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WITHIN WORLDS: IMMERSION AND SUBJECTIVITY IN FILM MUSIC

DARREN MARTIN

A dissertation submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Music by Research

The University of Huddersfield

June 2017

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Synopsis or Abstract

Music and visuals have coexisted together in film for years, with millions of viewers and listeners attending film showings in a way of escaping their normal lives. This aim of escapism gives the viewer a chance to surround themselves in another world, apart from their own, and in doing so they can become immersed. To allow themselves the act of disbelief for a short period in order to find enjoyment and experience enhanced emotional involvement, where this could not be possible in day to day life. So what makes this combination of visuals and sound so appealing to the masses? What is it about the relationship between these two medias that culminates to create something truly captivating? When music and film connect in a perfect way it can make a masterpiece of audio-visual content, though there is a lot at play to make this happen.

This dissertation delves into what it is that makes film so immersive to its audience, discovering multiple ways of composing music to film and how using similar formulas to those used in successful film, similar results can be yielded in terms of the ability to become immersed.

However, an individual's personal opinion and experience can often be the deciding factor in that person becoming immersed. With this in mind this dissertation investigates the role of subjectivity in conjunction with immersion and film, exploring how subjectivity can affect how immersive a film can be to the viewer.

The following films are analysed in detail: *Birdman*, dir. by Alejandro G. Iñárritu (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014), *Fight Club*, dir. by David Fincher (20th Century Fox, 1999), and *Inception*, dir. by Christopher Nolan (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010). These three films have been chosen for analysis because they share similar narrative themes, that being the idea that the mind can influence the world, and in some cases create new worlds. These three films show their main characters interacting with parts of their mind, and in some cases being transported into their own minds.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Catherine Haworth for her constant support throughout this project. Julio D'Escrivan, who always pushed me to be better than before, and more than mediocre. Robert Davis, for being my gateway into immersion and the study of film and music, allowing me to involve myself in something that truly fascinates me to this day. Finally to my peers, for giving me daily insight, comradery, and competition when I surely needed it.

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Introduction

An idea that frequently grabs my attention is the one that explores how all human beings are different, that we are each unique and individual, and just as complex as one another. With all of these uniqueness's in each living person come personal opinions that differ in every one of us. No two people can ever have the exact same mind or thoughts. This concept in turn makes everyone subjective to various things in life including their choices and thoughts. As a result, their subjectivity greatly determines their likes, dislikes, and their future. With so many opinions in the modern world, it is an extremely difficult task to create a piece of moving image that has the ability to entrance every single person that watches it. Genres help in this regard, to guide viewers into watching the things that they believe that they will enjoy, though it is sometimes the case that unwilling viewers can have their minds changed when witnessing a truly great piece of film which they had not wished to see. The importance of this information on subjectivity is that I may have to decide a number of choices for my own composition based on the outcomes of my research: Firstly, whether I will have to choose to direct my music towards a specific audience, or if the target range that my music is created for can be broad enough to immerse all viewers. This is as of now unknown, however I believe that creating music that has the ability to immerse all, regardless of their subjectiveness, would be a difficult task. The goal for my research is to discover what it is about films that immerses the viewer, be it through visuals, audio, narrative, or a combination of the three. Then I want to know how subjectivity can change the effectiveness of immersive elements of film, making the viewer more or less susceptible to

immersion. After discussing various academic approaches to these two topics, I chose three films that share similar thematic qualities in order to explore these issues in their music. I will examine how each of the scores are composed, looking through all of the elements of their creation. After this research is complete, I will take my findings and apply them to multiple variations of a score for the independent film *Centre of Attention*. With this I can use the methods of each composed soundtrack for the three films and create similar scores of my own, before deciding which elements of the three scores are most suitable for the film. Where possible I would plan to merge moments from each of the composed scores in order to create a singular score comprising of the most immersive pieces of music at any moment. I am researching different ways to write music for film in an attempt to discover what the most successful techniques are, and how these ways of composing can have immersive effects on viewers. Ultimately my research asks the following two questions: 1. How does music impact a film's ability to immerse its viewers? 2. How does the subjective nature of the viewer affect their likelihood of becoming immersed by a film?

Starting with immersion itself, I will be looking to uncover what it is that brings on this experience when audience members are watching and listening to a film. To do this I will inspect moments from the three chosen films that immerse me as a viewer, and examine the elements of that particular scene. Once I have discovered what is creating immersion, I will search for these immersive factors through the film in order to find any patterns. Then I will research the concept of subjectivity in more depth, looking into the idea that each individual person's background, likes and

dislikes; everything that makes up someone's personality can be the deciding factor in whether or not they become immersed when watching a particular piece of film. When this research is done, I can begin analysing my three selected films in order to discover how music and sound has been used to create immersion. When all of this is done, I can attempt to mimic the techniques that I was researching when composing different scores for my chosen independent film, creating three unique scores based upon the films I have analysed previously, and ultimately combining them into a score consisting of the best elements of all three. In order to make the structure of this dissertation clear I have structured the following chapters so they are organised in the correct order. Chapters two and three are focussed on academic literature and draw from many references and sources to reinforce and influence my own points; chapters four-six consist of my case studies and contain in depth analysis of films that I have studied for this project; chapter seven discusses how the influences I have gained affect my own work, here I analyse my own composition looking at each individual moment and referring back to the films from earlier chapters.

Chapter One

Immersion.

If constructed carefully enough any kind of visually or auditorily engaging spectacle can have the capacity to fully engage its participant in a world of wonderment, sometimes familiar and other times unknown; ultimately engulfing the viewer in a diegetic world where they have never stepped foot in before, or are possibly returning to again. As Joseph Anderson writes: 'A motion

picture engages our capacity to participate in the diegesis through its capacity to present surrogate arrays to our visual and auditory systems, and at another level but nested within the first, through the capacity to present characters interacting in a time and place.’¹ In films of today the same is true of anything unreal on screen. Although there are times that things on the big screen are simply beyond belief, this is usually the result of unsatisfactory work behind the scenes. For the most part, when a film is particularly impressive in all aspects the impossible can become possible. Marie-Laure Ryan writes:

The distinction of the possible from the impossible is a relatively straightforward matter: all it takes is a particular definition of the criteria of accessibility. A much thornier issue is the distinction of the actual from the non actual within the realm of the possible.²

As Ryan states, it is fairly simple to distinguish what can be done from what cannot be done. As humans, we know the limitations of ourselves and that of the objects we have created (though these boundaries can often be pushed every day). It is the idea of what can be possible under different circumstances that imposes a much more diverse set of realities. Leading back to film, the viewer most likely enters the cinema completely aware that what they are about to witness is a work of fiction, that what they are moments away from viewing has been made solely for their entertainment purposes. This agreement to step away from one’s beliefs while

¹ Joseph D. Anderson, *Reality of illusion: Ecological approach to cognitive film theory* (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois U.P., 1998), p.111.

² Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as virtual reality: Immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media* (Baltimore, Md and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p.100.

watching a film creates what Anahid Kassabian calls 'an offer of assimilating identification'³. When this happens, the audience can become much more susceptible to believing what is placed before them on screen. The most outrageous of events with the strangest of characters can seem to be the norm because every person seated before the cinema screen has made the choice to indulge themselves in something that does not belong in reality, therefore the audience can watch the characters 'sledding down the Himalayas, for instance'⁴ and be much more likely to accept it for that moment. The audience no longer has to question whether or not they can truly believe what has been shown to them, or as Ryan states: 'whether the created world is as real as the physical world',⁵ but instead only suspend their disbelief for the duration of the film (or part of the film in many of cases).

Immersion does not necessarily take place only in film, however it is said by some, such as Marie-Laure Ryan, that 'moving pictures are the most immersive of all media.'⁶ Yet for a film to be entirely believable, Ryan states that: 'the text must offer an expanse to be immersed within,'⁷ however this is not nearly enough, a textural world must be established to form any kind of true acceptance. Music often connects many other aspects of what makes the moving image so enticing to so many people, by tying together each element of the film - the text and narrative linked with the viewer's own psyche⁸, every member of the audience creating a

³ Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2001), p.2.

⁴ Kassabian, p.2.

⁵ Ryan, p.89.

⁶ Ryan, p.120.

⁷ Ryan, p.90.

⁸ Kassabian, p.1

separate interpretation of what they are witnessing.

It is much more likely for a filmgoer to refer to their experience as one involving "watching a film" rather than listening to one, though both of these senses are used. Seeing and hearing what is presented to you, and requiring both equally to understand and process it. As Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer remark: 'in fact speech, music, and noise fundamentally and routinely influence our understanding of what we see.'⁹ It is thanks to the successful job of the sound designers and composers that we do not tend to realise these aspects of film, while also relying on the complex and magnificent spectacles that our eyes are submitted to in film, or the interesting characters that fill fascinating worlds of unreal inhabitants that leave us forgetting about all of the sound that reinforces these features. 'We tend to take speech and effects sounds, such as footfalls or airplane noises, for granted because they are understood as natural, or what we would expect to hear if we found ourselves in the environment depicted on the screen.'¹⁰ Yet it is music (and more specifically sound) that is predominant in life, before our eyes have developed enough for us to visually see anything at all, we are listening. As the human body is being formed it can hear a vast array of sounds, noises that cannot be explained nor understood, but still they remain, and our perception of sound will always be present. Gorbman mentions: 'We begin to hear before we are born, four and a half months after conception. From then on, we develop in a continuous and luxurious bath of sounds: the song of our mother's voice, the swash of her breathing, the trumpeting of her intensities, the timpani of her heart.'¹¹ Music is often referred to as

⁹ James Buhler, David Neumeyer, Rob Deemer, *Hearing the movies: Music and sound in film history*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). p.xxi.

