

— International —
Master in Composition
— for Screen

Research paper

2nd cycle (Master)

University year 2021-2022

**Post-minimalist techniques in the writing of
modern film scores through the collaboration
between Thomas Newman and Sam Mendes**

Rodrigo Daniel MURILLO FLORES

Principal discipline: Music Composition for the Screen

Principal discipline teacher: Gilles Alonzo & François-Xavier Dupas

Name of referent teacher: Chloé Huvet

Date of the presentation: June 23 & 24 2022

Institutions: Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Lyon &
Université de Montréal



Université de Montréal

Techniques post-minimalistes dans l'écriture de musiques de films modernes à travers la
collaboration entre Thomas Newman et Sam Mendes

Par

Rodrigo Daniel Murillo Flores

Faculté de Musique

Mémoire présenté en vue de l'obtention du grade de maîtrise en Musique, option
composition pour l'écran

25 Juillet 2022

© Rodrigo Daniel Murillo Flores, 2022

Université de Montréal

Faculté de musique

Ce mémoire intitulé

**Post-minimalist techniques in the writing of modern film scores through the
collaboration between Thomas Newman and Sam Mendes**

Présenté par

Rodrigo Daniel Murillo Flores

A été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes

Pierre Michaud

Président-rapporteur

François-Xavier Dupas

Directeur de recherche

Francis Perron

Membre du jury

[Français]

Résumé

Ce projet de recherche se concentre sur la musique de Thomas Newman dans les films de Sam Mendes, il se focalise spécifiquement sur trois films qui représentent particulièrement bien la trajectoire de leur collaboration au cours des deux dernières décennies. Ces trois films sont : *Road to Perdition* (2002), *Revolutionary Road* (2008) et *1917* (2019).

En analysant les dispositifs musicaux, les techniques post-minimalistes dans l'écriture et la forme structurelle de la musique, ce mémoire étudie les rôles des ambiances musicales en lien avec les thèmes musicaux dans ces films et théorise comment ces ambiances contribuent à la forme du film en fonction de leur structure narrative.

Mots-clés

Postminimalisme

Musique de film

Ambiances musicales

Thomas Newman

Sam Mendes

[English]

Abstract

This research project is dedicated to analyzing the music of Thomas Newman in the films of Sam Mendes, specifically focusing on three films that represent particularly well the trajectory of their collaboration over the past two decades. These three films are: Road to Perdition (2002), Revolutionary Road (2008) and 1917 (2019).

By analyzing musical devices, post-minimalist techniques in writing and the structural form of music, this thesis studies the roles of musical atmospheres in relation to the musical themes in these films and theorizes how these atmospheres contribute to the form of the film according to their narrative structure.

Keywords

Postminimalism

Film Music

Musical Ambiances

Thomas Newman

Sam Mendes

Acknowledgements

Getting through this dissertation required an extensive research process in order to narrow down the subject, identify the target films to study and finding the most relevant matters for this thesis. Also, the analysis of the scores not only required many hours of deep study but also some visual guidelines and templates to correctly translate the results into a graph that could effectively show the results in a panoramic view. None of this would have been possible without the help of my main professors, Gilles Alonzo and François-Xavier Dupas, as they have provided me with the appropriate tools to appreciate and analyze a score as well as individual musical pieces. For that I am very thankful to them, but specially, I would like to extend my gratitude to my reference professor for this dissertation, Chloé Huvet. She has been there since the start to guide me through the process of defining the problematic, as well as the elaboration of graphs, suggestion of bibliographic sources and general revision of the writing process. Without further ado, thanks to all who contributed in this research and in the elaboration of this thesis.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	4
Table of contents	7
Introduction/Roadmap: A disruptive collaboration in the modern film industry	9
1. <i>Historical context: Filmmaking in the new millennium</i>	9
2. <i>A closer look into the works of Mendes and Newman</i>	11
3. <i>Postminimalism and musical ambiences in Newman’s scores</i>	14
4. <i>Chapter breakdown: Target question and planning</i>	19
I. Musical structure and narrative in the selected films by Sam Mendes	21
1. <i>Usage of musical themes, thematic development, and the identity component in Newman’s scores</i>	21
2. <i>Musical ambiences and their contribution to the structure of the films of Sam Mendes</i>	25
3. <i>Methods of thematic development through motifs and their connection to narrative in the three films analyzed</i>	30
II. Functions of musical context and post-minimalist techniques in Newman’s selected scores	36
1. <i>The construction of musical ambiences through post minimalist textures in Road to Perdition</i>	36
2. <i>Thematic development and preparation through musical cells in Revolutionary Road</i>	42
3. <i>The propelling force of music through time in 1917</i>	47
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	56
Annexes	59
Table of illustrations	65
Abstract	66

Introduction/Roadmap: A disruptive collaboration in the modern film industry

1. Historical context: Filmmaking in the new millennium.

Crossing the line towards the 21st century marked the beginning of a new era for the American film industry. The start of a new millennium is expected to bring innovation, progress, reinvention of things, and many other changes, and our civilization was anxiously awaiting the beginning of a new stage in the history of media and entertainment. When it comes to the American film industry, there were many actors that inspired the transition towards the new millennium, also referred to as a revolution by some authors (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015, p. 4), that affected the entire way we conceive motion pictures during this century. Some of these actors were the success of independent cinema, the continuous presence of post-modernist features and the beginning of the digital era which brought new production and distribution possibilities, but also, the new takes on “symphonism” in film music and new ways of developing narrative in the screenwriting process.

Any modification in the way narrative is constructed in a film will drastically affect its musical needs. In the digital era, the classical narrative form that dominated the industry during the XXth century is slowly being replaced in certain movies by new experimental forms of narrative with different purposes as deduced from Peter Greenaway’s statement in 2007 about the evolution of modern cinema¹ (Coonan, 2007). In fact, many modern authors over the past few decades have theorized about the sudden interest in producing spectacle through digital technology at the expense of narrative (McQuire, 2000, p. 42). Thomas Elsaesser, back in 1986, started the discussion about the decay of familiar narrative forms in films in his publication “Early cinema to cinema’s potential demise” where he established that not many authors address why narrative became the driving force of cinema and whether this may itself be subject to a change (McQuire, 2000, p. 41). I believe there is also a

¹ Clifford Coonan. Greenaway announces the death of cinema – and blames the remote-control zapper *The Independent*, October 10, 2007, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/greenaway-announces-the-death-of-cinema-and-blames-the-remotecontrol-zapper-394546.html>, accessed March 20, 2022.

notable interest in the reaction of traditional film narrative forms through the years of development and the upbringing of new technologies. These predictions might refer to a transformation and deconstruction of cinematic narrative, that will eventually lead to a modernist relation between aesthetic visuals and time in films.

“Film itself has not disappeared, of course; but filmmaking has been transformed, over the past two decades, from an analog process to a heavily digitized one” (Shaviro, 2010, p.130). This time, we were not only facing a revolution in the way cinema is thought of, but it is also a revolution in the process of making it. The same way television broadcasting emerged from the idea of cinema, many other forms of media have derived from it, and just like these so-called “new medias” were once heavily influenced by the 7th art they can also affect the way cinema develops nowadays.

Many of the elements that surround the idea of cinema have gained an unimaginable value during the past couple of decades. Film aesthetics, for instance, has a whole new meaning nowadays and has been explored in many different aspects, we could say it has been expanded to new non-narrative dimensions. “Aesthetics [...] is a fancy word for, ‘The philosophy of art’ and seeks to answer the questions pertaining to the definition of art, its role in man’s life, and by what standards works of art can be judged (if any)”² (Jacobs, 2015). During this century, we have come to discover the possibilities of chaos cinema, a very dynamic way of film editing that accumulates energy in a series of shots without dedicating time to build up any of these segments. Also, many recent action blockbuster movies have shown the use of new film aesthetic techniques, such as “intensified continuity” and “post-continuity” as coined by Steven Shaviro in his 2010 book *Post Cinematic Affect* (Denson and Leyda, 2016). After all, film aesthetics can heavily impact a film on the single dimension of a shot or on that of the entire narrative, and narrative is arguably one of the main interests for this study when we speak about film analysis (Shaviro, 2016).

² Derek Jacobs. *The Basics of Film Aesthetics* (Plot and Theme, April 24, 2015) <https://plotandtheme.com/2015/04/24/the-basics-of-film-aesthetics/>, accessed March 20, 2022.

2. A closer look into the works of Mendes and Newman.

Back in 1999, *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), a promising and staggering black-comedy movie, was released to bring new life in the common aesthetics and thematic development of films. It was the cinematic debut of Sam Mendes, an English director known for his theatrical background, and was acclaimed by critics and filmmakers mainly focused in the American film industry, and in the year 2000 it received the top prize at the Academy Awards in the category of Best Picture. It gave a proper closure of a whole century of cinema with a slight spark of disruptive hope to give way to the next one. The matters that were overpowered in films in the 1980s with the technological novelties that exhausted the energies of moviegoers up to this point were no longer present in this creation, and still, it managed to make an impact and leave a mark that is still visible today. This story instead of seeking to impress a generation with fiction and complicated plots, takes a much deeper and intimate turn and focuses on the life of a suburb regular man with a midlife crisis. It was an authentic cinematic expression of the postmodern film era and one of the works that defined its conception together with *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999) and *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999).

A few words on postmodernism

To talk about postmodernism is to talk about a very complex issue whose basic principle is to challenge previously established structures and for which there is not a single definition. Criticism is the core principle. Criticizing structures is what this contemporary movement specializes in, starting by challenging the pillars of past times' social, psychological, and artistic environments and every concept that has once tried to bring innovation and mark a change in whichever context it is established. It has also been called post-structuralism because of its anti-structure and anti-constructive nature, but this does not imply that this movement is degrading or does not contribute to development, instead, it pretends to create new constructions of ideas that would lead to the same goal in the end. Just like some other trends, post-modernism is dedicated to "deconstruct" our conventions, which involves rearranging and changing the intention of our forms of expression in the modern civilization.

For post-modernism there is no absolute truth. For the post-modernist thought, all the general notions that have existed for a long time around us and that are the basis of

the current society, are only social constructions that can be interpreted in many ways, broken in various forms, and for some reason they are considered truths when really, for this movement, there is no such thing as a single truth. The conceptions that postmodernism considers variable are so firmly established in society that any intention of deconstruction before them attracts attention. The concept of binarism, for example, is one that has always been present in common thinking and manifests itself as male or female, good and evil, everything and nothing and in many other ways that will be the target of a postmodernism break. Postmodernism suggests that these are only social attempts to impose beliefs based on theories that try to explain our reality and this only leads to another movement that will eventually appear to bring opposition and present a different theory, and thus become an infinite cycle. During this consistent opposition to the strong face of rationalism during the modernist times, postmodernism establishes that nothing is purely objective and through criticism aims to break the rational thinking that apparently does not lead to anything valuable and rather prevents the progress of the expansion of social thought.

After all, it is common to think that postmodernism is not a consecrated philosophy, but a mere way of analyzing things. Therefore, many so-called postmodern actors in fields like philosophy, art, psychology and more, have not succeed to (or simply do not intend to) establish a global definition for the postmodern movement. If we apply this way of thinking to the set of elements that make up this concept; the deconstruction of social structures, the opposition towards the rational thinking and the existence of absolute truth, we can deduct that postmodernism is not objective, but instead is only about perspective.

Newman's musical aesthetic

The musical works of Thomas Newman, a well-known film composer by this point with a notable family background very well recognized in the field, proposed a unique approach to musical motifs and identifiable themes with a mixture of traditional and non-traditional takes on film scoring and modal writing that favored the choice of timber, color and textures over melodic thematic material as we know it:

Leitmotifs are more oriented toward texture and color than melody, similar to John Corigliano's approach in *Altered States*. Nonetheless, Newman's leitmotifs are quite

definable once one develops an ear for his style of composition. At the same time, Newman is able to create an overall musical ambience, a signature sound that becomes identifiable with the movie as a whole. In this sense, he creates a monothematic atmosphere, a singular, omnipresent air that permeates the entire film. Balancing these two seemingly opposite approaches to film music composition, a leitmotif-based approach and an atmospheric-based gestalt, is difficult, but Newman is able to accomplish it through his choice of instruments for the score and his compositional approach. (Rothbart, 2013, p. 79).

