classical music’s representation of the basic paradox of musical expression in its extreme form is key to understanding music’s diversity of functions in film. Music’s paradox is that it is both inferior and superior to language. It cannot communicate basic information as language can, but it can express, represent, and elicit emotions with degrees of power and refinement that language only begins to approach at its most poetic (Rosen, *Music and Sentiment* 5–6). Music’s indefinite message combined with its emotional definitiveness allows it to color situations and contexts in film in such diverse ways, indeed often simultaneously, and is the key to challenging the misconception that modernist cinema’s use of classical music is exclusively or primarily ironic.

Third, for comprehending modernist cinema, the category of national cinema is neither general nor specific enough compared with the venerable category of the auteur—the director as the film’s author. Nationalism is not general enough because the influences on auteurs are national and international, idiosyncratic and universal. It is not specific enough because directors within nationally defined cinematic movements often make very different films. In the New German Cinema movement, Werner Herzog and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg offer cases in point.

While Herzog’s films have been criticized for their dilettantish enthusiasm for Wagner and Romanticism more generally, Syberberg is praised for his ironic flair with both. The truth in both cases is more complicated. The accusation that Herzog’s “reevaluation of Romanticism . . . without the component of nationalism” results in a form of self-deceiving liberation overlooks the educational value of many of his documentaries (Hillman, *Unsettling Scores* 137). His documentary about the Bayreuth Festival’s 1994 season, *The Transformation of the World into Music*, presents Wagner’s work in its historical and living contexts, including a critical account of its anti-Semitic and Nazi associations. (It was Wagner’s daughter-in-law Winifred who was a personal friend of Hitler’s and cultivated the Nazi regime’s ties to Bayreuth.) The film succeeds because of Herzog’s clear admiration for Wagner’s operas and for the musicians, artists, and tradespeople who keep the music alive. So while he does not neglect Wagner’s anti-Semitism and his Nazi co-optation, these extreme right-wing uses of Wagner’s legacy do not get the final word because, after all, Wagner’s music endures despite, not because of, the Nazi stain.

Meanwhile, when Syberberg flirts with fascism in *Our Hitler: A Film from Germany*, this is considered evidence of his ironic, kitsch sensibility and “stylistic temerity” (Flinn, *The New German Cinema* 7). But as his complaints about the influence of Jews and leftists in reunified Germany and his opinion that Hitler was “a genius, who acted as the medium of the *Weltgeist*” show, Syberberg is being more than ironic about Nazism in *Our Hitler* (quoted in Buruma, “There’s No Place Like Heimat”). Ian Buruma’s image for Syberberg’s relationship to Hitler is as damning as it is incisive: “the fascinating thing is that Syberberg’s philosophy . . . is articulated most clearly by a ventriloquist’s dummy in the shape of Hitler” (There’s No Place Like Heimat”). At the end of Part III of *Our Hitler*, Syberberg ventriloquizes Hitler to rail against democracy and “third class people” while emphasizing that the Nazis helped create Israel (“We got the Jews their state”). Throughout the film, Wagner’s music is mined for its rhetorical and expressive power in a way that is similarly more sincere

than ironic, more interested in reinforcing Wagner's link to Nazism than in reclaiming him from the association with their atrocities.

### A Fundamental Continuity

In varying ways, the examples of Coppola's, Herzog's, and even Syberberg's disturbing film show that it is not enough to say that modernist cinema ironically undermines classical music's expressive power. There is also a fundamental continuity, a *likeness*, between classical music's traditions and the aesthetics of modernist cinema, which can both be regarded to varying degrees as avant-garde in sensibility. Luis Buñuel's lifelong adoration of Wagner is the holotype<sup>4</sup> for the dialectic of irony and continuity between classical music and modernist cinema. For as much as he deconstructs Wagner's music in his early films, Buñuel also saw a deeper parallel in their shared focus on love's subversive power (*My Last Sigh* 219). His early films acknowledge this solidarity by transfiguring the Liebestod from *Tristan and Isolde* (see Sangild, "Buñuel's Liebestod"). He returned to Wagner's music and tropes not frequently but significantly throughout his career, including in the last scene of his last film, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, where the perverse reverie of the hero, Mathieu (Fernando Rey), to an excerpt from *Die Walküre* ends only because an even greater surrealist dream comes true when anarchists bomb a shopping mall.