¹⁰ Buhler, Neumeyer, Deemer, p.xxii

¹¹ Michel Chion (trans. Claudia Gorbman), *Audio-vision: Sound on screen*, (Chichester and New York: Columbia

the most immersive of the senses that human beings perceive, and it is through multiple media platforms with the inclusion of sound and music; immersive experiences can be found within a few moments and clicks. 'Immersion and interactivity are ideals in several "new" media forms'.¹² Even the act of searching for these moments can in itself become immersive - I just like many millions of others, have found myself lost in the endless stream of advertisement-like pictures and videos that are uploaded to the walls of Facebook. Furthermore, it is in those scenarios of openness to engagement, when the participant transforms into a sort of empty husk waiting for entertainment that they are the most susceptible to immersive media, in particular sound catching the listener off guard. Michel Chion refers to a lot of music and sound within film to be 'stuck like a shadow to the object that caused them',¹³ never acting out on their own but instead always being chained to their original creators. It is when sound is used in a different way; to include sound that is not always natural but instead created, that new ways of engaging an audience emerge. One of the most used examples of this can be heard in any amount of Foley used for a film, where sound is recorded separately and synchronised with footage for the best effect; commonly implemented for a character's footsteps.¹⁴ One of the goals of film is to engage its audience, and if this is to be done, then experimentation of methods should be encouraged. Surprise can be an effective method of engagement, and with new sounds to hear and new sights to see it becomes easier to capture the attention of a viewer. If an audience

University Press, 1994) p.vii.

¹² Richardson, J., Gorbman, C., & Vernallis, C, *The oxford handbook of new audiovisual aesthetics*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). p.6.

¹³ Chion, xvi

¹⁴ Anderson, p.85.

were subjected to the same forms of sound and visuals in cinema (sound effects that look like they belong where they should, for example), then they may understandably grow tired of this form of engagement. This of course does not apply to all viewers, but a select few.

Language and the use of voice is a very powerful tool when used in the right hands, it is language that has brought people together through settling of differences, and language that has waged wars; destroying homes and ending lives in a matters of mere moments. Chion mentions that word in film 'has long been both the Achilles' heel of Europe as well as its crowning glory.'¹⁵ With the inclusion of voice in cinema, new doorways to immersion are opened, as a culture we tend to listen to those who speak, and particularly to those who speak well. We have a tendency to look toward those of strength and confidence, those who cannot only capture our attention but firmly hold it for long periods of time. With this in mind, auditory close-ups have become extremely useful in grasping the eyes and ears of an audience; in films like *Star Wars*¹⁶, where C3PO's British butler accent warms us toward the character (of course this is subjective), or 'the exquisitely bronzy voice of James Earl Jones'¹⁷ creating the breathing sounds of Darth Vader. Here we do not even necessarily require speech since the sound of his ominous breathing is enough to imbue the entire audience in suspense. An auditory close-up can sometimes be an effective way for the audience to connect with the character of a film on a closer level, to not only see them in a more intimate perspective, but hear them also at such a closeness. Using the sound of an actor's breath to show multiple emotions; fear,

¹⁵ Chion & Gorbman, p.x.

¹⁶ *Star Wars*, dir. by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977).

¹⁷ Michel Chion & Claudia Gorbman, *The voice in cinema*, (Chichester;New York;: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.165.

infatuation, anger. In this way it allows the viewer to relate more to the character, to empathise with them. Yet this only works if the specific viewer is capable of empathising with that specific character, though this is something to be discussed in a later chapter. Anywhere you go in modern society, film has a basis of what forms day to day life. It is easy for anyone to find and watch a film that they enjoy, whether it be in the cinema, or at home, anyone can carry a film around with them to watch at a moment's notice. As Bordwell & Thompson state: 'Press a button, and a machine conjures up a movie for your pleasure.'¹⁸

Immersion can be defined in multiple ways, and academics describe immersion differently too. Joseph Nechvatal uses the phrase 'It is, like art, gradient.'¹⁹, going on to say 'suspending disbelief and outside stimulus for an interval of time—as when one's attention gets wrapped up in something compelling.'²⁰ Caroline Cuny, Marianela Fornerino, and Agnes Helme-Guizon refer to immersion as a state where 'People seem to move into a mental state in which self-interest and threats from the real world are less relevant. This type of disconnection might result from attention distraction: either cognitive, in the form of reduced attention capacity, or emotional, such that people engage in an emotional sensation.'²¹ Andrei Nae states defines immersion as 'the illusion of presence and, optionally, the ability to influence the fictional world.'²² In all of these definitions of the term, the aspect that links them is the concept that immersion has a way of taking a viewer's mind away from their

¹⁸ Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K, *Film art: An introduction, 10th ed.*, (New York; London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2012), p.2.

¹⁹ Nechvatal, J, *Immersion Into Noise*, (Michigan: MPublishing, 2011), p.13.

²⁰ Nechvatal, p.17.

²¹ Cuny, Caroline, Fornerino, Marianela, Helme-Guizon, Agnes, Can music improve e-behavioral intentions by enhancing consumers' immersion and experience?, (France: Elsevier B.V, 2015), p.1026.

²² Nae, A, *Immersion at the Intersection of Technology, Subjectivity and Culture: An Analysis of Silent Hill 2*, Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 13(1), (Romania, University of Bucharest, 2017), p.8.

natural surroundings and delivering them to somewhere else. Where the opinions differs is more through the means rather than the outcome, whether it be through intellectual stimulation, or engagement of emotions, all successful participants mind's are taken to another place.

In Winifred Phillips' book discussing video game music the term 'Suspension of disbelief' is used, defining this as 'an activity that we willingly embrace. We do this in order to appreciate imaginative literature. Much like a contract, we agree to accept the more outlandish aspects of a story we might otherwise reject as straining the bounds of credulity.'²³ As Phillips states, it is important to accept the terms of which any given media has set when immersing oneself in its world. Denial of this suspension of disbelief, and lack of participation through imagination can only cause a less successful outcome in engagement. However, imagination is not always essential for immersion to occur. Dominic Arsenault writes about three types of immersion, firstly naming one as 'Imaginative', but later renaming it to 'Fictional Immersion'. He states: 'The reason for this change is that we can be immersed in a story without exercising our imagination.'²⁴ At times immersion can be more effective when participation is minimal, rather than using imagination to further the ideas of a narrative, immersion can be thought of as more of an outcome than a goal to achieve.

Immersion itself is an ends not a means, and therefore if the ends are to be achieved, a means must be found. It's true that there are many ways to become immersed, and that there are multiple ways that individuals become immersed, yet

²³ Phillips, W, *A Composer's Guide to Game Music*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2014)

²⁴ Arsenault, D, *Dark waters: Spotlight on immersion*, (Montreal, University of Montreal, 2005)

it is down to an individual as to why they are immersed in particular subject matters. A person's beliefs, knowledge, or interest can be a defining factor in whether or not they are able to become immersed in a piece of media, this is where subjectivity is observed. Though there are effective ways to become immersed, for example surrounding the senses with engagement, it is not a definite answer as to whether immersion can take place within someone. Even if the parameters are perfect, if a person's interests or opinions directly contract or misalign with the subject of what they are being shown, it is less likely that they will be able to become immersed. However, if what is being shown is so contrary to a viewer's beliefs then it may cause a big enough emotional reaction to allow immersion to take over. This is why subjectivity plays a crucial role in the act of immersion.

Chapter Two

Subjectivity

To begin with, I want to clarify what is meant when using the word subjectivity in this work. I am referring to what Anahid Kassabian calls 'Distributed subjectivity', to which she defines as the following 'Distributed subjectivity is constructed in and through our responses to acts of culture-speech, music, television, and the likes'²⁵. It is this specific description that I refer to when discussing an individual's or group's subjective nature when relating to choice or opinion. Although Kassabian refers to distributed subjectivity as a non-individual occurrence, I will fundamentally

²⁵ Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: affect, attention, and distributed subjectivity*, (London, University of California Press, Ltd, 2013), p.xxiv.

be using the same description with the idea of individual application. Furthermore, though I am predominantly using subjectivity from the perspective of the viewer, I am aware of those who discuss the term from the film's point of view. One such academic, Edward Branigan explains the distinct similarity between subjectivity and perception in film:

Subjectivity here has something to do with 'perceiving' and also, perhaps, with 'feeling'. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whose perception, it is clear that the term subjectivity is not used to describe what the film is about — a particular character, topic or theme — but rather to describe in some way how the film presents or portrays its character or story.

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As Branigan explains, while an audience is being subjective towards a film, they are being fed feelings and perceptions directly from the portrayal of the film. The way in which a film has been made to present its characters or storyline can have a direct impact on a viewer's perception of the film, this is more so when one of the characters leads the narration of the story. In this instance, the story becomes subjective of the character themselves, and may not necessarily be a true account of the events. Even more so would be the impact of the filmmaker's own subjectivity, laying artificial perceptions and feelings for the audience to absorb.

Every person that is alive today arguably has some sort of interaction with the concept of subjectivity, it is a fundamental part of life and almost impossible to let slip by without some kind of subconscious thought on the subject. Put simply,

²⁶ Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema*, (Berlin, Mouton Publishers, 1984), p.1.

subjectivity refers to what David Beard & Kenneth Gloag call a person's 'sense of self'.²⁷ When referred to in this way it is quite plausible to imagine that most people will at some point in their lives think about their sense of self, their identity, what makes them who they are. Even if this is a simple matter of deciding how to style their hair, what to music to listen to, how to walk, who to befriend, where to work, or what to like, these subtle acts all have some participation with the notion of subjectivity within oneself. Every independent and opinionated thought that enters a person's head defines what kind of person they are; culminating to create their identity, their personality, likes and dislikes, their sense of self.