Thomas Newman comes from a film music family. His father, Alfred Newman, was a very well-known composer and conductor of film music in his time and he was an inspiration for many composers of the next generations, just like Lionel Newman, Thomas' uncle. His cousin, Randy Newman, has received a lot of recognition as well for his contribution to many films as a songwriter and arranger, he is particularly known for his satirical lyrics and soul "Americana" influences. He even directly competed against Thomas Newman for the Best Score category at the Academy Awards. There are many other very talented and recognized musicians in the Newman family, many of them specifically in the category of film and academic music, and I must emphasize that we are speaking about the most Academy Award-nominated family in the music category holding collectively 92 nominations and 12 awards.

Newman started gaining recognition in the film scoring field in the 80s for his contribution in titles like *Gung Ho* (Ron Howard, 1986), *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987) and *The Great Outdoors* (Howard Deutch, 1988) to name a few. He was also called in to participate with other famous composers like John Williams as an orchestrator or to take other tasks in the music department, which is probably what kicked off his career in the film industry. Newman has been quite outspoken about his time working with Stephen Sondheim in musical theater plays, and I believe it has helped shape his composition style. During the 90s, his collaboration in the Hollywood film industry became much more notable, he started building a name for himself in the field and a music style that would identify him not just as a member of a very famous family in the business but as a promising composer with a unique voice. His musical style is clearly influenced by Aaron Copland and Elmer Bernstein with roots in the American folk music, and is distinguished by the use of consonant

harmonies almost exclusively modal, minimalist techniques based on the obsessive repetition of short motifs, a balance of immediately recognizable melodies and sound experimentation, a particular hybrid fusion of orchestra and synths, and the use of unusual ethnic instrumentation often used to give a slight hint of comedy instead of adding a geographical function to the music (Huvet, 2022, p. 197-198). The specific use of the piano for the main motifs and themes is another singularity of his work, he is known for playing himself all the piano passages in his scores, according to him, this instrument possesses an “icy elegance” (*ibid.*, p. 204) that seems to be very efficient in his music. The writing of these piano passages shows very singular qualities, for example the use of parallel fifths while balancing between two chords, which evokes a sense of emptiness, and the monotonous repetition of very short motifs over a modal and static chord progression. To this day, the usual post minimalist qualities of his scores is definitely something that stands out from the other popular styles of music writing in this field, especially if we compare his style to the Zimmer approach to film music or to the music of composers of the Williams generation. (Huvet, 2022, p. 197 - 217).

The use of tension in his writing is also an important feature in some of his scores. He has managed to create ambiguous musical textures by mixing different scales at the same time to evoke a strange mood and sometimes he keeps this textures on a musical cycle, so that our ears would become used to it. In his writing, he often measures the amount of tension added to these textures according to the events in the story to the point where he would mix major and minor scales at a certain time in the sequence or make an impactful dissonant attack at a strategic moment, like on his score for *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994). At the same time, he is very effective at keeping the integrity of traditional modal music segments. He is able to locate the right modal structure that would bring the mood that can carry the scene most effectively and use these devices to create soundscapes that he would transform or break eventually according to the image.

3. Postminimalism and musical ambiences in Newman’s scores.

There are many notable influences of musical postminimalism that stand out when analyzing the style of Thomas Newman. This is a quite common phenomenon in the music of many film composers nowadays, the reason being, post minimalist

techniques have shown to be very effective to support the image and to connect with the modern audience. Postminimalism in music is a fairly recent movement, it emerged mainly in the New York area between the 1980s and 1990s as a response to an earlier form of musical creation known as minimalism, a compositional practice conceived in the 1960s with the appearance of composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Terry Riley and John Adams who wrote the most emblematic works of this style such as *Piano Phase* (Reich, 1967), *Einstein on the beach* (Glass, 1976), *In C* (Riley, 1964), *Nixon in China* (Adams, 1987), and many others. It was characterized by the continuous reiteration of single and simple ideas, a slow or irregular pace of change and a significant focus on pulse and timber. Minimalism, in its pure form, was a very particular branch of contemporary academic music. Unlike other aesthetics of contemporary music, it remained tonal for the most part, was constructed with very limited musical material and did not intend to overload the piece with lots of information and complex structures. It was the opposite of serialism and many other styles of contemporary composition where composers used mathematical reasoning, chance and aleatory improvisation for their creations. Because of its disruptive nature, minimalism was seen as a very controversial movement and it was sometimes criticized by acclaimed composers from the early 20th century. As a consequence, it remained seen as an elitist style of composition until post-minimalist composers arose with a new and much lighter interpretation of the minimalist principles to bring back popularity to this style. Postminimalism, as a subgenre, is meant to categorize the creation of contemporary composers that are in some way influenced by minimalism and employ these techniques to enhance the creative value in their work: some notable figures in this music scene are Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Janice Giteck, Ann Southam, etc. (Gann & Potter, 2013) In film music, there are also very significant referents of post minimalist composition, such as Michael Nyman, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Pascal Estève, Alexandre Desplat and Phillippe Rombi, whose music for the French film *Dans la maison* (François Ozon, 2012) inspired the essay *Une musique pour l'image* written by Cecile Carayol, an important reference for this dissertation.³

³ Cécile Carayol. *Une musique pour l'image: Vers un symphonisme intimiste dans le film français contemporain*. (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012)

Newman's post-minimalist style became more noticeable during the 90s, with the release of many critically acclaimed titles for which he scored the music aside from *The Shawshank Redemption* such as *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992), *Scent of a Woman* (Martin Brest, 1992), *The Favor* (Donald Petrie, 1994), *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont, 1999) and of course *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999). It became noticeable that his contribution to these films (and many others after this period) was an important factor to their success and effectiveness towards the audience.

Modern film scores have found great value in the particularities of the post minimalist style of musical writing explained a few lines above, and even more if we talk about underscore and the inner cues of a film. Seen on a larger scale, the conceptual idea of constant repetition of simple motifs can result in the creation of interesting musical textures and ambiances, which have great potential when manipulating the sense of time, establishing an identifiable motif on the background or creating tension to be released at a specific moment. Newman is known for creating musical textures, often very long, on some of his scores to manipulate the sense of context and achieve a stronger impact with the addition of tension. It is quite easy to take for granted these musical ambiances, especially if they remain in the background for a long period of time during a very engaging scene, but this is exactly what makes them so important. An effective development of musical ambience can be of great use to subtly condition the audience to expect something, or nothing at all. The distribution and channeling of information on a film is crucial to determine the way the spectator perceives and follows the story of the film and a good development of musical ambiances, well balanced with silence, can make a great impact in the narrative structure. Just like some of the early minimalist pieces would maintain a repetitive texture for extremely long periods of time in the attempt to accustom the audience to a specific mood, Newman has shown to achieve the same effect with a much lighter and less complex writing style perfectly suited for the films he scores. This study will be dedicated to the employment of musical ambiances in Newman's scores, as they have proven to be a common and very powerful asset particularly in the films of Mendes to support their narrative structure and enhance the experience of the spectator.

Thomas Newman has been nominated and awarded many times for his musical work. He has also made a strong enough connection with the directors and filmmakers he has worked with to keep collaborating in some of their other productions as a creative duo. Along the decades we have seen many of these power couples take over the big screen with recurring successful releases, for instance Steven Spielberg and John Williams, David Cronenberg and Howard Shore, Tim Burton and Danny Elfman, etc. Newman has collaborated in various occasions with a few directors like Andrew Stanton and Steven Soderbergh but the recurring collaboration that peaks my attention is his collaboration with Sam Mendes, which started with the release of *American Beauty*.

Sam Mendes was known for his work as a director in theater plays and adaptations of stage musicals in the 1990s. During this period, he also worked in design and artistic direction in various theaters. He gained recognition in this field for the success of the projects he had participated in, and by the end of the decade he switched his focus to cinema. Considering his background, he started to build a personality in the film industry after the release of his first film in 1999. He has directed 8 films over the past two decades and he has collaborated with Newman on 7 of those. It can be hard to find a common characteristic when analyzing his filmographic career as he has directed films in various genres like action, romance-drama, comedy-drama and war. However, there is certainly an interesting approach to narrative in his storytelling and we could say it matches almost perfectly the musical style of Thomas Newman. Seeing it from the musical point of view, the results of their collaboration have been a clear example of a phenomenon we have witnessed this century in many blockbuster titles and productions of the American film industry which is a new approach to musical thematic identity that differs from the times of musical symphonism where melodic themes led the score in a quite traditional way.

The Mendes-Newman collaboration

Mendes and Newman, as an artistic duo, have provided us with wonderful films over the past couple decades. The products of their collaboration demonstrate a quite modern approach of musical structures and management of an arguably limited amount of musical thematic material. Some of these films feature some newfangled

narrative qualities, plots and storytelling techniques that seem to perfectly match the intentions of Newman's post minimalist-influenced style. However, their collaboration has not yet been deeply studied. Their productions have achieved many milestones along the past few decades, starting by the success of *American Beauty*. In spite of its unusual character dedicated to the devaluation of the American dream and to depict the monotonous and decaying life of the bourgeoisie in the suburbs, the film was very effectively accompanied by Newman's score, a collection of moods and colors created largely by percussion instruments. The musical ambiences in this score performed by the finely curated mixture of timbers in its instrumentation helped to "propel the film along without disturbing the "moral ambiguity" that Newman found so fascinating in Alan Ball's script" (Burlingame, 2000)⁴.

"Like *American Beauty*, *The Green Mile* did not demand a series of hummable tunes. Instead, Newman serves the film with music that provides color and emotional support. "An old-fashioned sweep with a modern sensibility" is how director Frank Darabont describes Newman's contribution". (Burlingame, 2000)

Their second film, *Road to Perdition*, was released in 2002 and with it, a whole period of collaborations had officially started. This film was a follow up to Mendes' award-winning success, *American Beauty*. It is an action-drama thriller film that tells the story of a father and his son on a journey across states escaping from the threats of a mob and seeking to find peace by starting a new life elsewhere. It may have not been as relevant as their other productions at the time, but today it certainly is an important movie to consider when analyzing their trajectory, as it shows a clear picture of the beginning of their collaboration and shows many of the qualities in the music we have seen today in their more recent releases.

Throughout their collaboration, they have explored different genres and styles related to drama, war, thriller and action including two films from the James Bond franchise, *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012) and *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015). Although these two films received a lot of attention from Bond fans all over the world and were very well received by critics, they do not necessarily explore a musical aesthetic based on

⁴ Jon Burlingame. *Spotlight: Thomas Newman* (Variety, January 20, 2000) <https://variety.com/2000/music/news/spotlight-thomas-newman-1117761178/> accessed March 20, 2022.

musical ambiences and post-minimalist techniques, since they had to stick to the guidelines of the franchise. All these productions demonstrate Newman's particular qualities of musical writing and are great examples of the use of post-minimalist techniques in film scoring to create musical atmospheres to subtly accompany a scene. These scores also show a clear difference between melodic themes with a traditional development and a post minimalist approach to thematical material through musical ambiences. It is noticeable in their most recent production, *1917* (Sam Mendes, 2019), how these particularities in the music have evolved through many years of working together and how they can help the intentions of the modern narrative structures explored by Mendes in all his productions and especially in this particular film.

4. Chapter breakdown: Target question and planning.

This study will be focused on the scores of Thomas Newman in the films of Sam Mendes and I will specifically write about three films that I believe best represent the trajectory of their collaboration as each one of them belong to a different genre and they were all released a few years apart from each other over the past two decades. These three titles are: *Road to Perdition* (Sam Mendes, 2002), *Revolutionary Road* (Sam Mendes, 2008) and *1917* (Sam Mendes, 2019). By analyzing the musical devices and structural shape of these scores in relation to these stories, I aim to explain the roles of musical ambiences and musical context, in relation to the melodic themes, and theorize how they contribute to the shape of the film according to their narrative.

The analysis on these films will be focused on the musical devices with clear post-minimalist influences employed by Newman in his scores and the musical ambiences that, seen from the overview, create a structure and propose a shape that help develop the stories of these films. This study will begin by analyzing the thematic material in these scores from the traditional point of view in order to comprehend their construction, measure their presence throughout the film and understand their development which often favors the repetition of single motifs in a more textural form. This will lead to direct the analysis more towards the musical ambiences, addressed differently in each one of these films, and the use of silence to compare their functions on the scenes. On this same subject, this study will analyze the balance of tonality and musical moods in general created by the strategic use of modal writing

and other harmonic devices, which is related to the overall musical structure and thematic balance of the scores.