For a more contemporary example, think of the opening sequence of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), where the Prelude from *Tristan* becomes an accompaniment for a slow-motion apocalypse. (Or is the apocalypse a mere accompaniment to *Tristan*?) The *Tristan* Prelude is in a narrow sense the wrong music by Wagner for such a scene (Hello? *Gotterdammerung*?!), but all the same it works. In fact, it is so much the better for the specific story of a depressed heroine who cannot find redemption in romantic love, but finds relief when the other earth, "Melancholia," collides with ours.

Walter Benjamin suggests that extreme cases like Buñuel and von Trier's films are worth greater consideration because they give us more information than typical or average ones. Schoenberg noted something similar about the futility of seeking norms and averages in his comment on the nature of artistic theory. "Theories of art," he writes, "consist mainly of exceptions" (*Theory of Harmony* 11). And Slavoj Žižek similarly begins his analysis of Hitchcock's films with *The Wrong Man* because it is an exception among them. "The only way to reach the underlying law of a universe," Žižek proclaims with his usual aversion to understatement, "is through its exception" ("In His Bold Gaze" 211).

Modernism is typified by such exceptionality and extremity. For Fredric Jameson, this challenges a widely held assumption about modernism's origin: that it is a reaction to economic modernization. As Jameson also points out, fundamental modernist works tend to come from the periphery of modernity, not the urban, industrial center. The word itself was coined by Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario. Joyce's *Ulysses*, the modernist novel, is set in late-colonial Dublin; the South is central to American modernist literature (*A Singular Modernity* 99–105).

The directors and composers examined in this book are similarly peripheral and essential. Richard Wagner rebelled against the conventions of Grand Opera, yet his work is also its summation. To escape Franco's fascist regime, Luis Buñuel went into exile, and the resulting alienation is a key element of his authorial signature (V. Fuentes 160). Thanks to his "offshore" location in the United Kingdom, Kubrick's work is a part of and apart from the Hollywood system. Godard epitomized the French New Wave, but by continuously revolutionizing his filmmaking, he left it behind when its other exponents were finally hitting their stride. Haneke embodies the opposite phenomena. He is a late (and Austrian) arrival in the New German Cinema, providing its extreme version, thanks to doses of Kubrick's coldness and Godard's censorious melancholy, mixed with a directorial sensibility honed in television.

Standing to a degree outside their social contexts allows these directors to identify key modern historical conjunctures. In his critiques of the bourgeoisie and Catholicism, Buñuel notes the left's ongoing struggle against the fascism which was never defeated in his homeland (and that is newly resurgent today). For Kubrick, key conjunctures are the French Revolution, World War I, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War. Godard is fascinated with the New Left, anticolonial struggles, and the 1960s and their aftermath. Haneke's vision is defined by an overriding sense of discontent with the end of history, with life after the triumph of global capitalism in 1989. In each of these contested interpretive fields, classical music becomes not a nostalgic voice from a golden age, but what it always has been—an enigmatic historical commentator on and participant in the ongoing dramas of economic modernization, political modernity, and cultural modernism.

In an interview with Carlos Fuentes in 1973, Buñuel's reflections on the heady days of his youth are characteristic of vanguard artists' sense of their contribution to the drama of history.

Forty years ago, everything was very clear-cut. We thought we knew the issues. There was a defined line, moral, artistic, political; it all went together, a new art that would

enlarge conscience and sensibility, along with a revolutionary politics . . . We could then attack the bourgeoisie, surprise it, because it was so sure of itself . . . Now that's all changed . . . The media . . . make everything innocuous, fashionable. Just before he died, Breton told me: "Dear friend, it is no longer possible to scandalize anybody." Maybe he was right. (quoted in C. Fuentes, "The Discreet Charm of Luis Buñuel" 70)

The essential element here is the scope of Buñuel's ambition. His art was to be more than just art—it was to be an attack on philistine sensibilities and the political order sustaining them. If it is, as Buñuel speculates, no longer possible to provoke the scandals of old with one's attacks, and increasingly difficult to "enlarge conscience and sensibility" among desensitized consumers, that has not stopped the most ambitious and politically conscious of auteurs from trying. The fact that this ambitious approach to cinema persists signals that modernism itself—despite reports of its demise—has yet to be relegated to the dustbin of history.

To sum up: there is a fundamental continuity between classical music and its associated aesthetic ideals and some of the most significant modernist cinema; and, in both hidden and more obvious ways, modernist cinema renews the subversive energy of classical music masterworks. In this way, this book casts classical music in a more central role in the history of modernist cinema than has been previously proposed.