Many individuals spend years in the search for who they really are, and this desire for inner understanding has the ability to take over every ambition in a person until they are comfortable with the reassuring knowledge that they know who they are. Of course in the end none of it really matters to anyone else, there are many that portray themselves to others only in the way that they want to be perceived, in an attempt of masking their true identity. Countless members of society have the ability to hide their true self from others through powerful tools such as social media. In the online centred world of the modern day you can be anyone you want to be, even if that person is vastly different to your true self. The opportunity to meet new people and make new friends on the internet from all over the world is more likely than it has ever been. Not only that, it is much more possible for many of the world's inhabitants. This way of socialising can be considered a significantly easier alternative than venturing out into the real world and risking any kind of anxiety that overwhelms a lot of society, so creating an online profile, entering a mass amount of

²⁷ David Beard & Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The key concepts, 2nd ed*, (London, Routledge, 2013), p.176.

personal information, and making a journey into the digital world seems like the more logical option. The issue with this however (as I have previously stated) is that there are not a lot of people in the world that know exactly who they are, and in not knowing who you are it is likely that any information that you are asked to enter into an online profile may not be accurate. The obvious example being the endless dating websites where participants tend to alter specifics about their information, sometimes to the degree that when faced with another applicant, an overall cloud of confusion is formed as it turns out no one is who they claim to be. In early life we are all constantly forced to reassess ourselves as members of society, be it in school where the time limit to "life" is ticking down, or at home where parent's and friend's expectations define how we shape ourselves. All of this pressure has the ability to push a constant shift in our sense of self, feeling different around family rather than friends, and especially when alone. All of it seeming to beg the question "Who am I?"²⁸ Yet, it is hard to blame anyone for not being completely honest when describing who they are as a person, because the fact is that a lot of individuals simply do not like aspects of themselves, and when given the opportunity to change that (even if it is only in the false world of online) they jump at the chance to be a better version of themselves.

Every action and reaction in our lives sculpts who we are, and it is through every little fragment of our lives that we are each individually subjective. No two people are exactly the same. Twins may look alike but no matter how parallel appearance can be, the mind of two people can never be identical. Our subjectivity determines our taste in culture; film, music, art, and it is because of everything that has

²⁸ Donald H. Hall, *Subjectivity*, (New York & London, Routledge, 2004), p.1.

happened to us in our lives that we are able or unable to become immersed within films. Where one viewer may completely relate to a film and know exactly the meaning behind it, another member of the audience will have fallen asleep because of disinterest or an incapability to understand the plot. Of course there may even be another viewer who has fallen asleep simply because they are too tired to stay awake, and it is not their opinions that have decided this but some part of their life that has put them in this specific position. Though the fact that their life may leave them unable to stay awake long enough to enjoy a film may have become part of their subjective nature against films in general, and if this way of life has always existed for them then they may never have been sitting asleep in that cinema chair in the first place. The most basic form of this idea for narrative film is the one of "good versus evil", though this can come in many and more complicated forms, such as the pen versus the gun, or 'East versus West.'²⁹ As Peter Wollen states.

There is a reason why children have such an easy time becoming immersed within a film world (that is if they are interested in the film). This is down to a child's ability to pretend, to play make believe and imagine themselves as the main character of a world that is not real. Children play games and assign each other roles of the films they love; even creating arguments over who gets to play the hero and who has to be the villain, because every child wants to be that hero, to be admired by their peers and cheered as the victor. As many grow older it is very easy to lose this sense of make believe, that playing pretend is something that only kids do, becoming too proud in maturity. This makes the act of immersion much more

²⁹ Peter Wollen, *Signs and meaning in the cinema, 2nd ed* (London: Thames and Hudson, British Film Institute, 1970), p.94.

difficult for the more adult-oriented of people, those that choose to shun anything that they find mildly unbelievable or immature, as if they have become ashamed of their childhood and forgotten that they were once just like any other child; head filled with wonders of heroics and adventures that could be undertaken at a moment's notice, all they needed were their imaginations and the ability to believe. 'Such satisfaction is related to our capacity to play, to pretend, and is manifest in role identification. At ten years old it is easy for children to view a movie and pretend that they are the hero, that is, to actively take on the role of the protagonist.'³⁰ Stories are an integral part of childhood, they help us to realise our own experiences by being able to organise them into concise stories of our own, and then share those stories with others, allowing connections to be made through shared and similar experiences. 'Whether a story is our own or someone else's, the essential principle that guides and defines its construction is that it must convey and at the same time disambiguate experience.'³¹ It is a simple idea and most of it happens subconsciously, but the art of stories and storytelling has for centuries helped us as a society to grow into what we are today, and throughout time civilisation has created numerous pieces of technology to tell stories in different ways. It is no longer just words around a campfire but moving pictures on the big screen, cinematic shots and world-known stars, breath-taking sound effects and tear-jerking scores. However, most of what makes us appreciate these film features is subconscious to us, and purposely so. Filmmakers spend a lot of money and many months to carefully craft these moving pictures in such a precise way that barely any of the fine tuning is perceivable by the audience (unless they are trained

³⁰ Anderson, p.139.

³¹ Anderson, p.144

in such a way to notice). 'When viewers sit before a theater or video screen to watch a movie, they face a sequence of images and sounds. This precise nature of the sequence is neither arbitrary nor random, but of the most carefully crafted order.'³² With an upbringing of watching films we are unaware of how our minds are being trained to both believe and not believe simultaneously, the mere fact that we do not run out of cinemas with the appearance of a monster on screen shows that we are all very aware that when sitting down to watch a film, not everything placed before us is fully accurate. 'Even in the most engrossing of movies, the dual nature of the film viewing experience serves to prevent moviegoers from acting upon the information obtained from the screen'.³³ Yet our ability to react to something on screen comes from our subjectiveness, one reason that we do not run in fear when witnessing a monster on the big screen is because we are not the first to witness such a thing, and secondly because this practice of watching fictional stories in film is engraved in us from an early age. A viewer's reaction to a love scene may in fact depend on their subjectiveness; whether or not they have felt that way about someone in their actual life, if they can empathise with the characters, or perhaps have had a bad experience of a similar nature. Leading back to the idea of auditory close-ups, this sense of closeness with a character may or may not be effectively engaging to a viewer depending on their own subjectivity. This is not only true for characters audio, but objects also. The sound of a gun being loaded, a supermarket checkout beep, the typing of a keyboard, or the humming of an engine. All of these sounds have the ability to engage with the audience on a closer level if they are able to relate to them, and if they are subjective to these sounds. However, unless

³² Anderson, p.10

³³ Anderson, p.47

perceived on an extreme level, it is unlikely that sounds such as these can affect a viewer to the point of them leaving the room. It is an unwritten contract that we sign when buying tickets to a film, or even just pressing play on our phones, that we are very clearly able to distinguish the real from the unreal. In actual fact, when we sit down in a cinema we are looking at a flat screen with light projected towards it, and sound coming out of speakers that are precisely placed around the room. But it is much more than that in our minds, we are not looking at a screen but instead a portal into another world, we are not listening to sounds coming from speakers because the voices of these characters are coming straight from their mouths, or as Anderson asks: Why are we willing to accept, as an integral part of the movie, music that does not have a source in the image on the screen?³⁴ Regardless of this question, we are entirely willing to be mesmerised by the spectacle before us.

When writing about music in film, semiotics are often an important aspect of the study. Semiotics surround music for film, and signs can always be interpreted from music accompanying a scene, with numerous hidden meanings to be discovered and discussed at length. Numerous academics have written about semiotics in film and shed light on their uses and meanings, Warren Buckland for example states: 'In effect, semiotics enables film theorists to drive a wedge between film and its referent, to break the supposedly existential link between them, and to demonstrate that filmic meaning is a result of a system of codes, not the relation between images and referents.'³⁵ Here Buckland explains how the use of semiotics allows to be looked at and observed in a more analytical sense, that using semiotics gives a

³⁴ Anderson, p.81

³⁵ Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.10

much higher complexity to the inner workings of film aspects such as music. So that instead of music being created only to compliment a scene, it can be said to add subtle or possibly subliminal messages that enhance the rest of the film. In a different sense, Charles Soukup discusses how semiotics act within an advertisement: 'In many respects, in the conventions of advertising, all else narrative, character, drama, action, etc. is subordinated to depicting the product as attractive, glamorous, and appealing. An advertisement, ultimately, can have only one emphasis, the commodity, and only one theme, the desirability of the commodity.'³⁶ As Soukup states, when semiotics are observed in advertising it becomes clear that almost every aspect of the audio and visual are being carefully constructed to do one thing - sell a product. A leader of the study into semiotics - Philip Tagg explains how he teaches the impact of these signs and interpretations to his students:

Over the last ten years the first lesson in my course on Music and the Moving Image has begun with an well-trying commutation trick. I have attempted to focus attention, as tangibly as possible, on music's ability to bring about radical changes in our interpretation of the images it accompanies. This old trick consists of playing the same thirty-second sequence three times in succession, first with no music, to establish the visual sequence of events, then with the music written expressly for the sequence, and finally with music of contrasting character.³⁷

³⁶ Charles Soukup, *Techno-Scopophilia: The Semiotics of Technological Pleasure in Film*, (Critical Studies in Media Communication Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2009), p. 21.

³⁷ Philip Tagg, *Music and Manipulation*, (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2006), p.163.

This simple yet effective test proves to be very useful at creating different interpretations of a moment of film, to be able to entirely alter the outcome of a scene's mood through music. Either using complimentary music, contrasting music, or non at all, these choices have been implemented into films with reasonable success. In *The Lord of the Rings*³⁸ for example, drums of war accompany an army of orcs as they march across the land. The music here, composed by Howard Shore, ideally matches the mood of the visuals in a way of boosting the anticipation of upcoming conflict. The choice of instrumentation suits the visual style and era of the story, creating a believable representation of what could possibly be played diegetically. Yet in *Insidious*³⁹ things are opposed, in one such scene music is used in a very contrasting manner. The music of performer Tiny Tim can be heard in a tension filled scene, as this music plays along with the visuals it in no way matches the eerie visuals, yet in the music's characteristics of being so happy and whimsical, it somehow creates a creepy combination. Music of a sinister nature could be expected in any scene in *Insidious*, however it is the unexpected nature of the included song that intentionally throws the audience off balance, creating an audio-visual moment that they may never have seen coming. Finally, *No Country for Old Men*⁴⁰ uses its music in an even more different way, by removing music from scenes entirely. In a scene of considerable length where an innocent man nearly becomes the victim of the film's villain, no music is used at all. Though this has the possibility to flatten the emotion of a scene, it instead raises the tension, making the scene itself very effective in causing tension and anxiety towards the villain. It can

³⁸ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, dir. by Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001).

³⁹ *Insidious*, dir. by James Wan (Blumhouse Productions, 2011).