I. Musical structure and narrative in the selected films by Sam Mendes

1. Usage of musical themes, thematic development, and the identity component in Newman's scores.

On any musical idea, there are many factors that contribute to its function of becoming identifiable. This study will not be focused on leitmotifs or melodic thematic development *per se*, but it is important to understand how and why they work and know their role on a score. A musical idea can become identifiable by its timber, color, rhythm, melodic features, harmonic context and many other aspects, but the real question is: to what extent can a musical idea become identifiable? This dissertation will be dedicated to describing and analyzing the elements that are treated as musical themes in these three films (and that can be perceived as such by the audience) and explain how they demonstrate a modern approach to thematic musical material and challenge the definition of the concept.

Even though there are many melodic themes and motifs that lead the score and shape the structure of the music in these films, Newman also uses more subtle concepts like ambiences, textures, rhythm patterns, a particular musical tonality or modes to describe a character, situation or feeling and doses its presence adequately so that it can be perceived as a unique element and not just accompaniment or generic underscore. This of course creates great contrast with the often-used obsessive repetition of single ideas and motifs but, on a general level, both techniques contribute to the hierarchy of thematic material. The use of musical ambiences that remain in the background to illustrate an identifiable element in the story can be seen as a much "safer" way to score a film, as it will rarely create conflict with the information the film gives to the audience upfront, but it can also be of great use to create long-term effects of perception of the narrative structure.

The music in *Road to Perdition* presents a variety of thematic material that is arguably not always led by particular melodic features. It is, out of the three scores chosen for this dissertation, the closest one to a more traditional structure of thematic development; it presents a main theme and a secondary theme reprised only a few

times throughout the score, and some other motifs and textures that are associated to less important recurrent elements and characters in the film. These two themes represent the two most important elements of the film that describe the protagonists and their roles in the story: the main theme is dedicated to the journey they undertake towards a new life, and the secondary theme describes the bond between them as father and son, which becomes noticeable mainly on the third act of the film.

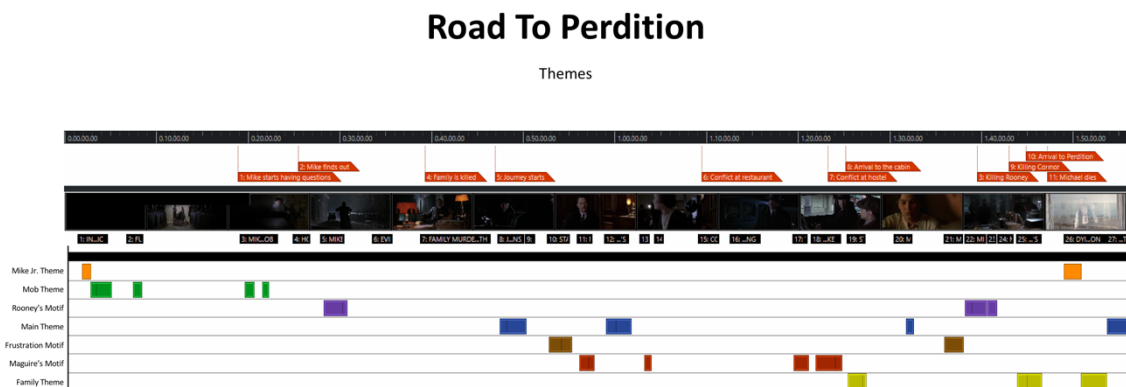


Figure 1: "Road to Perdition" Timeline of Musical Themes

Possibly what stands out the most about the use and distribution of these themes through the timeline of the film (Figure 1) is that they are introduced relatively late on the film, being the main theme added at 00:47:00:00 and the secondary theme at 01:13:00:00. The reason behind this is that these themes, unlike most of Mendes' films, are not used necessarily to introduce, describe or present the characters, but instead to illustrate their development throughout the story and indicate moments of change in their behavior and situation. The addition of these themes certainly makes a great impact in the viewer's experience, not only because of the lack of a consistent melodic theme prior to this, but also because it transmits that the characters are finally becoming what they are supposed to represent and we, the audience, are starting to get to know them. These sudden additions of lead themes are marked as well with a novelty in the structure of musical ambiences, moods and tonality used on the film by the introduction of a new musical mode or scale, the Mixolydian mode and the major scale. This technique has been used by Newman in several occasions, like in his scores for *The Shawshank Redemption*, *American Beauty* and *Revolutionary Road*, and it makes us believe that this particular mode or scale plays a big part in the identity of the music theme.

Road to perdition is not the most complex example of a use of musical ambiences to transmit information, but it surely shows an early conception of the writing techniques around ambiences, moods and overall structure employed by Newman to give value to the themes that will later evolve in more complex structures of musical ambiences on their next films. For starters, in this score, the palette of musical modes and scales used for the music cues along the film's timeline proposes an interesting landscape of musical color and moods. There is a much more traditional use and writing style on the modal music used in this score compared to the other films, and this helps to understand each mode much more clearly, so each time a new mode is introduced or reprised it makes great impact. This score uses all the modes of the major scale except for Lydian and Locrian and even has some moments of pure atonal ambience and diminished scales for the tensest scenes. But these modes are not just supporting the musical development of the score or performing the traditional effects of modal writing on the listener: some of them actually have a much more important role in the film and hold an identifiable value.

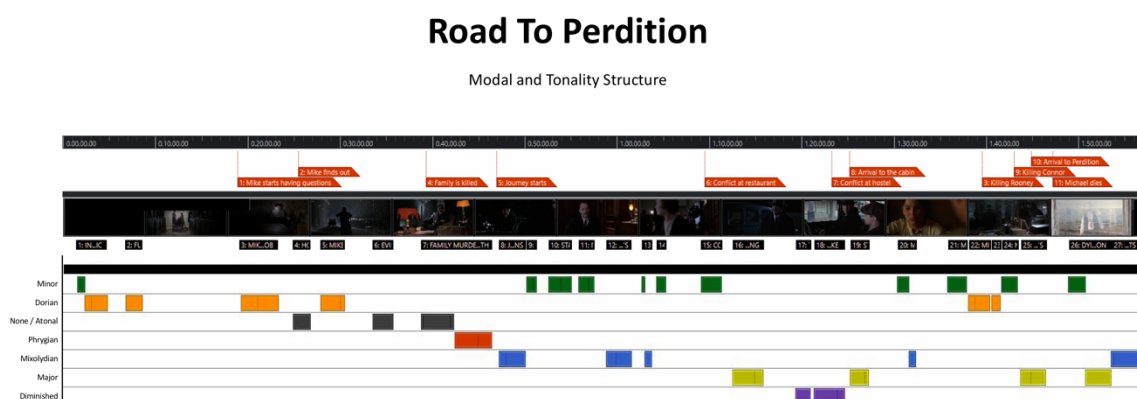


Figure 2: "Road to Perdition" Modal and Tonality Structure.

As seen in the graph above (Figure 2), the film starts its musical structure with the Dorian mode which remains throughout pretty much the entire first act. This mode is predominant during the introduction of the film as we are seeing for the first time the characters that will lead the story and the Irish mob that runs the city where they live in. This mode is used to develop the first theme heard in the film, which we will refer to as "Rock Island Theme". This theme on its own does not play a big role in the development of the story, it basically describes the ambience of the city where the story will take place and we will not hear it again after the first act is finished. The

presence of the Dorian mode later on will be used to the advantage of the composer to give a few hints back to this introduction and most importantly the first encounter with the Irish mob. It is important to point out that when the audience meets the mob for the first time during this first act, they are not presented as the villains of the story, but instead as some sort of entity that has power over the people in the city but also looks after their wellbeing. Their true intentions will be revealed later on as the story unfolds. Towards the end of the first act, the use of the Dorian mode will eventually lead to a very specific texture or ambience that does not immediately capture the attention of the audience, as a melodic theme would do. This texture will remain in the background and will be used to represent Rooney, the leader of the mob, and it will not be understood as a theme until the end of the movie, when the exact same Dorian texture accompanies his death.

This effect is of great value to describe the arc of this character. At the beginning of the movie, Rooney is presented as a well-intentioned character, someone who is close to the protagonist's family and that has helped them in many occasions. However, he ends up betraying them. His death by the hand of the hero, towards the end of the movie, represents the closure of the protagonist's life of crime and the dangers that haunted his family, and puts an end to their tragic relationship. The feeling of closure symbolized by Rooney's character arc would not have been as effective if the Dorian mode had not been distributed the way it is through the film. This Dorian mode that guided us through the beginning of this story will disappear completely as the second act begins, and then, our attention will be focused on the other impactful events that will trigger the main action of the story. Through the second act, many other modes, themes, and musical textures will be introduced and reprised sporadically and towards the resolution of the film we will hear the Dorian mode only to close the conflict with the mob with Rooney's death. The absence of this mode, or musical ambience, not only helped to illustrate the transition of events and the unmasking of characters, but also made possible its association with the mob and Rooney.

Compared to the other scores to be analyzed, the thematic structure of *Road to Perdition* is much closer to a traditional style of writing. Most of the themes in this score are composed of sections that are respected on each reprise and their phrasal structure is quite melodic, especially if we focus on the two main themes.

The music of *Revolutionary Road*, on the other hand, shows a much stronger influence of musical post-minimalism in the writing style compared to *Road to Perdition*. For starters, the thematic material is led by one specific theme, the main theme of the film, that is on its own constructed around a single three-note motif. We could say that the thematic material of the whole score is summed up by this three-note motif. The thematic hierarchy in this film is very simple, it focuses entirely on the main theme and the other thematic motifs indicated in this graph are very mild and only reprised a few times, unlike the main theme. The overall musical material in this score is very limited, there are not many musical cues, the total duration of the music is relatively low compared to the other two films and almost all of the cues present thematic material, only three of them are composed of pure underscore.

Revolutionary Road

Themes

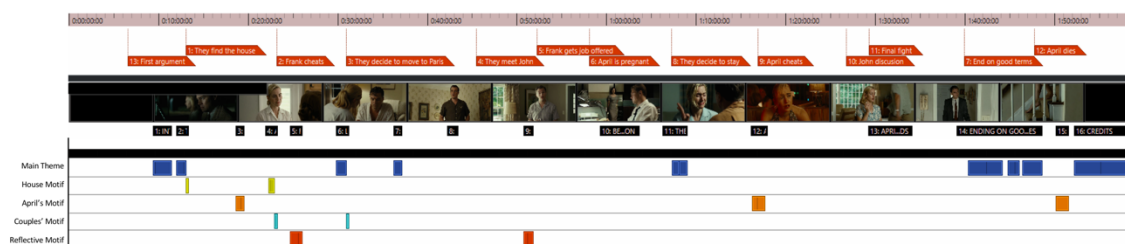


Figure 3: "Revolutionary Road" Timeline of Musical Themes.

Considering most of the music revolves around single ideas, like the main three-note motif, and most cues are composed of cycles of other musical cells, it is safe to say that the musical content in this score is quite minimal. This characteristic indicates that there is a prominent use of musical silence and the music, through its obsessive repetition of single ideas, seeks to create tension, a constant feeling of monotony and a noticeable insistence on the main three-note motif.

2. Musical ambiances and their contribution to the structure of the films of Sam Mendes.

In this dissertation, the term "musical ambiance" refers to the environmental and atmospheric nature of any musical construct performed on the background that holds a significant contextual function on the film and sets the mood of a scene. Musical

ambiances are not necessarily led by a melodic form of music writing, instead, they are used to subtly communicate important information through more contextual aspects like harmony structures, textures, modal progressions or scales in which the music is written. To better understand the functions of the musical ambiances found in these scores in relation to the themes, this study must begin its analysis on a global perspective, with a panoramic view of the film's timeline where the structure of scales and modes is seen as a whole, and where its relation with the narrative structure of the film becomes noticeable.

Revolutionary Road proposes a score entirely constructed around the concept of musical ambiances. The use and development of the main theme is one of the aspects that stands out the most, it is presented first as a very melodic piece with a very clear structure during the main titles where it takes the foreground. This happens right after the film has presented the lead couple in their best moments and showed us a glimpse of their marital problems that will eventually lead to the final tragedy. Throughout the film, the main three-note motif will be reprised a few times to hint back to this main theme over different harmonic backgrounds, but in a simpler form. These slight reprises create a feeling of monotony that, through time, illustrates the lack of excitement and motivation in their lives as a suburban family and the stress accumulated after their many arguments, similar to the effect of obsessive repetitiveness created by Newman in his score for *American Beauty*.