Its central role for classical music is part of what makes modernist cinema's sense of history distinct. Cinema's most frequent effect on historical subjects is to bring them back to life through realist aesthetics of verisimilitude and reenactment. Modernist cinema's interaction with classical music points to two different historical effects beyond this often misleading historical realism. In both the way it renders the "deep time" of the cinema's art-historical prehistory and the way music triggers memories and associations in qualitatively different ways than images and language, classical music is cinema's historical repressed returning. The effect of music on our lives, in other words, is both an older and a more transient form of experience than that of glimpsing moving images on screens. It is both more ancient and more immediate than encounters with moving images.

Its combination of emotional immediacy and art-historical "deep time" makes classical music modernist cinema's figure for the eternal. Baudelaire defined modernity in art as "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent" and contrasted it with the "other half of art . . . the eternal and the immutable" ("The Painter of Modern Life" 13). Benjamin went



a step further by identifying the two. “The eternal,” he proposes, “is in any case far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea” (*Arcades Project* 69). If Benjamin’s metaphor works as a figure for eternity, it is because intuitively at first it does not. Like a transient musical performance, nothing could be less eternal than a superfluous ruffle on a dress. But then one remembers the venerable solution to this paradox. The traditional shrug accompanies it. The yawn of boredom follows. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Again and again modernist cinema manages to shrug off boredom and enliven such clichés in a process film critic André Bazin describes as progress won by cycling back to cinema’s origins. “Every new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented!” (*What Is Cinema?* 21). Modernist cinema is thus original in a double sense: its new developments are original, as are its returns to its origins to find them. And to an underappreciated extent, those origins are in classical music. “Wagner?! God, again?!” one can easily imagine the technician in charge of temp tracks asking. “Yes, Wagner again,” the figures in this book reply, “but we will make it new”—just like it felt originally, when the cinema had yet to be invented.

## Coming Attractions

Chapter 1—“What Happens to an Apocalypse Deferred”—expands on musicologist Deryck Cooke’s insight that while Wagner the philosopher believed in a bygone “golden age,” the story of *The Ring* itself posits no such prehistorical period (258). *The Ring*’s afterlife in modernist cinema adds another level of critique to Wagner’s own unconscious self-criticism of his philosophy in his art. While *The Ring* hinges on Wotan’s decision to forsake power, its key appropriations in modernist cinema feature authorities clinging to power at all costs. At the same time, the visions of directors like Griffith, Coppola, and Herzog bear witness to the enduring modernity of Wagner’s art by associating it with new visions of epochal and apocalyptic events. And in a final analysis, Wagner’s vision of timely questionings of authority and subsequent rebellions remain in many ways more radical and subversive than his most significant modernist cinematic appropriations, which often lack the political imagination to see beyond the status quo of looming environmental catastrophe.

Fundamental to Chapter 2—“The Imperfect Wagnerite”—is the observation that Buñuel’s most daring films, either in their formal experimentation or in confronting political authorities, all feature classical music prominently. The early masterpieces, *Un chien andalou* (1929), *L’age*

*d'or* (1930), and *Las Hurdes* (1933), feature it most extensively. But Buñuel returned to classical music in *Viridiana* (1961) and periodically thereafter in *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). All of these films are unique variations on Buñuel's consistent aesthetic—to have modernized and politicized the transformation of the individual through erotic love that in *Tristan Wagner* imagined as fundamentally sacred. Buñuel's modernism is both a critique and a radicalization of the emancipatory political and cultural project of Romanticism—just as surrealism was not so much a rejection of Romanticism and realism as their synthesis.

Chapter 3, “‘A Film Should Be Like Music,’” begins with the observation that Stanley Kubrick's films are often at their most historical when they are at their most musical. In particular, Kubrick associates classical music with the historical development of the modern psychological subject. Thus music and the condition of music are central to scenes of indoctrination and of recognition and reversal in Kubrick that relate to historical shifts in human psychology. This complex pattern holds true at a number of crucial junctures, including scenes of indoctrination in *Full Metal Jacket* and *A Clockwork Orange*, traumatic encounters in *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, and sudden mental evolution in *2001*. As Roland Barthes wrote, “The historical meaning of the lied must be sought in its music” (274). The same is true of Kubrick's films, and the historical task of music in his films is to represent repressed psychic histories by both fixing and rupturing the meaning of his films.