⁴⁰ *No Country for Old Men*, dir. by Joel Coen & Ethan Coen (Miramax Films, 2007).

be witnessed through these different yet effective styles of composing music for film that although sometimes the best way to score a scene is to choose the most likely route, and create music that compliments the scene's aesthetic, it can also greatly benefit a film to use music that is contrasting to its own nature, or even to remove music completely where deemed necessary.

So as it would seem, subjectivity has a big role to play in the act of immersion, along with semiotics that give meaning to a lot of often unseen choices in film. It is through semiotics that the subjectivity of the viewer can be connected with, as an attempt at immersion is taking place. Advertisements carefully create visuals and audio to sell something to a specific primary audience, the creation of this 30 second clip is tailored perfectly for a group of the public, and this can use subjectivity to its advantage. Semiotics can prey upon the subjective nature of an audience, using their opinions to lure them into a false sense of security in order to make a profit. If this attempt is successful then immersion can also be achieved. These methods can also be used in film itself, using subjectivity to embed semiotics into a film, raising the chance that immersion can occur. In order to explore this further, specific films must be analysed in depth.

Chapter Three

Inception

Christopher Nolan's *Inception*⁴¹ is a film based on the concept of entering a

⁴¹ *Inception*, dir. by Christopher Nolan (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010).

person's dream in an attempt to capture valuable information from the dreamer. It follows a team of characters as they plan their biggest heist to date. All with individual motives, there is a mystery surrounding the main character Cob throughout the film that unravels as the end draws nearer; the audience learn of the dangers of entering these worlds within worlds. The film deals with the ideas of love, loss, creativity, and endless life, it attempts to fill its screen time with complex narrative plot points and theories, while assigning one specific character as an interpreter for the other characters (and also clearly for the audience members).

For this particular film, Hans Zimmer⁴² may have made more of a set of thematic material rather than unique pieces of music to represent exactly what is happening on screen, but *Inception* does not really suffer for it. In a behind the scenes making of video of *Inception*'s score, the film's director Christopher Nolan mentions that he liked the idea of Zimmer being able to 'write freely, and not be trying to hit cuts.' He also states: 'I wanna kind of hear where his imagination will go, were it completely free to just interpret the ideas of the script.'⁴³ It is with this information that we know that Zimmer was encouraged to make music based on his interpretation of the script and its themes, rather than attempting to compose directly to cuts. The music works with the visuals, and is created based on ideas and concepts from the film rather than any particular visuals, brass stabs and percussion are sometimes added to emphasise certain moments, but these are most likely added into the music as a padding to ensure that the music feels appropriate to the ears (in connection with the eyes) of the audience members.

⁴² Hans Zimmer, *Inception: Music from the Motion Picture*, Produced by Christopher Nolan (Reprise, 2010).

⁴³ Hans Zimmer, *Making of Inception Soundtrack*, (2011), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Fiv7rFbv4>>

Much of the score that has been written for *Inception* is used within the film at multiple moments. This can be said to be common in films, using musical themes known as leitmotifs to relate back to earlier scenes in the film, however *Inception* does this in a slightly different way. Pieces of the score are not only used multiple times, but also different sections of the same piece will be used in different places. Many of the pieces of music from the soundtrack, for example 'We Built Our Own World', 'Dream Is Collapsing', and 'Old Souls'⁴⁴ start with one tone and end with another, usually beginning slowly and ending with a climax. These pieces contain multiple levels of intensity, allowing them to be used multiple times in different moments of the film. The beginning of a piece of music will be played at one section of the film (for example where the music is much more soft), and then a later moment of the music will enter at another point (where the music has become more dense and dramatic). This adds to the idea that Zimmer has created more of a musical set piece for the different ideas that exist within the film, making pieces of music that relate to ideas rather than the time of a scene, and can be used multiple times and in different ways during the film. Where this method could be considered less ideal, in ways it has a greater range of use for the film. There are times in *Inception* where not only do different pieces from the soundtrack appear, but multiple pieces overlap, creating a mixture of music that cannot even be heard on the official soundtrack. It is rare to hear an entire piece from the score in one scene of *Inception*, for the pieces have not been created in that sense. Composer Trevor Jones uses a similar technique in his use of 'toolkits', where he creates multiple tracks containing different kinds of music to be used by the director to gain more

⁴⁴ Zimmer, 2010

control over the musical elements of the film. Most of the music can be created for specific scenes or scenarios, but the director may wish to use them in a number of ways, as Ian Sapiro states: ‘the primary intention behind the toolkits was indeed to enable the director to have this freedom to shape the music’⁴⁵.

Instrumentation used in the film’s score consists of a few elements that repeat throughout, arpeggiated and staccato synth and strings feature, with crescendoing brass existing as one of the films main musical elements. Apart from this, sweeping strings and synth can be heard occasionally as filler music that does not appear on the official score. This can be heard at 0:31:00 in the film, where Cob is allowing Ariadne to explore the dream and experiment with altering its layout, as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: *Inception* (d. Nolan, 2010). Cob allows Ariadne to explore the experiment.

The music can at times be simplistic and minimal, adding and emphasising rather

⁴⁵ David Cooper, Ian Sapiro, Laura Anderson, Sarah Hall, ‘*Simple, Medium, and Shebang*’: Trevor Jones and the Development of the Toolkit’, *Music and Moving Image IX Conference*, (2014), <<http://www.trevorjonesfilm.leeds.ac.uk/files/2014/08/Simple-Medium-and-Shebang-Website.pdf>>, p.4

than taking over entirely, while at other times it can sweep in to take the stage and grab the viewers' attention if only for a few moments. The music of *Inception* may not necessarily be the most unique or inspired score that has ever been composed, but it does exactly what it needs to in order to have us on the edge of our seats. Yet, there is one musical element of the score by Zimmer that has created a trend within Hollywood feature films that have been produced since *Inception's* rise. The iconic crescendoing brass that features in the beginning of the film has been used countless times in popular media since its origins in *Inception*, a simple yet effective musical idea that has been copied by multiple other composers for films, it is especially effective in trailers of feature films in a way to increase hype. Examples of this are the trailers created for the following films: *Elysium*, *Prometheus*, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, *The Avengers*, and *World War Z*⁴⁶. These brass swells create warning signs, resembling that of a fog horn, or air raid siren. It is a repetitive and recognisable sound that grab the listener's attention, this making it a useful tool for a film trailer, the main focus of which to grab the attention of the audience.

Strangely enough though, this aspect of *Inception's* music was not solely created by Hans Zimmer. One of the main concepts in the film is that when the characters are exploring the realms of a dream, time slows down. They state that the deeper into dream worlds that you travel, the slower time becomes compared to the real world. This also means that anything that happens around the sleeping bodies of characters in the upper worlds can affect them in the deeper dream worlds, but in

⁴⁶ *Elysium*, dir. by Neill Blomkamp (Tri-Star Pictures, 2013).
Prometheus, dir. by Ridley Scott (20th Century Fox, 2012).
Star Trek Into Darkness, dir. by J. J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013).
The Avengers, dir. by Joss Whedon (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2012).
World War Z, dir. by Marc Forster (Paramount Pictures, 2013).

slow motion. If they are slapped, they will fly across the room, if they are hit by a drop of water it may start to rain, and if they hear music it is time stretched to match the stretching of time between realities. A piece of music that does not belong to the original score but features heavily within the film and even has a place in the film's narrative is *Non, Je ne regrette rien*. Composed by Charles Dumont⁴⁷ and performed by Edith Piaf. In the film, the characters use this piece of music as an indication that they are about to be woken up from their current dream, they hear the music in their dream world and prepare themselves for an awakening. Though when they do hear this piece of music, because they are in a dream where time is faster than the real world, the music that they hear is slower than the original piece. *Non, Je ne regrette rien* becomes iconic in the film for this reason and because of this it has also been implemented into the score of the film. The direct translation of the title is 'No, I do not regret anything', this ties itself further with the film as the main character Cob is filled with regret, and can only move forward when he believes that what he did was right. The song is 2 minutes and 28 seconds long, and *Inception* lasts 2 hours and 28 minutes, syncing the two but at an elongated state. Finally, the film's credits end with this song which gradually transforms itself into the repeated, loud brass that also introduces the film. The opening of *Non, Je ne regrette rien* begins with repeated staccato brass for the first 10 seconds (seen in Figure 2), this may not sound familiar as it is, but if slowed down by around 400% (much like it is heard by those in a dream, where time is much slower in regards to time outside of the dream), the music becomes something different entirely. Suddenly what can be heard is almost exactly identical to the iconic crescendoing

⁴⁷Charles Dumont, *Non, Je ne regrette rien*, performed by Edith Piaf (1956).

brass that features at the beginning of the film, creating links meta-diegetically to the film and the audience. In a film that explores the concept of worlds within worlds, they have created music within music, in an outstanding way.

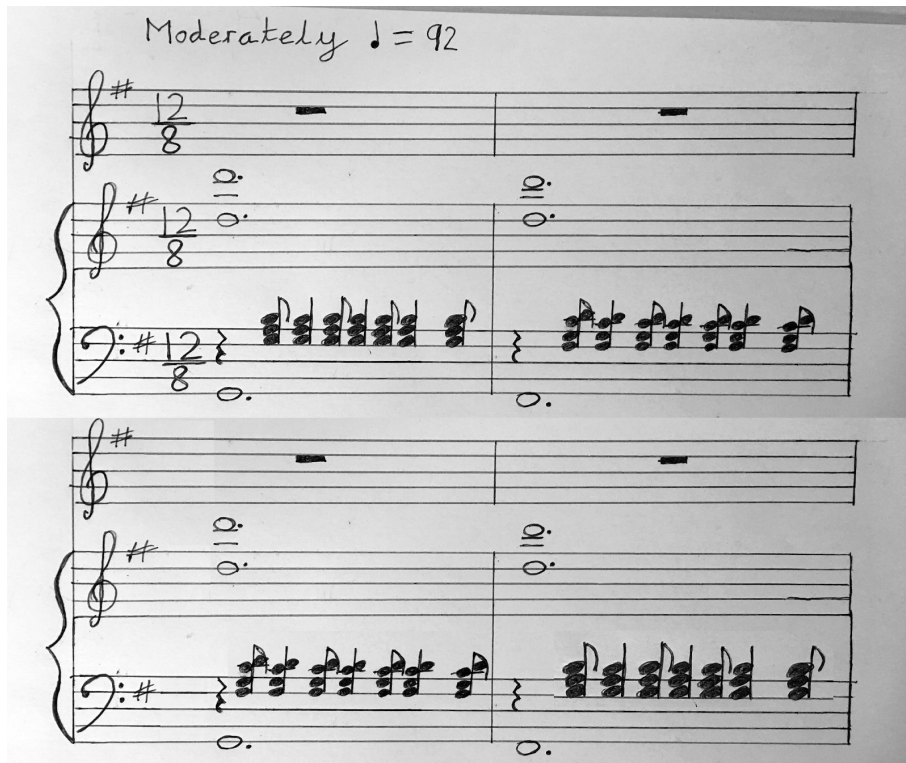


Figure 2: Charles Dumont, *Non, Je ne regrette rien*, (1956). First four bars.