Revolutionary Road

Modal and Tonality Structure

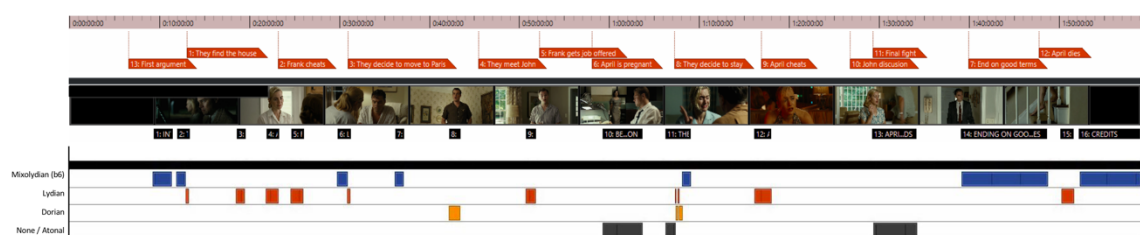


Figure 4: "Revolutionary Road" Modal and Tonality Structure

The way the musical ambiances are constructed in this score is also something to point out (Figure 4). The modes and scales chosen for this music show a clear dominance of the Mixolydian (b6) mode, mainly used for the main motif, with some hints of

Lydian and Dorian for the other less important thematic elements. This palette of modes and scales defines the color and tone of this score, which keeps a sense of ambiguity through the whole film created by this particular Mixolydian (b6) mode, mainly because it never lays on a Major or Minor scale. On the most tense and ambiguous scenes, the score presents an atonal ambience that sometimes seems to be led by a symmetrical scale but, because of the very limited musical material in these cues, it becomes hard to identify the musical harmonic context and instead, the main focus is directed to a cycling motif repeated for a considerable amount of time. This creates a very intense feeling of stress and tension built up by simple repetition, without any raise of dynamics but just a mysterious and unidentified ambience.

In *Road to Perdition*, there are some musical elements that perform a less important thematic role that have not been mentioned yet. There is a motif that accompanies two scenes where the mob denies helping Michael in his worst moments, a rhythmical pattern used to describe the manic character of Maguire, the main threat towards the end of the film, and a motif that represents Michael's son on his own. This last motif is heard only at the very beginning of the film and at the very end. It holds a very important meaning as it is supposed to represent a character that does not necessary perform the main actions of the film but is highly affected by them, and who is the only survivor from the members of Sullivan family by the end. This motif is accompanied by the same shot of Mike Jr. looking at the ocean, it creates a link between the beginning and the end of the film, and it helps to enhance the feeling of conclusion of the whole story just as Rooney's motif. It is heard together with Mike Jr.'s monologue when he introduces and concludes the story with a few string ascending phrases on the Minor scale and a few hints of the Dorian mode, which will later on lead the score through the first act. At the beginning of the film, this motif intervenes when we are looking at Mike Jr. from his back, without knowing who he is or anything about the story, which gives a mysterious feeling that is also reflected in the music. This motif slowly brings in some string phrases that evolve and keep a mysterious Minor ambience with long notes and some silence in between phrases to leave space to reflect over what Mike Jr. is saying about the story. This motif does not act as a theme, it is not reprised as it is through the development of the film and this is why it achieves such a powerful effect on the closure scene. (Figure 1)

The entrance of the secondary theme in *Road to Perdition*, which we will refer to as “Family theme”, marks an important moment in the story. Not only it appears towards the conclusion of the film but also brings in a new scale, the Major scale, which will be used as a new element to bring hope to the journey and indicate the turning point towards the final resolution where the heroes arrive to their desired destination after leaving the mob behind. The addition of the Major scale happens right at the moment when Michael and his son start to bond as a family and work together for their purpose. This technique marks a change in the overall mood of the story and creates an interesting dialogue with the narrative structure. The narrative techniques applied in this film are dedicated mainly to slowly unveil the real intentions of the characters and illustrate their arc and development through the story in such a way that we feel that the characters become what they are supposed to be only towards the end of the film. This last aspect is well reflected on the music score by the fact that it accompanies the heroes on their journey with a theme over the Mixolydian mode at the start of the 2nd act, and brings them together with a theme over the Major scale towards the end of the film, before they are separated forever.

This same effect achieved through the addition of the Major scale on a score with an already defined tone and harmonic language (usually inclined towards modal structures) is employed again in a much different way by Newman on *1917*. In this case, instead of using the Major scale, the music remains Minor and at 00:54:49:00 he introduces a very melodic piece over a steady 3/4 metric, very different from the music heard previously on the film. This novelty in the score comes right when the hero takes a break from the stress of crossing the open field and sits in silence, while being transported on a troop carrier, to reflect on the recent loss of his partner. Here, the film shows a first glance of pure introspection.

1917

Modal and Tonality Structure

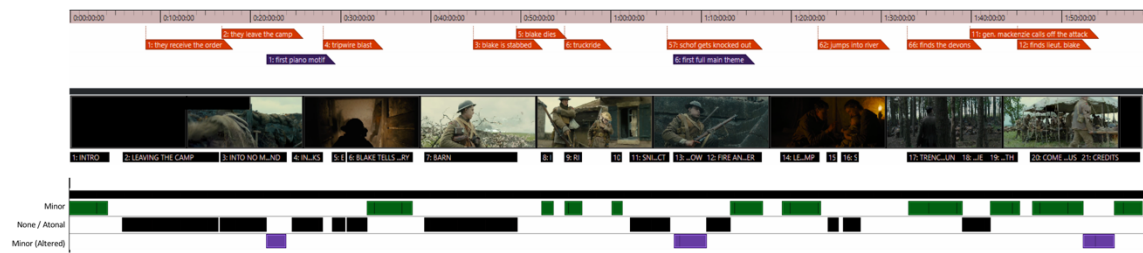


Figure 5: "1917" Modal and Tonality Structure.

The music on the film *1917* is conceived quite differently compared to the other scores analyzed. For the largest part of this film, the score serves the purpose of supporting the image through some very long cues and gives a distinguished value to the musical ambiances developed through the film. This score is considerably longer compared to the other scores analyzed, however, the thematic material and modes and scales that compose it are a much more limited. The music for the most part remains on the Minor scale and sometimes is composed by drones, percussion and effects on an atonal ambience (Figure 5) but in very few occasions, it switches to a very specific altered Minor scale with a dominant feel where the 3rd degree is often raised to play the first degree as a major chord. Even though there is a predominance of the Minor scale, Newman uses other elements in the music to bring new characteristics to mark important events or emphasize a transition in the story. For instance, around the middle of the film, shortly after Blake's death, the music performs the first melodical and emotive cue over a regular rhythm. This happens right before our lead character undertakes his mission on his own and makes this transition much more efficient. At this point, it is important to mention a quite particular technique in the storytelling of this film. Even if the story follows very evidently the two cadets that embark on an extremely hard mission, the audience is tricked to believe that Blake, being the most motivated one of the pair, will lead the story, presenting him as the main character with a clear purpose. His death, which happens quite early on the 2nd act, creates a hole in the story, a sense of emptiness that will be soon fulfilled by Schofield, his companion, as he decides to continue on the mission all alone but motivated to

complete it as Blake would have wanted. This way, he undertakes the role of lead character.

The scene right after this tragic switch of roles takes place in a troop carrier truck that picks Schofield up to get him closer to his destination. This scene leaves the audience alone in front of Schofield for the first time, while the troops talk with each other and he remains silent, as he takes a moment to process what has happened and what comes next for him. The score brings a new musical piece at this moment, a very melodic, sad and steady track on C minor that reflects Schofield's inner grief after losing Blake. The addition of this emotional cue led by a piano and supported by a string ensemble lets us start seeing the story from Schofield's perspective. The music stops when the soldiers get off the truck to push it out of the hole. They get back on the truck and Schofield starts telling the other soldiers about his mission, still with no music. After this, the soldiers start to reflect about the land that is in dispute and a new cue begins to play. As we remain on Schofield's perspective of the situation, the musical mood shifts from sadness to hope and determination. This cue is mainly identified by a solo cello playing a melody in G minor which will become Schofield's own theme and is used at this moment to bring hope to the character and the audience, as well as to mark the turning point of the journey.

3. Methods of thematic development through motifs and their connection to narrative in the three films analyzed.

When it comes to narrative and storytelling techniques, *1917* is also a very particular case compared to the other two films analyzed. The score in this film plays a very important role when transmitting the feelings of the lead characters (because they are often alone) and connecting the sequence of events that make the story (because the film is almost just one continuous shot). As the movie carries the audience through a very immersive and realistic experience in the ambience of war by making no noticeable cuts in the editing, the score creates a sense of unity and constant anticipation through sometimes very long cues and very minimal thematic material. Arguably the most crucial function of Newman's music for this film was to maintain the feeling of danger, fear and expectation through most of the scenes in this movie,

even through scenes where nothing threatening actually happens. Thanks to this effect, the film is able to capture the audience's attention in a very lively way and keep them engaged through the journey of the hero as if they were part of the mission. Because of the one-shot effect that characterizes this film, the editing process had very limited possibilities to manipulate the sense of pace and rhythm of the story. This is why music became crucial to glue scenes together, mark strong separations and create long sequences of tension to try to get as close as possible to a lively experience in the battlefield. However, the main functions of the music in *1917* are not the same as in any other film, and it is mainly because this story remains always in the present tense and is very descriptive of the immediate actions seen onscreen without making evident time jumps. In this score, as opposed to others, the need to illustrate through themes the relations between characters and situations, to enhance character arcs and to carry the audience through time and space and propose an external perspective is no longer as important as it is to accompany the heroes on their journey. The primal function of this score is to create a continuous motion to push the heroes forward on their quest and generate an immersive and lively experience of war for the audience.

The narrative structure of *1917* proposes a very significant division around the middle of the film that's even more impactful than the turning points at the start of each act. The scene that marks this separation between the first and second part of the story comes right after Schofield is dropped by the troop carrier and encounters an enemy sniper on a tower firing at him, forcing him to hide. During an intense confrontation, Schofield manages to hurt the sniper from afar, and makes his way inside the tower. He cautiously walks to the room where the sniper is, and as soon as he opens the door, they meet in crossfire. Schofield is hit, he falls down unconscious and the film suddenly cuts to black. Mendes makes the only clear cut in the film at this very moment, as to communicate that our protagonist has been taken out and is stunned on the ground. After around ten seconds of black screen, the second part of the movie begins. Schofield wakes up to find the sniper dead from the shooting and looks through the window to the exterior, now at night, lit up by the flames emerging from the abandoned camp. The score marks the beginning of this second part with the first and only apparition of what could be the theme of the movie. This theme is titled "The Night Window" on the soundtrack album and it is the first piece of music in the film

that remains fully melodic for a considerable period of time. This cue begins with a clear and unique motif of piano arpeggios that is repeated a few times to build up to a point where the orchestra joins in and plays around a similar pattern eventually reaching a musical climax for the first time in the film. The music takes the foreground at this scene, only for the second time on the film, and it accompanies Schofield as he walks in awe through the camp invaded by flames over a wide panoramic view of the scene.

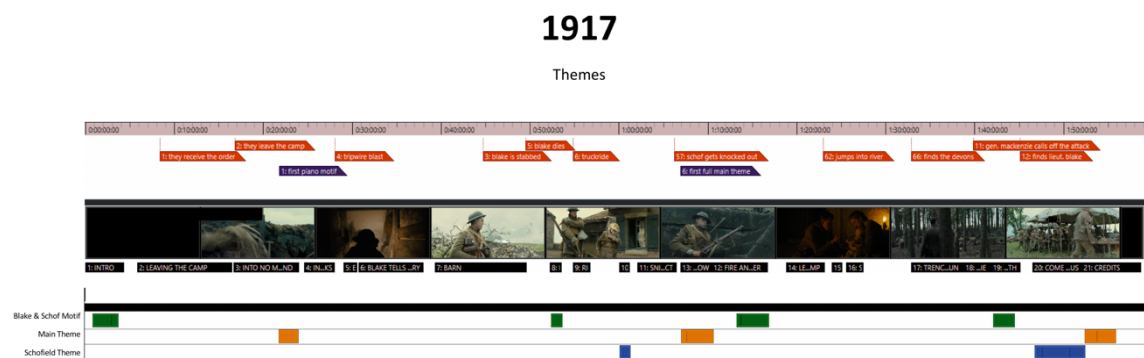


Figure 6: "1917" Timeline of Musical Themes

Even though this theme is never reprised, the audience might get the feeling of having heard something similar before, specifically at the end of a cue at the start of the 2nd act, before its first apparition. This is because the score presents briefly the scale on which this theme is written, and the piano motif with which it begins, as part of a musical cue at around 0:23:00 (Figure 6), when Blake and Schofield start to really get into no man's land, the first time in the film where the score takes the foreground. The main theme at the middle of the film is performed over a Minor scale that starts with a minor chord on the VII degree and the tonic chord is usually played as a major chord instead of a minor chord, creating an uplifting altered dominant sensation. During this first interpretation of the scale, titled "Gehenna" on the soundtrack album, Newman brings the piano to the score for the first time on the film to play an ostinato over an irregular metric (which creates the effect of an accelerated pace) formed by phrases of three ascending notes that create chord arpeggios. This three-note ascending motif is also slightly present at the very beginning of the main theme, but this time playing different notes, without the ostinato and on a regular metric. In spite of the similarities, it is safe to say that there are no melodical elements shared between "Gehenna" and the main theme. However, just by anticipating the use of the same alterations over the

Minor scale and reprising the ascending three-note motif on the piano, Newman prepares the audience for the theme that will be later introduced in all its glory in order to make its apparition more powerful and somehow felt as a reprised musical idea.