Chapter 4, “Too Soon, Too Late, and Still to Come” focuses on Godard's tendency to feature fragments of classical music in his films. These fragments are more than emotive refinements of narrative developments. They are—as fragmentary ruins—signs of the current state of history, which from Godard's idiosyncratic but clearly leftist political standpoint is a matter of immense dissatisfaction. In addition to associating classical music with leftist politics, Godard also associates it with reflections on the history of cinema. From the standpoint of his use of fragments of classical music, Godard's *idées fixes* of leftist politics and cinematic art have occurred both too soon and too late on the stage of history. Godard's films bear witness to this historical noncoincidence of its major ideas and their realization in their abiding sense of melancholy. And yet, at the same time, Godard's use of classical music as source music in the films is often more optimistic and lighthearted in tone. Godard's reference in particular to Mozart has this quality of already being in a future world where work and love are united.

Chapter 5, “Before a Winter's Journey,” reads Haneke's film as an anachronistic prequel to Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise*. When Erika

(Isabelle Huppert) hits bottom after her affair with her student Walter (Benoit Magimel), the film ends just as she departs on her winter's journey. At this moment, she resembles the singer in Schubert's cycle and the speaker in Wilhelm Müller's monodrama. She has failed at love and abandoned the other defining characteristics of her life. The main historical implication of Haneke's anachronistic prequel is a desire to return to the prehistory of film music and to go in a different direction, to identify the cinema with chamber music and above all with Schubertian lied rather than opera, yet Schubert's art songs eventually contributed to major reforms in Romantic opera, while chamber music and opera are not as opposed as might ordinarily be assumed. In this way, Haneke offers a critique of film music by searching out one of its origins organically, that is, in a film about the life of a singularly distressed classical musician, one for whom the remedy for her suffering is to become one of classical music's key archetypes while leaving the music itself behind.

The conclusion notes the importance of metaphor throughout the book and analyzes Terrence Malick's 2011 film *The Tree of Life* as an extreme example of modernist cinema's search for origins. It revisits the origins of the universe and life on earth as a prelude to flashbacks to the protagonist's childhood. The film incorporates key classical works at crucial moments, including Zbigniew Preisner's *Requiem for a Friend*, written in honor of his collaborator, the Polish auteur Krzysztof Kieslowski. This leads to a discussion of his *Three Colors* trilogy as a similar attempt to Malick's to incorporate the ideals of the Enlightenment into modernist film. It ends by comparing the film's use of Mahler's Symphony No. 1 and his attempts to keep the classical tradition alive by reinventing it with borrowings from folk and popular music with how Malick's film attempts to renew ancient wisdom in light of scientific discoveries. Like Preisner and Kieslowski, for Mahler and Malick, despite setbacks, the struggle for Enlightenment values continues.

### Failing Better at Reading Walter Benjamin

In his controversial treatise *The Philosophy of New Music*, Theodor Adorno attempted to apply Walter Benjamin's philosophical-historical method of literary criticism to the study of music. Benjamin outlines what his method entails in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. "Philosophical history, the science of the origin," he notes, "is the form which, in the remotest extremes and the apparent excesses of the process of development, reveals the configuration of the idea—the sum total of all possible meaningful juxtapositions of such opposites. The representation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the

whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored” (47). Adorno used Benjamin’s method to juxtapose what he saw as two opposed extremes of European musical modernism—Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Their juxtaposition was meant to configure the general idea of new music.

But Adorno’s application of Benjamin’s method has been shown to have two fatal flaws. First, it is motivated by a bias—what Charles Rosen calls Adorno’s “parochialism”—in which Schoenberg represents the heroic continuation of central European musical culture and Stravinsky represents an alien intruder from a marginal culture (Rosen, “Should We Adore Adorno?”). The second problem is that Adorno limits himself from the outset to only two extremes from essentially only one category of modern music: the European avant-garde. Adorno makes this mistake in part because he ignores the crucial second sentence of Benjamin’s formulation in his invocation of Benjamin. “The representation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored.” Ignoring this stipulation, Adorno refused from the outset to explore the full range of possible extremes. As Rosen observes, “Adorno . . . eliminates from his review all forms of popular music, including jazz, and refuses to consider such contemporary figures as Rachmaninov and Sibelius. Hindemith is dismissed as a reactionary and Bartók given the most cursory treatment. In this way, he reduces the picture of the modern age to two isolated images” (“Should We Adore Adorno?”).