The sound effects within the film are mainly familiar to those of the real world, this is particularly so when the characters themselves are currently in the real world, things happen as they would normally, and that is true for the sounds that objects make also. There are the occasional standard movie edits to sound, such as the helicopter not being nearly as loud as it would have been if the characters were sitting inside it during flight, instead they are able to talk freely without the use of headphones and microphones as is necessary when flying in a helicopter. It is when the viewer begins to witness the dream however that things start to become less

realistic. The first example of this is when Cob is thrown into a bathtub of water to wake him up, as seen at 0:11:00 in Figure 3, he is sitting on a wooden chair and then is submerged within the water before he wakes. In the dream we hear wood creaking and bending before the walls of the room he is standing in are burst open to an ocean of water flying towards him, this may be where the sounds begin to be created rather than recorded but there are even more examples of this.



Figure 3: *Inception* (d. Nolan, 2010). Cob is dropped into a bathtub for the kick.

When Cob and Ariadne are sitting at a café and she finds out that they are currently dreaming, the world around her begins to crumble and decay, seen at 0:28:07 in Figure 4.



Figure 4: *Inception* (d. Nolan, 2010). The dream world begins to collapse.

Objects pop and explode in very strange way and the sound that accompanies them is equally odd: it has clearly been created for the purposes of the film. As things become more intense around the characters, so too do the sound effects, right up until the point where they are both bombarded with debris. Another interesting moment for sound effects is when Ariadne steps on a glass in a dream, the sound is surely not what breaking glass sounds like and it has a crystallising quality to it, almost as if created by a synthesizer of some sort. This sound is used multiple times throughout the film and has a way of making me believe that this sound is not only supposed to represent the same kind of action happening again, but the exact action, the same moment that has happened the original time.

The structure of the film's narrative can be quite simply plotted down, it begins with a cliff-hanger, only to place the audience in a similar but at the same time completely different situation. Then after some initial action to grab the attention of the viewer, we are slowly drawn into the secrets of the film, as it explains to the audience what exactly is happening and how all of the many complex concepts

work. There are even characters that are solely present to explain things in a way for other characters (and clearly the audience) to simply understand, these tend to come in small chunks so that it is not too much at once and still has the ability to make viewers believe that they are in some way able enough to fully grasp the ideas that envelop the plot. Finally, about halfway into the film's runtime, we have heard every explanation and are ready to proceed with the plan. This in some way is when the film is fully allowed to release itself. Yet at the same time it is also when *Inception* becomes more familiar to the role of a Hollywood blockbuster, the complex narrative is subsided for more gunfights and action packed scenes. The theme is the same and there has been some effort made to keep some of the complexity, but it is at this point where the film stops truly creating, and begins to simply play out what we expect (or don't expect) to happen. However, by allowing the audience a glimpse into the future, it has raised the anticipation of every person in the room. We think we know what is going to happen, but can we really be sure of it? Are our assumptions of the plot truly believable, or is the film going to surprise us, deny us the ending that we so desire, to betray our expectations and leave us truly astounded by what we never saw coming. Forcing us to believe that we never had a chance, and that for the entire duration of this film we have been completely at the mercy of the film makers.

As has been covered in this chapter, the music of *Inception* has been created in very interesting ways. The film's composer has manipulated the time of the music just like the characters of the story manipulate the time around them through dreams. In this way, the music is directly influenced by the events of the film, as can

be heard when the characters venture deeper into lower levels of the dream world. With this direct link, the film has a closer connection with the music within it. At the same time the music then mirrors the film's themes, creating a stronger idea of the theme in the process. *Inception* is not the only film that has a close relationship with its music, other films that will be discussed in this study also carry this trait. To use music in a way of strengthening the themes and style of the film, while also adding something or being influenced by the plot of the story. One such film that does this is *Fight Club*.

Chapter Four

Fight Club

*Fight Club*⁴⁸, like *Birdman*⁴⁹ uses music in a slightly different way to films like *Inception*. Unlike *Inception*'s Hollywood blockbuster-esque score, *Fight Club* takes a more reserved approach with the music it uses. Whereas *Inception* is full of music, and *Birdman* has much of it (though it is of a more unique quality), *Fight Club* has long moments that exist completely without music (such as when the main character first attends a group session as seen in Figure 5), yet the lack of such music does not take away from the experience of the film.

⁴⁸ *Fight Club*, dir. by David Fincher (20th Century Fox, 1999).

⁴⁹ *Birdman*, dir. by Alejandro G. Iñárritu (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014).



Figure 5: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). The Narrator cries with Bob at a group session.

The story of *Fight Club* is one of a man (whose name is only revealed at the end of the film) struggling with life, he is obsessed with consumerism and trapped in a capitalist society. He cannot sleep and does not fully understand why, that is until he meets Tyler Durden (later discovered to only be a creation of his mind), who teaches him to rid himself of material possessions and give in to his more basic and primal instincts, thus creating fight club. Yet little does he know what he is doing at the time, and up until the moment he discovers the truth that Tyler does not exist, a mass conspiracy is afoot and there is no way of stopping it. The film keeps the audience guessing as to what is happening while also throwing subtle hints out to its viewers at the same time.

The goal with *Fight Club* is arguably to break the norms, to tear away from the fake world that consumerism places neatly around society and to experience something truly real, to show actual reality as it is. The music mirrors this, as for a lot of the film silence is what accompanies the visuals, the sound of reality. Music can be heard

when characters enter a bar or cinema, as seen in Figures 6 and 7, but for many of the scenes where diegetic music is not apparent, there is no non-diegetic music.



Figure 6: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). The Narrator and Tyler Durden at a bar.



Figure 7: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). A movie theatre audience watching a film.

The conversations continue just as they would outside of the movie world, there are pauses where all that can be heard are the noise of location or environment nearby. Though this is not to say that music does not exist in the film, however the music

that is used differs from those of films such as *Inception*. An example of this is in the scene where the narrator is ordering new furniture over the phone while reading an IKEA catalogue, the music resembles that which could be heard in a department store like IKEA itself. Even the track name: '*Ikea Man*'⁵⁰ suggests this as part of the influence for The Dust Brothers when creating the soundtrack. The track uses this Muzak style of sound until 0:55, it then becomes more in keeping with the tone of the film. This uses a pop culture reference and adds to the relatability factor once more, also relating back to subjectivity. When any of the audience members hear the music that reminds them of shopping (because they have been in those situations themselves), they can lose themselves while watching the film and become immersed. Music of this kind can also be said to have a meta-diegetic element to it also, just as the narrator is thinking aloud in his own head, the music could very well be originating from there as well. As if in the character's mind he is actually shopping in a store, instead of browsing a catalogue.

Though music may have a more reserved position within *Fight Club*, sound in general still plays a large role. There are multiple scenes where sound effects can be heard in an over exaggerated manner, such as when The Narrator is continuously punching Angel Face, seen in Figure 8.

⁵⁰ The Dust Brothers, *Fight Club - Original Soundtrack*, Produced by Michael Simpson & John King, (Restless Records, 1998)



Figure 8: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). The Narrator fights Angel Face.

Sound effects also play a major role here too, and the exaggerated use of sound throughout the film has a way of filling any musical gaps that could be missing otherwise. If the film was to have less sound effects or dialogue, there would be more of a reason to include music within the film, otherwise what is left becomes more of a silent film. *Fight Club* reinforces the idea that silence can be just as important in a film as music can be. However for this to be possible, sound effects and dialogue must be acceptable or at the very least present. There are also scenes where the sound of the current surroundings have been altered to match the state of consciousness of the narrator, when he is blocking out a particular person as they are speaking, the viewer can no longer hear too or when he is envisioning himself somewhere else, the viewers enters this other world also. This happens specifically when the narrator is blocking out the pain of a chemical burn by meditating, seen in Figure 9.



Figure 9: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). The Narrator meditates to avoid pain.

Music within *Fight Club* appears during certain types of scenes more than others, when characters are talking the music is often absent, but whenever a montage of events is taking place, music has a tendency to be present, such as the montage seen in Figure 10. Music in montages for this film can arguably be said to work in the same way that the montages themselves work for the film, to grab the attention of the audience and to further the plot without spending too much time. This works as a way to sum up large pieces of information and time during the story so that the audience can understand how things work and what is happening, while still being entertained. The music that plays during the montages is usually upbeat and of a faster tempo (and at times even slightly comedic), which mirrors the pace of the visuals (lots of cuts and different scenes in concession) while also giving the audience a break from intense, scenes which lack music that have previously been witnessed. The track '*Setting Up A Fight*' is used in montage shown in Figure 10, and features a playful melodic line at the beginning of the track. This lightens the tone of the scene, and adds a more comedic aspect to what is being shown on screen. Though even with this comical use of melody, the the rest of the track still

remains in tone with the usual genre of The Dust Brothers music. From 0:12 into the track, a much more urban and electronic genre can be heard through the drums, vinyl scratch sounds, and use of sampling.



Figure 10: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). Members of Fight Club try to get into fights.