The entire thematic structure of the score in *1917* is arguably constructed by only three elements that are reprised through the film, one of them being the main theme, the other one a simple motif used to represent Blake and Schofield on the mission and lastly a solo cello melody that represents Schofield after he is left alone (Figure 6). Blake and Schofield's motif is used four times on the film, it is the only element heard more than twice on the film and it is always presented in the same form, as a very calm and airy piece where a synth with a very particular sound and a lot of resonance plays the melody in long notes which makes it sound a little blurry and unclear. This melody is essentially composed by two phrases that repeat on a cycle while some additional instruments are added on top. These phrases perform the same motif of 3 notes and the only difference between them is the last note. This passage is performed always in F minor, the last note of the cycle is a high C and the phrases never properly resolves to the tonic, which allows it to remain on the air constantly on a loop. The starting interval of the phrases is a minor 7th, a slightly tense interval that is heard repeatedly when this motif plays and is the most identifiable element of it (Figure 7).

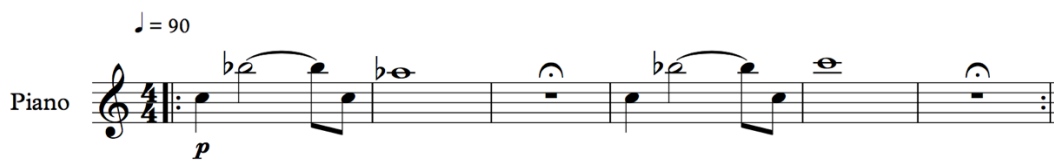


Figure 7: Blake and Schofield's Motif in *1917*.

The effects of subtly accompanying a character through the film with a simple but unique cycling motif is of great use to illustrate its development through time and through the main events of the narrative structure, even if they may not seem the center of the story but still are heavily affected by it. This technique can help to keep interest on a character without giving away much information about what is about to happen, and it is also present in other of Newman's works. *Revolutionary Road* is a film that, aside from many other things, represents the tragedy of an oppressed

textures and musical ambiences to set the pace through the many suspenseful scenes and tense confrontations in the film balanced with very minimal thematic material to keep the music for the most part in the present tense. *Revolutionary Road*, on the other hand, is a story that not only expands along a much larger period of time, but also develops around an ambiguous context that is created by a score with less amount of music and a significant value for silence. Also, it requires musical symbolism to transmit the burden that overwhelms the characters, and that is not always seen on screen, reflected through the emptiness, monotony and sense of no direction caused by the obsessive repetition of the motifs and cycling modal harmonies. The difference in the use of post minimalist musical elements in these scores relies mainly in the way music is used to determine the context in which the characters find themselves and, sometimes, the way music supports the actions on screen.

II. Functions of musical context and post-minimalist techniques in Newman's selected scores

1. The construction of musical ambiances through post minimalist textures in *Road to Perdition*.

There is a notable difference between music that is written to support the actions of the scene as opposed to music written to create the context in which these actions take place. In some cases, a musical cue will present both scenarios. The music of Thomas Newman in the selected films presents a variety of techniques and functions that color the ambience that surround the characters by creating a particular mood. As seen in the previous chapter, some of these functions can be used to create feelings of emptiness, threat, hope, etc., to support the characters' actions through the narrative. This type of music also proposes a perspective of the film to the audience, which, depending on the case, can be either empathetic or anempathetic⁵ to the image for the most part, as seen in the examples of *1917* and *Revolutionary Road* respectively. In addition to that, musical ambiances naturally set a pace to the sequence of events seen on the screen and can help propel the story from time to time, link scenes together, create a sense of perpetual idleness or monotony or do nothing at all by simply using silence. When analyzing the effects of the musical ambiances of these films through time, many other effects become noticeable, most of them achieved through the post minimalist techniques used in Newman's writing.

The overview of the music in *Road to Perdition* presents a wide palette of musical tone and color used throughout the film. As explained before, some particularities of the musical mood structure are aligned with the character arcs and the evolution of the heroes through the story, but there are also other points of interest that demonstrate more specific functions of musical ambiances. Some of the harmonic particularities in the music of *Road to Perdition* include turning minor scales and minor modes into tense dominant ambiances at specific moments, which can be also perceived in the score of *1917* in a different way. The treatment of modal ambiances is also very

⁵ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (Columbia University Press, 1994), 8.

specific, most of the cues that present an ambiguous atmosphere with bright sonorities and floating piano phrases that seem to be free of tempo give *Road to Perdition* its character of mystery, crime and betrayal. Moreover, there is one musical cue that stands from the rest because of its long duration, limited material and contextual nature and only by analyzing it we can understand how the post minimalist techniques in its writing play an important role in its construction.

“Murder (In Four Parts)” is the name given by Newman to the 7 minute and 40 seconds cue that supports the scene when Michael’s family is murdered by Connor, followed by Michael escaping the house with his son. The same cue links this scene with a direct cut to Rooney screaming at Connor for what he did and ends with the scene when Michael pays a visit to Rooney’s messenger looking for answers. This cue, as indicated in the title, is divided in four parts, and its purpose is to create an ambiance for the shocking murder scene and the events that consequently follow this action. It treats different motifs as repeated musical cells to create long textures and goes through different sonorities, always keeping a similar global mood throughout all the scenes it holds together. This cue creates a sensation of shock followed by fear, and a growing feeling of vengeance coming from within the hero with a slow and irregular pace of change. The following paragraphs explain the relation between the score and the scenes of this cue focusing on the post minimalist characteristics in the music.

Part 1: Murder (00:38:44:20)

Michael finds out his family is in danger and tries to call home. The music starts with an atonal ambience that favors percussion effects and resonant hits reminiscent to a prepared piano. We are driven into the scene with a percussion motif (Figure 9) of one bar constantly repeated over a tense drone and resonating metal chimes. This creates a dark resonant ambience while the image zooms into wide shots of the house to give the sensation of emptiness and of Connor lurking in. He walks into the bathroom to find Michael’s wife and youngest son unaware of his presence and shoots at them. Music intensifies for a moment and then leaves space for the resonance of the shots fired, as heard by Mike Jr. as he arrives to the house on his bike. Mike Jr. cautiously walks to the front door where he faces Connor through a window. We cut

to Connor's perspective and find out he cannot see him; he only sees his reflection. Mike Jr. hides next to the door and is unseen by Connor as he calmly leaves the house. The percussion motif that and tense drones, used to symbolize the lurking threat, are now released as we learn Connor cannot see Mike Jr. and the musical ambiance reduces to just a low drone note and a soft piano playing freely around a motif (Figure 10) to indicate the threat is gone. The music slowly transitions to no tension at all as Connor walks away like nothing happened and leaves only a dark and mysterious ambiance to reveal the aftermath.

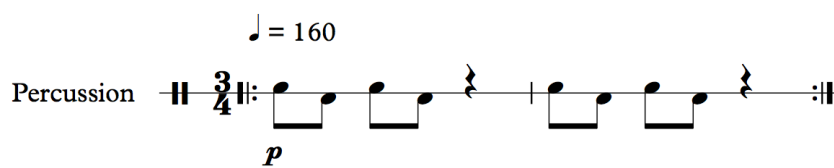


Figure 9: Percussion Motif during murder scene in Road to Perdition.



Figure 10: Piano Motif during murder scene in Road to Perdition.

Part 2: Aftermath (00:40:13:13)

Mike Jr. steps into the house at a slow and cautious pace. A strike of metal chimes marks the start of this part; this time the threat is gone but we are still in a tense and ambiguous environment. As Mike Jr. comes out of the dark and into the house, the tense drone comes back holding a long constant minor second interval and a pulsating low pizzicato with space in between to reflect Mike Jr.'s fear as he suspects what he is going to find. He makes his way to the bathroom and turns to see the horrible scene inside. We see him walk in slowly still without showing an expression. The tense drone makes a crescendo as he walks inside the bathroom. We cut to the exterior again to see Michael rush back home in his car. The percussion motif plays one time and other percussion effects come in, to reflect the fear in Michael's face. He walks inside the house and stares at his son for a moment who is facing him sitting on a chair

behind the dining table. We are left with a soft drone as Michael runs upstairs to find the shocking scene. The camera zooms into Mike Jr. showing no visible emotions as we hear Michael's screams from afar. The music remains still reflecting Mike Jr.'s static gaze. We cut to see Michael sitting on the floor in the hall sobbing in grief and the piano comes back to play freely around the same motif (Figure 10) as Mike Jr. joins him.

Part 3: Menace (00:42:25:16)

The film makes a cut to Rooney's bureau where he comes to meet Connor after learning what he did, he hits him and screams at him in anger. At this point the music presents the first sense of an Eb diminished chord. The low strings come in with a menacing tone playing phrases with the three notes of this chord in unison. These phrases are all three bars long with an extra irregular bar at the end to provoke a sense of instability in the rhythm. We get the feeling that something is starting to take its shape as these phrases remain unstable it is hard to understand the shape and rhythm of the music. The fifth phrase arrives with a clear motif that will be repeated from this point forward. The following graphic shows the Cello part of this section from the beginning until the strings play the phrase that will be constantly repeated (Figure 11). The brackets below the staff indicate the 3-bar phrases played by the strings.

♩ = 90

Vc. mp

Vc.

Vc.

Figure 11: Low string phrases during the beginning of part 3 of the murder scene in *Road to Perdition*.

After Rooney has released his anger, he hugs Connor and the music arrives to a more stable pace to reflect that he has controlled his rage. This three-bar phrase at the end of the score in Figure 11 will continue to play repeatedly and be harmonized with fifths and major thirds on the strings and brass while the high strings come in to play a progressively ascending melody, defining a sort of Phrygian dominant mode as the harmonic context. Over a three-bar pattern in constant repeat, the addition of voices and instruments creates a large crescendo that symbolizes the determination and anger growing in Michael as we see him leaving his house definitively. The following graph shows the reduction of the strings section in continuation to Figure 11, still maintaining the repeated structure of three bars while the top voice performs an ascending melody (Figure 12).

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for strings, labeled 'Str.' on the left. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The first system shows a three-bar phrase. The second system shows a four-bar phrase with a 'Sua' marking above the staff. The third system shows a four-bar phrase with a circled '8' marking above the staff. Brackets below the staves indicate the bar groupings.

Figure 12: Strings reduction with only the top and bass notes during the end of part 3 of the murder scene in *Road to Perdition*.

Towards the end of this segment, the orchestra reaches a climax. This rhythmically stable section serves to connect the time-lapse between the scene in Rooney's bureau and Michael packing up with his son to escape in his car. The music makes a decrescendo at the end of this segment (Figure 12) as we see Michael's car arrive to

his destination. The score becomes quieter and remains idle with just a pad playing the tonic as we see Michael turn back to his son to explain why they are not safe there and tell him that he will leave him for a moment to meet someone. Mike Jr. asks to not be left alone in the car, but Michael insists, gives him a gun and tells him what to do if he does not make it back. The music pad fades away when Michael leaves the car leaving a sinister and dark emptiness that surrounds Mike Jr.

Part 4: Suspense (00:44:03:05)

Mike Jr. is left in fear in the car in the middle of the darkness, confused and still in shock. The music brings in a new sonority over an empty ambience playing short notes. A ghostly and muffled but pure sound plays freely around a short motif leaving some space in between. This effect enhances the fear of the unknown and suspense as felt by Mike Jr. at this moment, as he does not know what is happening or if his father will come back alive. We see Michael climb through the fire escape of the building and enter a room. This mysterious ambience is maintained until Michael meets Jack Kelly in the room and closes the door. They begin to talk, and the music brings back the unstable low strings' phrases playing around the notes of Eb diminished (Figure 11), but this time without arriving to a full section with a steady pace. The strings continue to buildup helped by dissonant brass swells as Michael denies the money sent from the mob to him and points a gun to Kelly's head asking for Connor's location. The music at this point is dedicated to supporting Michael's feelings of anger and revenge just as this musical section did before with Rooney (Figure 11). The tension goes down as Michael lowers his gun for a moment but builds up again until he shoots Kelly in the head to transmit his rage towards the mob.