Like Adorno, my musical focus is limited to what one would typically refer to as European classical music and could not be considered complete by Benjamin’s standard because the whole range of opposed types of music in film is not explored. Perhaps this “better failure,” to paraphrase Samuel Beckett, is only an improvement in its self-awareness. But a broader justification for the singular focus resides in the fact that the historical and ontological tension that defines music more generally is at its most extreme in classical music. This tension involves the distance between the ideal of a piece of music and its realization in a performance. “Since the eighteenth century, the almost absolute separation between composer and performer has exacerbated the inevitable tension between conception and realization that exists even on the level of improvisation. It has placed the work of music beyond realization but within the range of everyone’s imagining” (Rosen, “The Aesthetics of Stage Fright” 10).

Modernist cinema heightens this tension between idea and realization by associating recorded realizations of music with its own ideas and contexts. Paradigmatically, modernist cinema displaces musical works to new contexts and thereby estranges them still further from their abstract

idealization. Even with modern or contemporary classical music—whose history coincides with that of the cinema—modernist cinema often associates it with historical settings at variance with its own social context. Kubrick's *2001* is a good example. Ligeti's *Atmosphères* is rendered in the future tense, as a soundtrack for the film's mystified version of the evolution of human consciousness, while the "Kyrie" from his *Requiem* becomes a recurring leitmotif for the eternal monolith's interventions in human history. Similarly, in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, the second movement from Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata*, meant as a Cartesian search for musical first principles by Ligeti, stands for a remnant from the Second World War in a film otherwise hailing, in terms of both its production and its historical imagination, from after the end of the Cold War, adapted from a novella from before either war began. In both cases, Ligeti's music's fuller realization, in the sense of reaching an audience of millions, dealt a blow to its absolute idealization. This is apparent in the way these pieces of Ligeti's music occupied a strange place, at least among cinephiles, where it is practically impossible to hear them without thinking of Kubrick's films. In this sense, Kubrick's use of these pieces has altered the very idea of them.

Such examples echo an unusual phenomenon in music history where vanguard pieces exist in advance of the conditions for their performance. Charles Rosen develops this point through an analogy with the history of the watermill (see Bloch, "The Advent and Triumph of the Watermill"). For Rosen, the history of the invention and belated exploitation of watermill technology is a model for how music develops relatively independent of its social context. Despite its immense benefits for productivity, the watermill was not fully integrated into Roman society until approximately five centuries after it was invented in the first century BC, and then it persisted as a means of production long after it was no longer the best option, well into the nineteenth century. These disjunctions were due to the exploitative conditions of labor relations in both eras. "As slavery declined," Rosen notes, "the expense of building watermills paid for itself, above all when the lord who owned the water rights could make his tenants pay for grinding their grain . . . When steam power provided an even more practical way of making flour, the water mills continued to be used because the local lord could force his tenants to continue bringing the grain to his mill" ("From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra"). From this, Rosen concludes that "the processes of invention and exploitation are out of phase. Inventions arrive before they are needed and continue to be employed when they are no longer useful. The history of society and the history of scientific invention do not fit neatly together" ("From the Troubadours"). The same is true in

music history. “Bach’s great Mass in B minor was never performed during his lifetime: as a Catholic Mass, it could not be played in a Protestant church, and the use of an orchestra was forbidden in Catholic churches during Bach’s lifetime, although he hoped it might eventually be possible” (“From the Troubadours”).

As in music history, so too for classical music’s role in modernist cinema: the music and the film’s contexts are out of phase. Most often in modernist cinema, classical music is an older art persisting in stories set in modern and contemporary times. One such example occurs in Michael Haneke’s *The Piano Teacher* and features the “Andante con Moto” from Schubert’s Piano Trio in E flat. After the film shows musicians discussing phrasing for the piece in rehearsal, they begin the piece again, but abruptly, as the music continues as a sound bridge, the scene shifts to Erika (Isabelle Huppert), the titular piano teacher, exiting an elevator in a mall in Berlin. The shock of the ensuing sequence is due not simply to the way the music feels out of place, the way it seemingly belongs to a more refined environment than a mall full of bratty teenagers who nearly trample Erika. The greater shock is that the music perfectly suits the story and images at this point. As the scene proceeds and Erika enters a sex shop and then a private viewing booth, the many parallels between changes in the Schubert and the film make the entire situation that much more revealing. It is as if Schubert’s trio was written nearly two hundred years ahead of its time, and its melancholy message were only fully expressed as an accompaniment for the exploration of sexuality in the alienated context of late-stage capitalism.