The film in this way deals its music out in short but strong doses, grabbing the attention of the viewer by using music that stays close to the punk genre through use of instrumentation and effects and sounding more similar to popular music than a film score, therefore becoming familiar to those in the audience who listen to such music. This is likely due to the soundtrack of the film being created by The Dust Brothers⁵¹, producers famous for their use of sample based music. This addition of possible sampling in the soundtrack only adds to the commercial consumerism that appears in the film, using popular sources to further another product. Music similar to the punk or electronic genre can be found in some of the fight scenes of the film, seen in Figure 11, though many of these moments can still be classified as montage and this explains the similarity. There are a few scenes within *Fight Club* that

⁵¹ Dust Brothers, *Fight Club (Original Motion Picture Score)*, (Restless Records, 1999)

include music that is more suited to that of popular music than a film score, this is a recurring theme throughout the movie and may have been intentional to ensure the film's thematic elements. With all of this kind of music, it almost feels like the film has a popular music soundtrack, though this is not true. The music has been created with the same stylistic features as punk and electronic music but with a film score format, the music does not necessarily have a message like punk songs often do, yet the sound is similar. Most importantly it is the similarities that offer a hand to the audience when watching in a way of immersing them, using their knowledge in a subjective way to pull them in.



Figure 11: *Fight Club* (d. Fincher, 1999). A fight taking place at Fight Club.

The film's director David Fincher is known for his darker and more realistic portrayals in his pictures, films such as *Se7en*⁵², *Gone Girl*⁵³, and *The Social Network*⁵⁴. It is arguably the music that has extra cause in this, be it the presence or absence of that music. For example, the composed score for the three films aforementioned were partly created by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor. This gives

⁵² *Se7en*, dir. by David Fincher (New Line Cinema, 1995).

⁵³ *Gone Girl*, dir. by David Fincher (20th Century Fox, 2014).

⁵⁴ *The Social Network*, dir. by David Fincher (Columbia Pictures, 2010).

some proof that the darker tones in music within these films may have been influenced from Reznor's personal style in composition, and though he may not have composed music for *Fight Club*, it is arguable that Fincher would have wanted a similar kind of musical style for the film. The music in this film is visceral, matching the visuals in its animosity and having what Lissa⁵⁵ calls "Emphasis of movement". The music relates to the visuals in its often brutal way, while also being an "Expression of actor's emotions", relaying the emotions and reinforcing them for the audience to feel themselves, to understand the urgency and the tension.

Fight Club's music serves to strengthen the ideas and the themes of the film itself, to build upon a style that already exists, by aiding it in its comparisons. Though more often the sound, the music of Fight Club can at times relate to the visuals and provide further context to what is going on, or how the characters are feeling. Similar to Inception, the music is influenced by the plot and the visuals, and though this may not be as much a use of music being manipulated completely by the story, there are still elements of the two intertwining from time to time. Finally, there is one last film to discuss. One that once more uses its music to enhance the themes and emotions of those being portrayed on-screen, yet at the same time seems to directly influence the music even more so than how Inception does, turning non-diegetic music into what could possibly be perceived as diegetic, or at the very least meta-diegetic. That film is Birdman.

⁵⁵ Lissa, Z, *Aesthetik der Filmmusik*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Henschel, 1965).

Chapter Five

Birdman

*Birdman*⁵⁶, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, is a film that has a special relationship with its score. The music and overall sound that features in the film always appears to have a place within the scene. Music often ties scenes together and allows the film to move flowingly between moments, this is also due to the one continuous shot throughout. The film story is written using a dramatic device that is similar to Magic Realism, a form of storytelling where strange and non-realistic elements play a role in an otherwise fairly normal and average environment. It is a style that is used predominantly in literary works such as *Cien años de soledad*⁵⁷ and *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*⁵⁸ from the writers Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Carlos Fuentes, though it is also used in film and visual arts. The genre of magic realism uses a generally normal and realistic world as its basis, and then adds magical elements to that world. In this sense, the world still closely resembles the real world, yet with minimal magical aspects included on top. 'Magic realism, chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction.'⁵⁹ The story of *Birdman* follows washed up actor Riggan Thomson, played by Michael Keaton, as he attempts to revive his career by writing, directing, and starring in a play based on a book, written by an author who inspired him to become an actor in

⁵⁶ *Birdman*, dir. by Alejandro G. Iñárritu (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014).

⁵⁷ Gabriel Garcia Márquez,, *Cien años de soledad*, (Columbia: Harper & Row, 1967)

⁵⁸ Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962)

⁵⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Magical Realism*, retrieved from - <https://www.britannica.com/art/magic-realism>

the first place. All the while Riggan is haunted with the inner voice of his old role as the superhero Birdman, whose goal is to reign in Riggan's ambition and convince him to once again return to the film that made him famous, though this is far from Riggan's plan. Joined by his family and co-stars, Riggan must try to keep the show on the road while also keeping his own sanity intact.

The beginning of *Birdman* brings with it some of the most interesting (or at least intriguing) music in the film. The viewer is met with stylistic and rather abstract scenes accompanied by a matching score that compliments the visuals. Antonio Sanchez is the composer for this film and *Get Ready*⁶⁰ is the track that plays here. It looks and sounds like it could be a common Hollywood blockbuster, but that is the point of the opening scene, it could be a scene from an actual Birdman film. With that the audience are suddenly snapped out of any immersion from the first scene, yet it is possible that the sudden transition works in a way to capture the engagement of viewers for the next scene. The first character that is heard is Birdman, and with his iconic intro, to his ominous voice that does not appear to be linked to a body, and is instead supposedly coming from within the head of the main character Riggan (Michael Keaton), Birdman has made a claim on the film and audience members are likely curious as to what it all means. Though his character is not visually the most present during the film, Birdman's presence is strong throughout. He has the ability to manipulate characters and this is perceivable through Riggan, Birdman speaks to Riggan but also somehow seems to unlock hidden powers within him. When Riggan is trying to fight against Birdman and

⁶⁰ Antonio Sánchez, *Birdman (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, compositions by Victor Hernández Stumpfhauser and Joan Valent (Milan Records, 2014).

refuses to believe that they are one in the same, he uses telekinetic powers to throw things around the room, this is thought to be in his mind. However, with the tease of his powers being real in the end of the film, it is questionable as to whether everything of this nature could also actually exist.

Music in *Birdman* transitions gradually between diegetic, non-diegetic, and meta-diegetic during scenes of the film. This is noticeable most of all within the drum soundtrack that features throughout the entirety of the film, this music at first could easily be said to be diegetic, as it acts as useful background music for each scene. However, when Riggan and Mike walk through the street on their way to a bar, as seen at 0:32:00 in Figure 12, they pass a street performer playing a drum kit.



Figure 12: *Birdman* (d. Iñárritu, 2014). Riggan and Mike walk through the streets.

In this moment the drums come to life, what before could be considered non-diegetic music, now had become diegetic. In this scene the drummer is being given special credit, and so too the drum kit that has been heard for much of the film already. This raises the question of whether all the background music has come

from this performer, has this drummer been playing his music the entire time for the audience to perceive as background, or is the drummer real at all? It is later revealed in the film that this performer and his drum kit are possibly a figment of Riggan's imagination as the viewer sees Riggan walk through the halls to his final scene on stage of the play. We hear the now familiar drum kit and then see the same street performer as before, but this time in a room that Riggan passes, at 1:40:20 in Figure 13.



Figure 13: *Birdman* (d. Iñárritu, 2014). An unreal drummer plays in a small room.

The drummer could not be physically present in the scene shown in Figure 12, although it is more believable when he was shown playing on the street in an earlier scene. Thus, it is greatly suggested that the performer revealed in the small room was not real. The music that was once thought to be non-diegetic and then revealed to be diegetic, has at least been truly unveiled as being meta-diegetic, the music exists within Riggan's mind. Yet it is not the only thing that lives within his mind, as the audience are aware Birdman also coincides in this place, and the two can arguably be said to interact with one another. It is true that in many films, the

music has a tendency to follow the onscreen action, when things become tense, so does the music, and when action begins, the music compliments this. Yet in *Birdman* it does not just seem coincidence. The music feels in ways that it is coming from a source, like it has more presence than simple background music. This could possibly be due to the simplicity of the score, with the only instrument used for the majority of the film being percussion. This gives the music more of an identity, a singular instrument for a singular character, Birdman could easily be intertwined with the music as he is with Riggan's emotions.

There are moments of the film where music becomes less apparent, and eventually falls silent. It is often in these moments that crucial information is delivered by other characters, and the lack of music allows the audience to listen and understand what is being said. Noticeably again, the scenes with music accompanying them are not filled with this vital information, and could even be skipped or missed while still being able to follow the story, such as when Riggan is being interviewed by the reporters at 0:09:40 in Figure 14.



Figure 14: *Birdman* (d. Iñárritu, 2014). Riggan is interviewed by the press.

Here the music could again be seen as another character, having their time to speak and step foot into the spotlight, and then taking a backseat to allow others their time to shine. When two characters are having an intimate moment, music rarely intervenes, giving them their moment in time exactly how it should take place, not surrounding by sweeping strings. Riggan may fill his head with music as he slips further away from what is real, but in reality there is no need for a soundtrack, life is often intense enough by itself.

Another moment where music that includes more than percussion plays in the film is when Birdman actually reveals himself in person to the audience, viewers finally see the body of the voice that has been speaking throughout the movie and with his physical appearance comes his soundtrack. This section of the film could be said to serve as an interval between the build-up and the final performance of the film (and the opening night of Riggan's play), giving viewers something spectacular to keep them engaged for a little longer. Birdman himself breaks the fourth wall in this scene and announces that all the audience wants to see is the action that he is presenting to them. The music is unfamiliar and in ways is too much for what the audience have been subjected to this far, it is a full display of orchestral cinematic music that is common in films of today, but it has been completely absent as of yet. Just as the sudden cutting of the music in the beginning, this instant re-emerging of the full orchestra has a sort of shock tactic in immersing the viewer, just as jump scares do in horror films. The scene begins at 1:28:00 just before Birdman reveals himself as seen in Figure 15.



Figure 15: *Birdman* (d. Iñárritu, 2014). Birdman reveals himself in full for the first time.