This entire cue shows the presence of many post-minimalist notions that help these scenes become very tense and linked in continuity. The constant repetition of simple motifs that favorize tense intervals and the lack of a tonal center through the beginning of the cue help to create a dark ambience that enriches the view of the house, now turned into a murder scene. The resonant hits that ornament this ambience make the inside of the house seem desolate, sinister and also unprotected, whereas the percussion cycling pattern creates the illusion of a lurking threat in movement, even if unseen by the audience or by Michael's family. Keeping a minimal ambience of

single drones while the narrative provides so much information, creates a sense of time standing still reflected through the shock in Mike Jr.'s emotionless gaze. Finally, the slow and irregular pace of evolution towards a steady structure played by the orchestra helps to transition from the uncertainty and shock of the murder scene to the consequential rage that starts building up from something twisted and unclear to a state of determination, seen in Michael as he turns against the mob and sets out on his journey.

2. Thematic development and preparation through musical cells in *Revolutionary Road*.

The use of thematic material is different in each one of these scores. As seen in the previous sections of this dissertation, Newman uses different methods to construct the score around a theme according to the narrative structure and uses the musical ambiances to contribute in the development of the themes. In *Revolutionary Road*, the way the score develops and reprises the main element of the music in many occasions, which is reduced to a simple three-note motif, is mainly by switching the harmonic background and the key in which it will be played, and by creating stationary ambiances where the motif is played and repeated freely without a fixed tempo. The theme in its entirety is composed by a few harmonic phrases but the melody always keeps the motif played repeatedly only changing the notes as it evolves (Figure 13). It starts with the motif in its primal form (E, A, G#), in E, over the Mixolydian b6 scale, later on there will be occasional apparitions of the flattened 9th and the minor 3rd. Another important aspect is that the accompaniment is always composed by parallel fifths which gives a sense of emptiness and ambiguity to the theme (Huvet, 2022, p. 202-204). It is usually played by the grand piano, the lead instrument of this score, however, the sound of the piano varies in some of the reprises to make it fit the mood of the scene better and to create more variety of timber. This way, the sound of the grand piano playing the main motif becomes a very powerful element on the score that will be of great use for the development of the motif in certain cues like the one that accompanies the scene when April dies towards the end of the movie.

Figure 13: Beginning of the Main Theme in *Revolutionary Road*. Transcribed by Chloé Huvet in her article of 2022, p. 203.

This cue is the longest one on the film and it presents a very unique and ominous feeling that is held for a long time while we see April alone in the house reflecting and using the abortion instrument on herself over some time-lapse sequences through a very slow pace. This scene follows the final discussion between Frank and April, the tensest one in the film where April faces Frank, tells him she does not love him, and they embark on a major argument which is accompanied by complete musical silence. April leaves the house, goes into the woods to think and a very ambiguous and slightly tense ambience starts with simple patterns repeated on a cycle over an atonal ambience. This segment has no dialogues and it just shows Frank very upset in the house and April finally in peace in the woods. The music provides no indication of what April is planning or what she will do next, so by the end of this segment the audience is naturally intrigued and confused. The next scene is interpreted as a resolution from the big discussion and it happens the day after, in the morning. With no musical background, to achieve a neutral and uncertain ambience with a strong sensation of emptiness, we see April offering Frank breakfast with a kind and friendly attitude as if nothing had happened. Frank, still upset and confused from the previous night, responds with the same friendly character but with caution as he is still not sure of what is going on April's mind. They have a nice time together; they thank each other for the pleasant moment and Frank walks towards the door. The musical cue, titled "April" on the soundtrack album, begins here with soft strings playing chord

swells on modal harmonies making pauses in between. Right before leaving the house, he turns to April and asks her if she hates him (something she said to him the night before), to what she answers by saying she does not. The strings make one final pause and April says her last words to him, “Have a good day”. The strings come back and from this point onwards the music will overtake the foreground for a while, the strings play one last phrase and end by playing a long E note that will transition to an ominous pad as we see April at the house entrance waving to Frank while he gets on his car and leaves for work. April loses the fake smile on her face, shows a more preoccupied expression and tries to hold back the tears while the pad slowly fills the ambience with mystery by adding notions of the Mixolydian b6 mode. At this moment, a piano with a muffled and distant sound comes in to play the main motif but with a twist. Just as heard in other cues, the motif adds the flattened 9th degree in the middle of the phrase, enhancing the feeling of mystery and creating a slightly darker ambience (Figure 14). Starting from here in this cue, Newman will treat the main motif as a musical cell and repeat it constantly with slight variations every now and then to announce that the theme is about to begin but it does not, and the music remains like this for a while. This creates an uneasy ambience that increases constantly as the motif keeps on repeating, because the theme seems stuck on these first notes and unable to unfold. This development through musical cells, is used in many other occasions throughout the film with this main motif and other patterns in order to create ambiguous and neutral ambiences and buildup tension without having to increase the dynamics, just by repetition through long periods of time (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Main Motif in *Revolutionary Road* and one of its variations.

The motif with the flattened 9th will be repeated with some pauses in between while we see a time-lapse sequence of April in the house as she cries while washing the dishes and every now and then the music will switch the gloomy piano for a grand piano playing the main motif as it naturally is, as if indicating that the main theme is

about to start but it still does not. April sits by the house phone and calls Milly to ask her to take care of the kids that night and tells her to give each one a kiss for her. During the call the music plays a B section where the motif is no longer heard, instead, the piano plays some simple phrases of two chords accompanied by the strings. This section works as an interlude from the constant repetition of the motif. We see a more calmed April in front of the mirror gathering the courage to perform the abortion on herself followed by time-lapse sequences of her making all the preparations. The motif repetition comes back and the music unifies the scene. The grand piano keeps on appearing from time to time and occasionally plays a whole phrase of the theme to break from simply repeating the motif over and over and create more anticipation.



Figure 15: Single phrase from the Main Theme in *Revolutionary Road*.

Through all this sequence, the ominous pad in the back provides a general uplifting ambience to the scene that matches the neat environment of the house lit up by the sunlight coming in from the windows. We hear the motif for a last time and see April close the bathroom door, then the B section plays a second time as we see April cautiously walk down the stairs and towards the living room window to look outside. The strings come back to play chord swells like at the beginning of the cue to symbolize the fading thoughts of April as she looks into the light coming from the window and thinks about the life events that brought her to this moment. The music simplifies to just pads with synth ornaments that blend with the coldness of the scene reflected by the pale colors and the lighting of the sun that, instead of warmth, transmits an empty, lifeless view, just like the musical pattern of the main motif. While on this static texture, we look at April's face through the window as she looks down to find blood coming from under her skirt. Even though she is badly injured from the procedure, she remains still, and the music brings back the main motif with the b9 variation, indicating this might have been what she had planned all along. The camera zooms out as the ominous drone intensifies and the lurid and pale colors fill

the room making the blood highlight in the center of the shot. The music keeps this ambiguously uplifting mood without making the scene tragic as she walks out of the frame and calls 911 off-camera.

Shortly after, the film makes a cut to the hospital sometime later. We see Frank sitting on an empty waiting room at the ER very upset and worried about April's state. Right at this moment the music brings in a slow bass pulse basically playing D and E at the start of each bar. The gloomy piano keeps playing the motif on top and the pads on the background begins to intensify favoring the tensions of the altered dominant scale. Shep joins Frank and they talk about what happened over this tense musical ambience. The pulse stops for a moment and we hear the main motif on the grand piano as Shep realizes the seriousness of the situation, however the main theme does not fully start here. Shep leaves to get Frank coffee and when he comes back the music brings in a more continuous pulse to indicate that something important is about to happen. Frank comes out of the doctor's room in shock and with a devastated look and it becomes clear that April has died. The music changes the key from E to B and finally embarks on a steady section of the main theme while we cut to Frank helplessly running through the street. With a percussive pulsation playing eight-notes, the piano plays a section of the main theme, a four-bar passage on loop with strings supporting the chords and providing a melody on top. This passage contains four small phrases, all of them being the motif pattern but with variations. The first and last phrases are both the main motif as it is, and only the middle phrases provide harmonic changes. This helps to give the scene the feeling that there is no clear direction, and we are stuck on a cycle desperately trying to break out of the loop (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Section of the Main Theme in B heard at the end of "April" right after April's death in Revolutionary Road.

3. The propelling force of music through time in *1917*.

The effects achieved through obsessive repetition of a musical cell in *Revolutionary Road*, not only correspond to the creation of tense and ambiguous ambiences or transmit a sense of no direction, but also to set the pace and rhythm of a scene and keep the audience on the lookout. The musical effects that create expectation and/or tension with constant repetition are better appreciated through long sequences and with a narrative that transmits a lot of information through a sequence of events while the music remains on the same state and serves as a connector. The music, once it leaves the immediate action and becomes unattached from the image, is able to unify the series of events by providing a perspective of the general context of the film, almost as becoming a third-person narrator that guides the audience. Newman uses this function in the music of *Revolutionary Road* to illustrate the introspective evolution of the characters and to symbolize the burden that surrounds the main couple of the story from an external point of view. In *1917*, being the film so focused on the present action, the music only separates from the main characters in very few occasions to provide a contextual perspective. This is important to give a propelling force to the story, transmit the same motivation of the characters to fulfill their mission to the audience, and give a sense of time passing through a film with no visible cuts or time jumps.

The very first moment when this occurs is at the scene at 00:21:48:00 where Blake and Schofield are walking into no man's land as the track titled "Gehenna" in the soundtrack begins to play and slowly take the foreground for the first time in the movie. The way this track slowly begins to bring new elements to the score and color the ambience in an intriguing, a little tense and slightly uplifting fashion is crucial to anticipate the threats ahead of the way and is strongly connected to the presence of post-minimalism in the music.

After a long scene of preparation to leave the camp, Blake and Schofield have gathered all the equipment they need and are ready to cross the line into no man's land. Music stops for a moment as they look at each other to confirm their commitment to the mission and they climb the barrier to get out of the trench. The cue starts right here with a sinister and doomy low drone that fills up the soundscape to indicate the seriousness of the situation as our protagonists cautiously walk into the

deserted land. The drone slowly evolves and changes its timber while they get deeper into the field without saying much to each other and crossing the barriers looking for cover. The ambience is charged with suspense, they are in an open field and the enemy can appear from anywhere around, the fear in the two soldiers starts to become evident. The camera follows them from a close angle and moves around them, creating a very strong focus on their actions and, even though they are walking on a straight line, this makes their direction seem confusing. They spot a trench from afar and walk towards it to find cover. The music so far is only composed by dark drones and suspense effects, it is not giving a sense of tonality or musicality, but just setting the ambience by reflecting the macabre and desolate setting of the empty battlefield. They walk through debris from the conflict and dead bodies and the musical ambience gets creepier. As they get closer to the trench, the music brings in the piano for the first time with an ostinato figure of chord arpeggios over an irregular metric composed of two 2/4 bars and one 3/4 bar (Figure 17). This figure is repeated on a loop and begins by setting D minor as the scale but ends by playing the arpeggio of D major. This creates a sense of confusion between minor and major which loads the ambience with an intriguing altered dominant feel. The rhythmical irregularity of this pattern also provides a sense of acceleration to the scene as the figure is repeated constantly. This effect creates a pushing force that enhances the feeling of needing to find cover in the trench and pushes the heroes towards their destination.



Figure 17: Piano ostinato at the start of "Gehenna", music cue heard when Blake and Schofield go into no man's land in 1917.