### Auteurs Say “Fuck It”

Auteurism’s modernist rebellion began with François Truffaut’s 1954 polemic “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” which challenged the French film establishment’s “Cinema of Quality” on the grounds that its purported psychological realism was neither psychological nor realistic. For Truffaut, this was because the “Cinema of Quality” upheld bourgeois values rather than satirizing them, as had the literary canon of psychological realism. For Truffaut, the director, not the screenwriter, was the true author of the film, and auteurism became a tool for exploding an old, and creating a new, canon of French and American directors in the stifling creative environment of the French film establishment after World War II. Liberating experiments in personal style by New Wave and Left Bank auteurs followed, including Truffaut’s own early masterpiece *The 400 Blows* (1959). Such films sparked similar rebellions

in German cinema and Hollywood and continue to reverberate across world cinema up to the present.

As Hollywood's modernist period, the Hollywood Renaissance of the 1970s was the heyday for auteurism's directorial control of production and a high-water mark in the industry in terms of originality and diversity. Peter Biskind's description of the era is appropriately nostalgic. "The thirteen years between *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 and *Heaven's Gate* in 1980 marked the last time it was really exciting to make movies in Hollywood, the last time people could be consistently proud of the pictures they made, the last time the community as a whole encouraged good work, the last time there was an audience that could sustain it" (*Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* 17).

Coppola's description of an artistically inclined director's dilemma on the set of *Apocalypse Now* is of note because it dates from the beginning of the end of the Hollywood Renaissance, and the end of the heyday of the auteurism that Truffaut's writings and films had begun. Facing financial ruin, creative difficulties, and negative press, Coppola summoned his vision of a director at the moment when his career had become emblematic of Hollywood's divorce from the perceived risks of auteurism. "Nothing is so terrible as a pretentious movie," he begins bitterly.

I mean a movie that aspires for something really terrific and doesn't pull it off is shit. It's scum. And everyone will walk on it as such. And that's why poor filmmakers in a way . . . their greatest horror is to be pretentious. So here you are, on the one hand, trying to aspire to really do something. And on the other hand, you're not allowed to be pretentious. And finally you say fuck it. I don't care if I'm pretentious or I'm not pretentious . . . or if I've done it or I haven't done it. All I know is that I am going to see this movie and that for me it has to have some answers. And by answers I don't mean just a punch-line; I mean answers on about forty-seven different levels. It's very hard to talk about these things without being very corny. You use a word like self-purgation or epiphany and they think you're either a religious weirdo or an asshole college professor, but those are the words for the process, this transmutation, this renaissance, this rebirth, which is the basis of all life. The one rule of all men from the time they were first walking around and looking up and scratching around for an animal to kill . . . the first concept that I feel got into their head was the idea of life and death; that the sun went down

and the sun went up. When they learned how to make a crop and then in the winter all the crops died, the first man must have thought, "Oh my god, this is the end of the world." And then all of a sudden there was spring and everything came alive and it was better. And I mean after all, look at Vietnam. Look at my movie. You'll see what I'm talking about.

This "pretentious" speech has roughly three parts. First, it begins with a summary of the process by which a director overcomes his fear of being pretentious. Second, it includes a satirical and self-deprecating moment that marks the threshold of pretentiousness, with Coppola naming its stereotypical residents ("religious weirdos and asshole college professors"). And third, it takes flight into a pretentious, mythological anecdote that ends with the non sequitur of Coppola insisting that one simply view his film to comprehend the forty-seven different levels of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Like Coppola, the principal directors discussed in this book have, in various ways, said "fuck it" to being pretentious so that their films might at least mean something to themselves. Of all the ways auteurs risk being pretentious, using excerpts or fragments from classical music is among the most obvious. At such pretentious moments, the classical music expropriated comes close to being reborn. Except that it has never died, but continued to develop interdependently with other modern historical processes.

On account of its stubborn persistence after its initial periods and contexts, classical music in modernist cinema bears a family resemblance to Gloria Swanson's immortal performance as Norma Desmond in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* (1950). Desmond is a star from the silent era whose time has passed. When it becomes clear that her planned comeback has failed, she reacts by shooting the messenger, her lover Joe Gillis (William Holden), and retreating into psychosis. In one of Hollywood's great endings, murdering Gillis inadvertently fulfills Desmond's greatest wish. She finally reappears on the biggest stage of all when she descends the staircase in her mansion under the delusion that the news cameras are filming her latest movie, not her downfall. Like Desmond at this moment on the staircase, there is something sublimely defiant about supposedly outdated, "irrelevant" classical music's persistence in modernist cinema. And like Desmond, classical music in modernist cinema is ready for its close-up.