It is in this scene that Riggan's abilities, such as his flight as Birdman, are really shown and not only that, but they begin to almost seem real. Whereas before they only revealed themselves in private moments of solidarity for Riggan, now his powers are being shown in plain sight and full form. This scene along with the final scene of the film pushes the idea that Riggan is actually Birdman with real powers. The film plays with that idea throughout but it is moments like this scene that create more concrete evidence that this is the case, if only returning to what the audience had all come to know as normal. Just as soon as this scene finishes, the percussive soundtrack returns, reminding the viewers of what is actually happening, though for a moment Birdman has stolen the show, and given the audience a glimpse at what they could be watching instead.

Narrative in *Birdman* is important. In this particular film, it could well be considered more essential than the music in terms of solidarity of plot and the fictional world,

these things of course aiding in the process of immersion. David Bordwell⁶¹ states that most typical Hollywood films can be perceived in four parts: The Setup, The Complicating Action, The Development, and The Climax. The setup serves to initially introduce the viewer to each character and announce their relationships with one another, stating things like ‘You’re my attorney... You’re my producer... You’re my best friend’⁶². This gives exact details to the audience about characters in a straightforward way, leaving no confusion for the rest of the film. The complicated action section is where things go wrong (until they go right in a later section), the play seems to be a mockery, and one of the actors is causing problems for the play and for Riggan’s confidence in himself. He even considers cancelling the whole thing because of his disbelief in himself, this is until his producer changes his mind with lies about important people coming to see the play. The development exists to reinforce aspects of the film, calling upon plot points within each of the main characters and their relationships between one another. Riggan and his daughter still cannot understand each other, while Mike and Riggan’s relationship continues to become more and more heated in arguments and fights. The film returns to scenes that have been shown before, another rehearsal in either the apartment or suicide scene, Riggan’s dressing room, the rooftop. The film solidifies these locations by showing them a second time, making sure that the audience are well aware of the world in which they are being immersed into, and with the seamless transitions between these locations, the action of remembering these scenes becomes easier. Finally the climax serves to finish all storylines, mainly the points

⁶¹ David Bordwell, *BIRDMAN: Following Riggan’s orders*, (2015),
<<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/02/23/birdman-following-riggans-orders>>

⁶² David Bordwell, *BIRDMAN: Following Riggan’s orders*, (2015),
<<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/02/23/birdman-following-riggans-orders>>

that exist between Riggan and his immediate family. Riggan has finally found inner-peace within himself, this can be shown when he is silent for the first part of the final scene. He is being told how much of a success his play is and yet he barely reacts, almost as if the play's success wasn't what he was trying to achieve but instead it was a sense of self-worth, and he has found this. Though it is not only his own goals that have been accomplished, his daughter has found love for her father, something that until this point had been quite the opposite, with such scenes as when she rants at Riggan about not mattering to the world anymore, at 0:40:00 in Figure 16.



Figure 16: *Birdman* (d. Iñárritu, 2014). Sam shouts at Riggan about not being relevant.

Now however she lies next to him and shows her love for him. As well as Riggan's daughter is his ex-wife who seems to have gained a fondness for him once again, seen as they hold hands when Riggan's daughter enters the room. It is this narrative, these moments of the film that strengthen its connection with the audience. Riggan's family heavily resembles many of those shown on reality television - celebrities with excessive wealth and expensive lifestyles, who often

argue with one another, and who usually think highly of themselves. There is even a moment in the film when Riggan refers to being offered to star in such a show about his life. With this, the audience can begin to find some believability in the performance of Riggan's family, and as they argue and their relationships become more fragile, it is all the more heartwarming when the family comes together again in the end.

Ultimately, Riggan has triumphed over Birdman, though at the same time he is conceding to him also. Throughout the entirety of the film, Riggan and Birdman had been opposites, Birdman striving to bring Riggan back into the mainstream of superhero films and blockbusters, all the while Riggan making attempts to breakthrough into Broadway theatre (a more refined form of art in his eyes) and pay homage to the writer that inspired him to become an actor. Though in the end, they come together in some sort of understanding. Riggan dons a sort of surgical representation of Birdman's cap, and Birdman is for once silent. The final act of acceptance is when Riggan takes flight, where this action had meant fleeing before, reverting to a form where he was unhappy and not achieved what he desired in his acting life, he can now fly freely, confident in himself. And so with the main character's ultimate goal achieved, the film comes to an end. Birdman does not force music upon its viewers for the entirety of its showing, in fact it does more of the opposite, treating music like another character. One character rarely takes full screen and dialogue time during a film, and the music that features in Birdman acts in a similar way. Silence is almost as present as the music is, and it is certainly just as important. It is in this way, how *Birdman* handles its use of music, that allows the

viewer to stay engaged to the film. Where the drum kit offers complimentary background to the visuals, whether it is following the characters through the street towards a bar, or assisting in the transitional periods of scene or time, it keeps most moments of the film from falling flat. Other times, the music exits the give room for the films main characters, allowing them to say what is needed to be said, and allowing the audience to listen more critically. This silence arguably sucks the viewer in more, immersing them in the moment because when the music is vacant, all that is left is the voice of a character. Combined with the camera work, this gives the audience a perfect view of the location in which the story resides, never tearing them away at a moments notice and possibly pulling them out of any immersive state they may have been experiencing. Instead, if immersion has been achieved, it is able to smoothly continue just as the scenes transition smoothly.

With all of the films that have been discussed, there is a common feature that links them together. Each one of these films uses its music in an interesting way, and as a result of this, the music has a closer relationship with either the story of the film, the visuals of the film, or both. These films carry across the idea that the score can be influenced by the visuals, or that the score can impact the visuals also. This idea to use music in such a way, seems to be one that is effective in connecting the audio and visual aspects of a film, combining the music with the visuals in a way that makes more sense in terms of the music's presence. With this concept in place there is more reason for the existence of a score than simply to add background music, or to emphasise what the visuals are already achieving. At the same time this allows the music to be used only when necessary, instead of constantly existing in

the background. With this method the music now has a greater role in ways, becoming much more like a character, as can be seen in *Birdman*, and having more of a direct impact on the story, when used in *Inception* for example. It is all of this that must be taken into account when composing a score of my own. With this in mind, this aesthetic will be one that will be attempted to be included as my own score is written.

Chapter Six

Practical Evaluation

As part of my research I had planned to compose music for a short film using the knowledge that I had learnt in my dissertation, this includes multiple styles and techniques of composition. I wanted to compose in the three different styles that I had studied, composing off-screen to ideas and concepts and then matching to the visuals as best as possible, in reference to Hans Zimmer's *Inception* score. Next I would compose music directly to the on screen events, a more audio-visually connected score, using the music to emphasise the film's themes, referring to Antonio Sánchez's score from *Birdman*. Finally, as the short film I would be scoring for was completely void of sound, I would record sound effects to create a Foley track and use sound in interesting ways in reference to *Fight Club*. The short film in particular that I composed for was *Centre of Attention* by Alistair Lightfoot, a nine minute piece of film that explores the idea of becoming lost inside of one's mind. Much like the films that I have researched and analysed in the rest of my

dissertation, Centre of Attention attempts to create a world within a world, where not everything is grounded and realistic as usual. Roughly half the length of the film exists within the real world while the other half takes place within the mind. This gave me a good opportunity to experiment with different ideas and techniques when it came to creating music. The real world would be matched with more recognisable instruments such as piano and strings, whereas the dream world could incorporate more technologically involved instruments like synths. Matching the instruments with the separate worlds was an attempt to enforce the difference within the viewer's minds, aiding in their understanding of the film's storyline and locations.

In preparation of composing music off-screen, it was important that I gain experience composing in this way, finding a project in which I could practice this kind of composing before continuing with my project. For this reason I took on a side project writing music for an upcoming fashion show, which would have its designers create two minute long performances to display the costumes that they had made. So rather than simply walking down a catwalk to popular music, the show would contain a sort of collection of mini theatrical performances alongside cinematic music; an opportunity to practice the necessary skills for my project. Rather than involving myself with the choreography and rehearsal sessions and therefore being witness to the visual elements of the performance, I was given short story extracts that explained the ideas behind the clothing, conceptual sketches that gave an insight at the style of the outfits, and notes on how the designers imagined the music sounding in their heads, sometimes with reference to other

pieces of music, as seen in figures 17 and 18.