As the music keeps repeating this piano ostinato, the camera starts to move a little further from the soldiers. We see them cross a crater hole and, as they climb out of it, the music begins to build up still around this ostinato by adding a dulcimer and some more intense drones. The camera makes a transition to the other side of the crater by passing through some rocks and we lose sight of the soldiers for a moment to find them on the other side walking and aiming with their rifles. The music creates a constant crescendo through all this scene, slowly gains the foreground and at this point stops playing the piano ostinato to bring in the strings playing the same figure but on

a regular metric (Figure 18). The camera continues to get further and further from the soldiers to reveal more context of the field filled up with obstacles. The music keeps on building up by adding a brass line on top that reflects the rising tension felt by the heroes as they approach the trench without knowing if they will find enemy troops there. The ostinato now played by the strings is constructed by the same notes on the piano ostinato, but this time all the notes are of the same duration, making no spaces in between and producing rising tension and a more accelerated pace. The string ostinato slowly becomes a background texture and is overshadowed by the brass line that maintains long notes and balances between the b13 and the fifth degree. This long crescendo is supported by timpani hits towards the end, and reaches its peak by making three accented hits over the arpeggio of D major on the strings and the brass playing the flattened 13th, leaving a tense dominant feel unresolved by not hitting the first beat of the bar at the end (Figure 18). We see Blake and Schofield from afar getting ready to look into the trench with their rifles ready and the music ends the crescendo with the three hits as they aim inside the trench to find no one inside. We feel the relief in the soldiers as the instruments' resonance fade away leaving only a static drone as they descend to the trenches to find shelter.

The musical score for Figure 18 consists of two systems of music. The first system features a Brass part (Horns) and a Strings part. The Brass part begins with a rest for four measures, then enters with a long note on the fifth degree (F) in the fifth measure, marked *mp cresc.* The Strings part starts with a *mf* dynamic and plays a continuous eighth-note arpeggio pattern. The second system features a Brass part (+trombones (8vb)) and a Strings part. The Brass part enters with a long note on the flattened 13th degree (E-flat) in the fifth measure, marked *mf*. The Strings part continues with the same eighth-note arpeggio pattern.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Brass, Strings, and Timpani. The Brass part is marked '+trumpets' and consists of a series of chords that crescendo from *f* to *ff*. The Strings part features a piano ostinato on an irregular metric, with a steady pattern that crescendos from *pp* to *ff*. The Timpani part features a steady pattern that crescendos from *pp* to *ff*.

Figure 18: Reduction of the orchestral section at the end of “Gehenna”, heard when Blake and Schofield approach the trench in 1917.

This scene is a clear example of a musical cue that transitions from supporting the immediate action to providing a more contextual perspective of the scene. The music that supports this scene begins by creating a suspenseful environment and describing the macabre setting of the open field always remaining very close to the characters while the camera surrounds them. As we see them making progress, the music switches to a more contextual point of view to illustrate the dangers of the battlefield where they are diving in. This occurs when the camera slowly begins to separate from the heroes and the music reflects this movement by taking over the foreground and adding new musical forms, like the piano ostinato on an irregular metric and, furthermore, the orchestral section that crescendos over a steady pattern. The effects of this musical piece also demonstrate how minimalist musical structures can enhance the feeling of intrigue and alter the sense of time without any cuts in the image by providing and accelerated pace with irregular metric structures that slowly turn into a regular texture. This scene plays a very important role in the film, it serves to show a glimpse of the threats that will come for our heroes. The music in this sequence does not specifically present a melodic theme but, through a very charged musical ambience that will eventually be reprised, sums up the character of the film and takes a break from the heroes’ perspective to provide a general view of the story to remind us that the mission is way harder than what they imagine.

Conclusion

The concept of musical themes has been approached through many different ways by film composers over the decades. Not only the thematic elements themselves can be presented in various ways and forms and still achieve their function, but also their distribution and development through a film can vary depending on many factors related to genre, narrative, storytelling techniques, etc. Thomas Newman is a composer that, from the start, defined his style through musical aspects regarding timber, instrumentation, use of modal harmony, etc. and became known because of his unique voice. The way his scores are structured around thematic elements and how these evolve through the story demonstrate an interesting approach of post minimalist writing and the creation of ambiance through music in order to accurately support the narrative structure and give value to some elements of the story. These particularities become, in his music, evident through the analysis presented in this dissertation focused on the scores he has delivered for Sam Mendes' films, which on their own, explore new qualities of film narrative and perception of time through storytelling. Needless to say, the three films analyzed are very different from each other, and the way Newman interprets these stories through his music shows a variety of musical functions that can be achieved through relatively similar techniques found in his style of writing, that represent an important part of his identity as a composer and make him an ideal partner for Mendes.

The result of an adequate balance between musical ambiances and thematic material have shown many interesting effects on the overview of these films. By viewing the global timeline of musical moods in *Road to Perdition*, it is clear that the variety and distribution of scales and modes has been carefully crafted to create a journey-like experience, mark the important turning points and keep new elements coming as the audience goes through the story. In this film the ambiances that surround the heroes provide a perspective on the film that accompanies the audience, enhances the feeling of resolution and arcs in the story, just like the Dorian mode to symbolize the mob's presence and authority over the heroes as well as the late apparition of Mixolydian

and Major harmonies that mark the evolution of the characters and bring in the most important themes.

A similar method of musical structuration is applied in the score of *Revolutionary Road*, but this time, the musical functions are focused on communicating a constant sense of monotony, emptiness and ambiguity that creates a weight force on the lead characters that, over time, leads to the tragic ending. This structure limits the apparition of musical cues to a minimal level to create a stronger impact each time the music cues in. By revolving around Lydian, Mixolydian b6 harmonies, almost exclusively, the score keeps a global enigmatic feeling of ambiguity and maybe even a dreamlike bliss that often clashes with the image and favors the intriguing nature of the story. The continuous balance and obsessive repetition of the lead motif of three notes and other motifs presented through the film together with the balance of two chords that accompanies it, creates a sense of moving forward towards something but without seeing the end of the line. The score is dedicated to imposing a thematic hierarchy, clearly led by the three-note main motif but also supported by other elements like April's motif that slowly fades away in the score as she does in the story.

In *1917*, the use of musical ambiances becomes even more present and more important to transmit sensations to the audience in a very subtle way. In this score, Newman goes a step further into the concept of creating a musical structure of a considerable length with very limited thematic material, and this reflects the idea of a dangerous open field that surrounds our heroes. The large amount of musical ambiances that simply keep a tense background as the two soldiers dive into no man's land, helps to keep the mystery of the story, keep the audience always on the lookout, just like the characters, and create a much stronger engagement with the events. The ambiances are used to slowly bring in the musical elements that will define this score and, by occasionally adding musical motifs that repeat on a cycle, they create a constant drive force that pushes the lead characters forward on their quest. This propelling force created by the score that slowly moves from the background to the foreground in certain scenes, like in the one where they find shelter in the enemy trenches, helps to transmit a sense of pace and rhythm to assemble the events together. This specific scene also anticipates the use of a particularly altered Minor scale that will later on bring the first big melodic theme and gives the audience a contextual

view of the scene to provide a hint of the dangers that our heroes will meet. The construction of these musical ambiances is usually connected to the use of post minimalist notions in the music writing.

Musical postminimalism is reflected in Newman's work on many levels and through many aspects of his work, and it is mainly through it that his music achieves an effective connection to these films' narrative structure. Through the analysis presented in this dissertation, the presence of post minimalism has become evident in Newman's work on the films of Mendes, especially when analyzing the functions of the score and how they affect the story. The repetition of simple ideas, to begin with, is very often used in the music to create anticipation, tension or turn a motif into a texture or a cycle, that can eventually be developed or turned into something new. The use of the main motif in *Revolutionary Road* is a clear example of this. It is also common to see in these scores that the music begins with a single idea repeated on a cycle that, on its own, does not establish a scale or even a chord, and this way the score keeps an ambiguous ambience before fully revealing a complete phrase with a steady rhythm. This is easily found in *1917*, where the music remains enigmatic and unclear for a long while at the beginning of the film before even bringing the instruments in. Another characteristic of post-minimalist music is the importance of keeping an irregular pace of change. This is approached differently in each of these films, and is much more noticeable in long, tense and suspenseful scenes like the murder sequence in *Road to Perdition*. In this sequence of events, the music slowly shifts between four stages while developing different ideas and sonorities to evoke the different sensations felt by the characters as a consequence to the murder of Michael's family, a very impactful event that triggers the main struggle of the story.

The presence of post minimalist notions in Newman's music shows to have evolved all along the three scores chosen for this study. The score of *1917* is arguably the one that dives further into the modern minimalist approach of film music. It demonstrates a different use of thematic material, and a much more limited one especially if compared to *Road to Perdition*, one of the first films of the Newman-Mendes collaboration. Moreover, the music in *1917* demonstrates another very important principle of post minimalist writing: a strong focus on pulse, tension, texture and ambience. This function is crucial in this score to create a constant moving motion in

order to propel the heroes through the story and keep a constant feeling of stress and suspense to transmit the ambience of a desolate battlefield in a quite immersive way. Consequently, this score is able to generate a solid engagement with the audience and the vast musical presence in the film proposes a variable sense of time passing through the different events of the story. This effect supports the narrative development by proposing a different rhythm and pace to each sequence, which is of vital importance considering that the story remains from beginning to end in the present tense and that the film has almost no visible cuts.

This dissertation presents only a glance of the post-minimalist phenomenon's presence in film music of the modern era by dedicating a musical thematic and structural analysis of the work of a renown Hollywood composer and his collaboration with one of the many filmmakers that have recurrently trusted him with the music of their films. This study begins by presenting a cinema of the new millennium that explores new aesthetics and gives value to certain aspects that have gained relevance in the making of modern films ranging from technological novelties to the construction of new narrative structures, far from the classical forms that dominated the medium for decades. These new takes on film narrative, show a relation with the modern ways of managing thematic material on a score, the manner it is created and developed, and also, the effects of an effective balance between musical ambiances and melodic themes.

The analysis of these three films has brought to light the different techniques that have been applied in the musical writing to support the narrative and the enhance the viewers' experience of the films. Through an overview of the musical structure of the scores, it has now become evident how Newman achieves an appropriate distribution of themes along the films and how this relates to the use of musical ambiances to give value to the thematic material or create a more subtle voice to transmit important information about the context.

There are many other aspects that have gained value in the digital era of cinema. Some of these are completely separated from narrative, but related to other forms of film aesthetics like color, tone, style, framing, etc. Many of these non-narrative aspects can show a relation to post minimalist features on the score. It would be of great

importance to study the effects of this musical phenomenon on different dimensions of film aesthetics.

Furthermore, this collaboration has not come to an end. As of 2022, Sam Mendes is currently working on a new feature romance film titled *Empire of Light* that will also have the contribution of Thomas Newman for the composition of the score. Considering the evolution of the post minimalist approach in Newman's scores that has become evident through this dissertation, an analysis of the musical thematic material and use of musical ambiences in this upcoming film would be of great interest to complete the study of the Mendes-Newman collaboration.

Bibliography

Films

- Darabont, Frank. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank Redemption* [Film]. Castle Rock Entertainment.
- Mendes, Sam. (Director). (2019). *1917* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures, Reliance Entertainment, New Republic Pictures, Mogambo, Neal Street Productions and Amblin Partners.
- Mendes, Sam. (Director). (1999). *American Beauty* [Film]. Jinks/Cohen Company.
- Mendes, Sam. (Director). (2008). *Revolutionary Road* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures, BBC Films, Neal Street Productions and Evamere Entertainment.
- Mendes, Sam. (Director). (2002). *Road to Perdition* [Film]. The Zanuck Company.
- Ozon, François. (Director). (2012). *Dans la maison* [Film]. La Banque Postale, Images 5, Canal+, France 2 Cinéma, Mandarin Cinéma, Palatine Étoile 9, Région Ile-de-France.

Publications

- Carayol, Cécile. (2012). *Une musique pour l'image Vers un symphonisme intimiste dans le cinéma français*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Chion, Michel. (1994). *Audio-Vision : Sound on Screen*. Columbia University Press.
- Denson, Shane & Leyda, Julia. (2016). *Post-Cinema. Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. Reframe Books.
- Gann, Kyle & Potter, Keith. (2013). *A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning from:* The Ashgate

Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music Routledge. (p. 39-60). Routledge.

- Gaudreault, André & Marion, Philippe. (2015). *The End of Cinema ? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age*. Columbia University Press.
- Jullier, Laurent. (1997). *L'écran post-moderne : Un cinéma de l'allusion et du feu d'artifice*. L'Harmattan.
- McQuire, Scott. (2000). *Impact Aesthetics: Back to the Future in Digital Cinema? : Millennial fantasies*. Sage Publications.
- Rothbart, Peter. (2013). *The Synergy of Film and Music: Sight and Sound in Five Hollywood Films*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Shaviro, Steven. (2016). *Post-Continuity: An Introduction* in "Post-Cinema. Theorizing 21st-Century Film. Reframe Books.

Articles

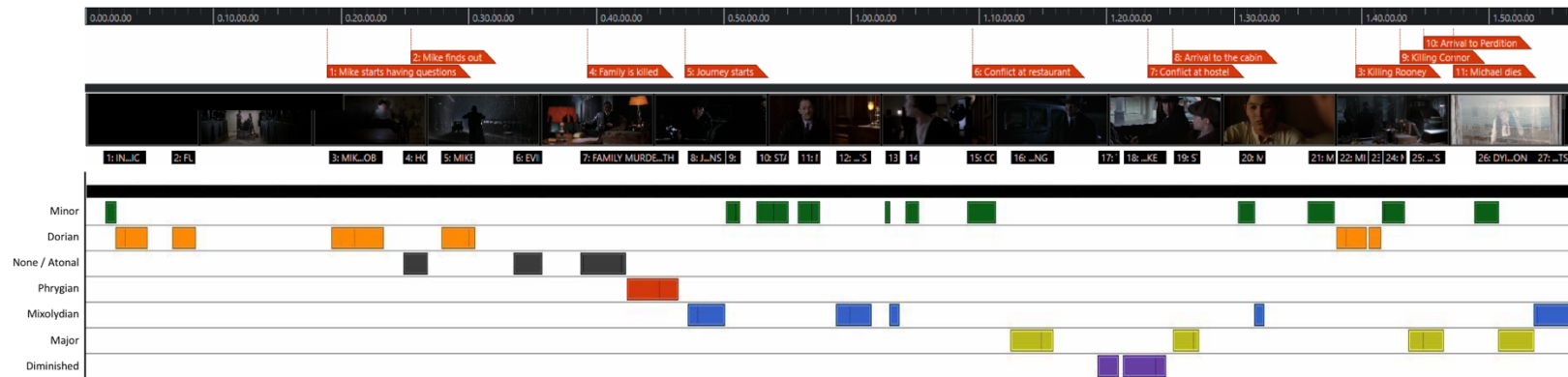
- Burlingame, Jon. (2000, January 20th). Spotlight: Thomas Newman. Variety. Located at <https://variety.com/2000/music/news/spotlight-thomas-newman-1117761178/> accessed March 20, 2022.
- Coonan, Clifford. (2007, October 10th). Greenaway announces the death of cinema – and blames the remote-control zapper. Published in *The Independent*. Located at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/greenaway-announces-the-death-of-cinema-and-blames-the-remotecontrol-zapper-394546.html> accessed March 20, 2022.
- Huvet, Chloé. (2022). Thomas Newman/Sam Mendes. Auscultation audiovisuelle du drame des banlieues bourgeoises dans *American Beauty* (1999) et *Revolutionary Road* (2008). In Cécile Carayol and Jérôme Rossi (dir.), *Compositeurs et réalisateurs en duo, dix-sept études musico-filmiques* (p. 197-217). Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes.

- Jacobs, Derek. (2015, April 24th). The Basics of Film Aesthetics. *Plot and Theme*. Located at <https://plotandtheme.com/2015/04/24/the-basics-of-film-aesthetics/> accessed March 20, 2022.
- Reyland, Nicholas. (2015). Corporate Classicism and the Metaphysical Style: Affects, Effects, and Contexts of Two Recent Trends in Screen Scoring. Published in *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*. Volume 9 Issue 2 (p. 197-217). Liverpool University Press.

Annexes

Road To Perdition

Modal and Tonality Structure



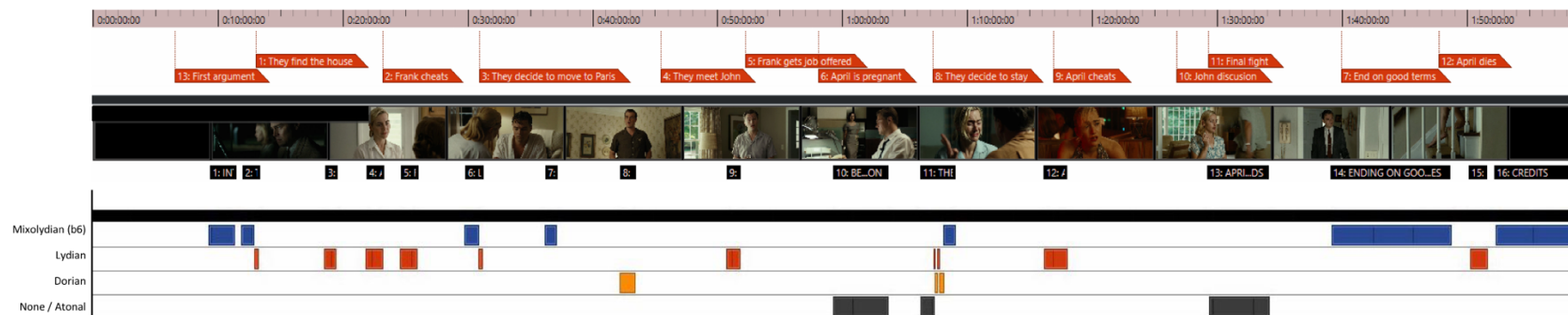
Road To Perdition

Themes



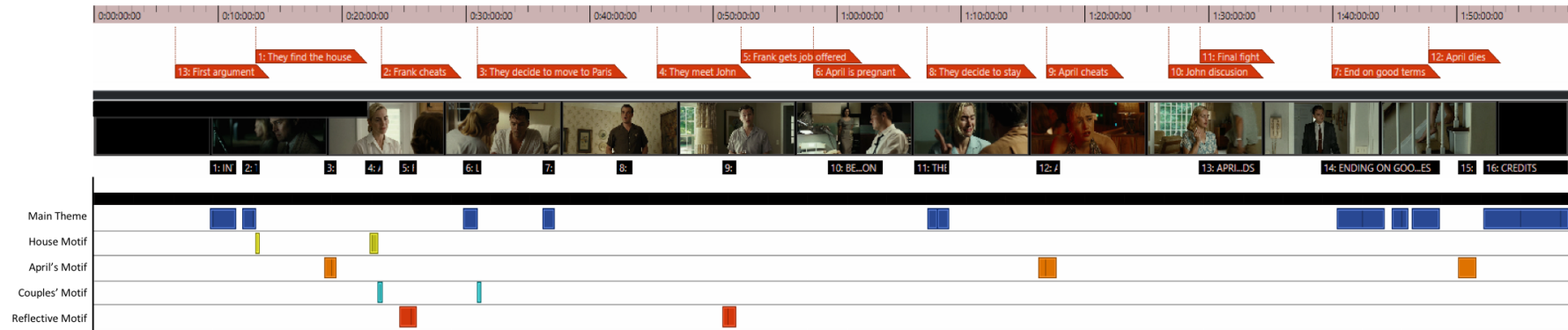
Revolutionary Road

Modal and Tonality Structure



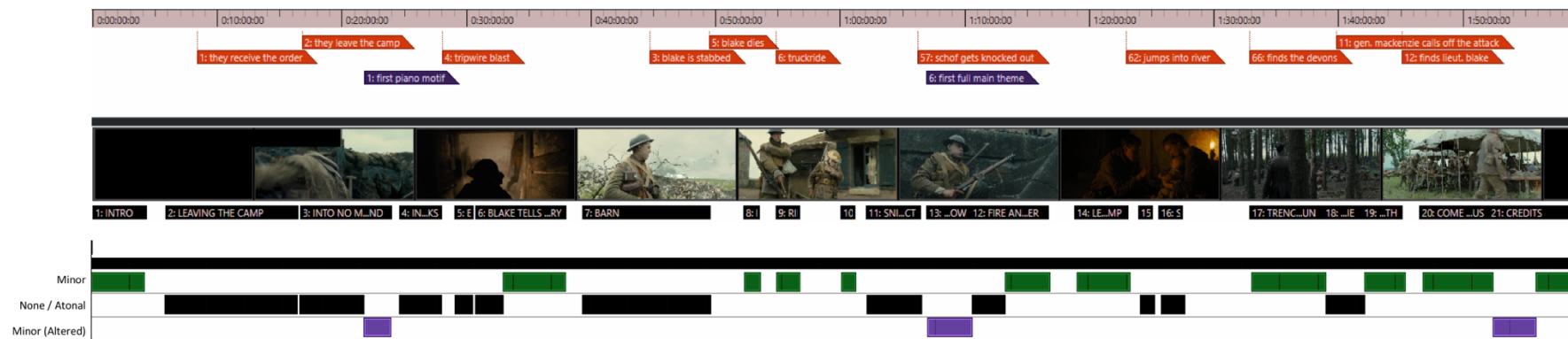
Revolutionary Road

Themes



1917

Modal and Tonality Structure



1917

Themes

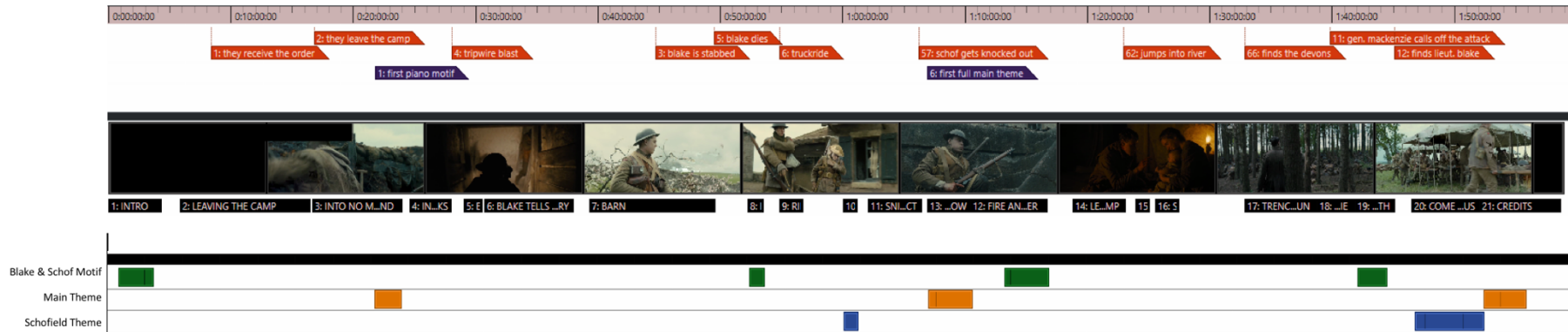


Table of illustrations

Figure 1 : “Road to Perdition” Timeline of Music Themes.....	22
Figure 2 : “Road to Perdition” Modal and Tonality Structure Timeline	23
Figure 3 : “Revolutionary Road” Timeline of Musical Themes.....	25
Figure 4 : “Revolutionary Road” Modal and Tonality Structure.....	26
Figure 5 : “1917” Modal and Tonality Structure	29
Figure 6 : “1917” Timeline of Musical Themes	32
Figure 7: Blake and Schofield's Motif in 1917.....	33
Figure 8 : Motif that represents April’s thoughts in Revolutionary Road	34
Figure 9 : Percussion Motif during murder scene in Road to Perdition	38
Figure 10 : Piano Motif during murder scene in Road to Perdition	38
Figure 11 : Low string phrases during the beginning of part 3 of the murder scene in Road to Perdition.....	39
Figure 12 : Strings reduction with only the top and bass notes during the end of part 3 of the murder scene in Road to Perdition.....	40
Figure 13 : Beginning of the Main Theme in Revolutionary Road. Transcribed by Chloé Huvet in his article of 2022, p. 203	43
Figure 14 : Main Motif in Revolutionary Road and one of its variations.....	44
Figure 15 : Single phrase from the Main Theme in Revolutionary Road.....	45
Figure 16 : Section of the Main Theme in B heard at the end of "April" right after April's death in Revolutionary Road	46
Figure 17 : Piano ostinato at the start of “Gehenna”, music cue heard when Blake and Schofield go into no man's land in 1917	48
Figure 18 : Reduction of the orchestral section at the end of “Gehenna”, heard when Blake and Schofield approach the trench in 1917.....	50

Research paper of: Rodrigo MURILLO

2nd cycle (Master), 2019-2020

Post-minimalist techniques in the writing of modern film scores through the collaboration between Thomas Newman and Sam Mendes

Abstract in French

Ce projet de recherche se concentre sur la musique de Thomas Newman dans les films de Sam Mendes, il se focalise spécifiquement sur trois films qui représentent particulièrement bien la trajectoire de leur collaboration au cours des deux dernières décennies. Ces trois films sont : *Road to Perdition* (2002), *Revolutionary Road* (2008) et *1917* (2019).

En analysant les dispositifs musicaux, les techniques post-minimalistes dans l'écriture et la forme structurelle de la musique, ce mémoire étudie les rôles des ambiances musicales en lien avec les thèmes musicaux dans ces films et théorise comment ces ambiances contribuent à la forme du film en fonction de leur structure narrative.