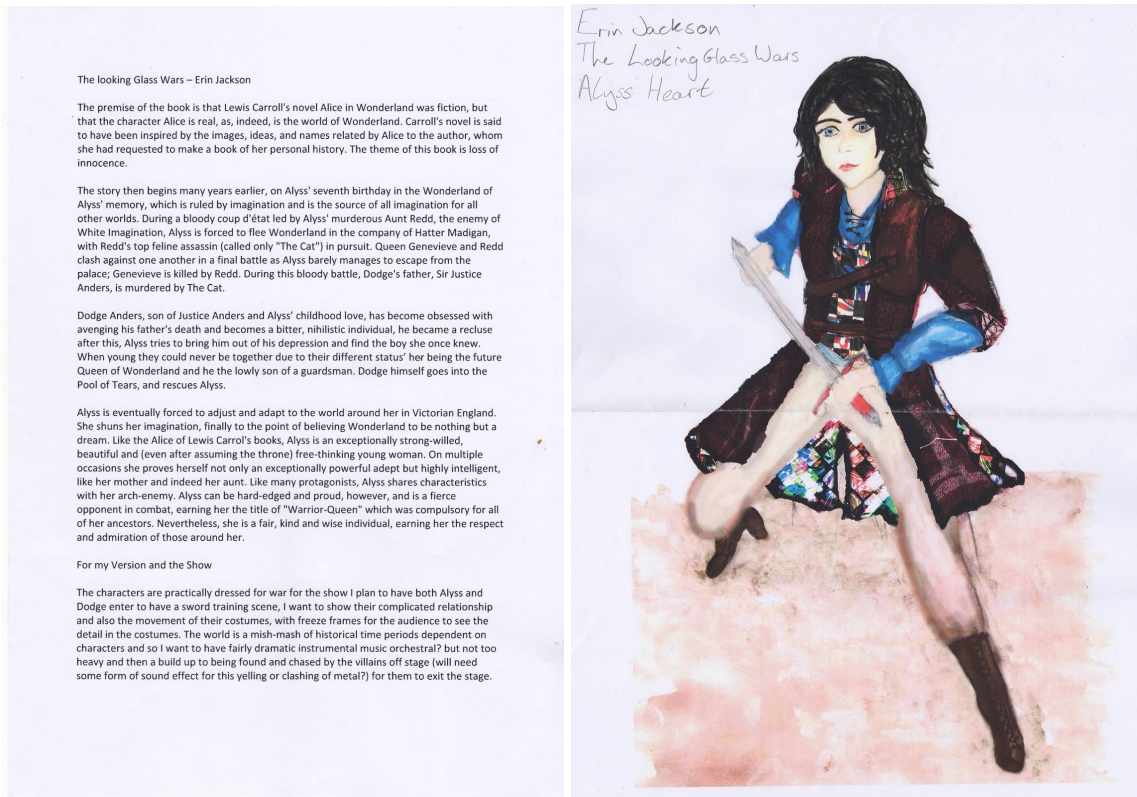


Figure 17: *The Looking Glass Wars* (d. Jackson, 2016). Story & sketch

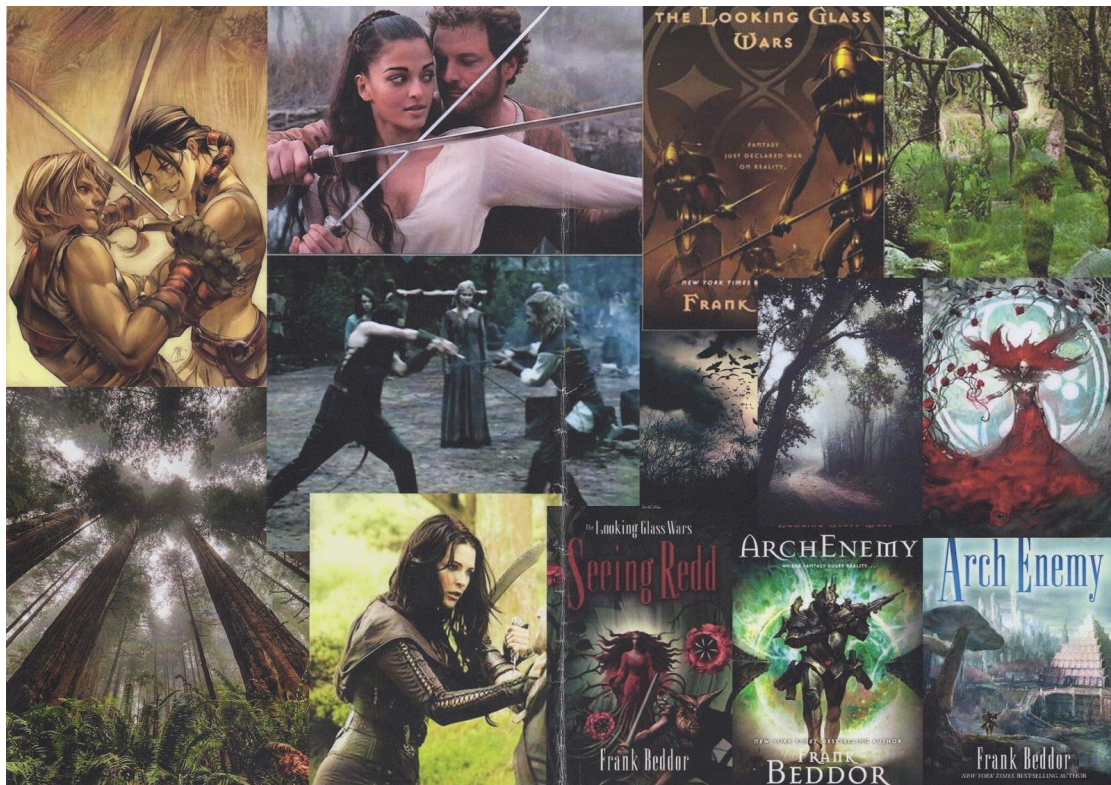


Figure 18: *The Looking Glass Wars* (d. Jackson, 2016). Mood board

I discovered that by composing in this style, much more research was necessary to convey an ideal sound. Through the information provided I would have to create a visual representation of what was written and see it in my mind, imagining the stories almost as films themselves, or rather as fully functioning worlds containing characters with minds and agendas of their own. Doing this I could begin to learn who each of the characters would be, how they would present themselves and what music might suit them, imagining their themes playing as they entered a scene, and how they could clash with other characters. I believe that this form of composing comes more naturally with creativity; an inability to use imagination could make the process a more strenuous one. Whereas when it is possible to imagine the world written before you, it can be inspiring, giving you enough contexts to not only have an idea of instrumentation or dynamics, but to almost hear the music that is to be composed. Though it does not change the circumstances of my project, I enjoyed composing in this way; writing music to ideas and then matching them where possible to any visual elements. In the end, I had composed five pieces of music of varying styles for the ideas that had been presented to me, giving me a suitable amount of experience for my main project.

For the purposes of the project, I wrote the off-screen music first and did not watch the finished film during this process. Instead I received written information about the film and its premise from Alistair, with a small amount of screenshots to help convey the film's style and theme, as seen in Figure 17.



Figure 19: *Centre of Attention* (d. Lightfoot, 2016). Screenshots from the film.

Using the experience that I had gained from the fashion show side project, I was able to begin composing music to the ideas behind *Centre of Attention*. Though I did not fully realise what the film contained, I was able to create multiple short pieces of music that I could imagine being played along with the many scenes and scenarios in my head. Of course the images in my head could never be an exact copy of the actual film, but in ways this was liberating, allowing me to compose music that had no restrictions of the real and visual world. When creating visuals for film it can often be harder to achieve as magnificent a sight as first intended, it requires much more planning, money, technology, and hardworking crew to capture something perfectly. However with simple imagination anything is possible when it comes to creating spectacular scenes, in turn this allows the music to be just as ambitious in its scope without the restrictions of reality dragging it down to the surface. Yet as I wrote this music freely, I was aware that it was maybe the restrictions of the actual film that would help to find the right tone for the music. Rather than creating something that contained too much depth, perhaps I should be standing in the shadow of the visuals, instead of stealing the spotlight. Taking all of

this into account I created the off-screen score, and found the process to be quicker than when creating music to screen, though it would have to be matched to the image before I could finalise it. This is where the complications come in when composing off-screen, discovering that not everything that has been written is correct, and that sometimes you have written too much, whilst at other times there simply is not enough. Because of this I have come to the conclusion that a composer can rarely write all music off-screen, because with every edit comes greater knowledge of the visuals, and ultimately the music begins to morph into being written directly to the moving image. For the final representation of my score I chose to combine the most successful moments from each of the composed variations, forming a score comprising of music created on and off screen, with a full Foley track that emphasises certain aspects of sound effects where necessary. Choosing to do this allowed me to fill in any gaps that became clear in the off-screen score with the music written for the screen, therefore stopping me from having to alter the off-screen music more than may have been needed.

The process of writing music to the screen was something much more recognisable to me, as most of my previous compositional education had used this technique. My first step was to watch the film multiple times, paying attention to different moments with each instance, and ultimately getting a sense of the film's pace and direction. After getting to know the film and its style more, I was confidently able to begin choosing instrumentation, wanting to keep a running theme throughout by using a set amount of instruments that would appear numerous times. With the previous version of the score fresh in my memory, I turned to many of the same

instruments that I had used before, acknowledging that the musical choices I had made in the off-screen score were a good decision. However when composing to the screen my method was certainly different to my previous attempt, writing music as the film played in the background, and constantly pausing to step backward and attempt something again. In a sense, composing to the screen became much more analytical than earlier, as I worked my way slowly through the film to match music to visuals, repeating the process if something did not quite fit. It was blatantly obvious if I had written the wrong kind of music, having the film placed in front of me made me much more aware of what I was composing for, narrowing the kind of music that could be made, or rather focusing it in on what could be more suitable.

Composing this way can take more time initially, but the results are often more tailored to the film, sometimes “mickey mousing” the music to the visuals. In this way the music looks like it matches the film more successfully, where music created off-screen may be thought of simple mood music rather than something that fits.

Yet at the same time music that is made for the screen can lack an emotional depth if too much physical movement is being copied in the music, and writing music solely for its own purpose can give it a much needed uniqueness. This can be thought of as the difference between music that emphasises the visual elements of a film, and music that coincides beside the visuals, creating its own hype and following. A combination of the two is the most beneficial approach, yet often difficult to achieve.

Recording Foley for this project was most likely the newest of experiences for me. I had recorded sound for image before, but never to another individual's film. The

process for this was very similar to that of composing to the screen, firstly watching the film multiple times to list any and all moments where sound would occur. Listing sounds that would or could appear in the foreground and the background was easier to do with foreground objects as there is much less interpretation needed. For the background sound I was able to take more creative control in what might resonate, visiting similar locations for research on what these places sounded like in person, and then either recording the sounds on site or re-creating them artificially back in my studio. When it came to recording sounds for the first half of the film, where the character exists in the real world, it was mostly straightforward. I would watch the film and note down the actions that were taking place in order to create the sound that would occur; sliding a letter through a letterbox, or sucking liquid through a straw. These are all sounds that as human beings we have come to recognise, and therefore can safely assume what they will sound like with only the visual aspects as a representation. In order to record this part of the Foley I took the list of sounds and mimicked them myself, later applying the sounds to the film and syncing up the sound to the visuals. On the other hand, when recording Foley for the second half of the film, predominantly taking place within the mind, there were more aspects that needed to be considered and more alterations that needed to be made for the sound to be perfect. Not only would I list the sounds that should occur, but also the sounds that could possibly take place in this other world. For most of the recordings I wanted to over exaggerate the sound, placing more emphasis on it to enforce the idea of being somewhere different and strange. The use of EQ and reverb made this more possible, making the sounds larger and more drawn out, changing them into dreamlike version of their former selves. For this

section of the sound effects I was able to draw from the research I had made earlier, from films such as *Inception* that deal directly with how sound is altered within a dream, and how sound from the outside world can be altered when perceived in the dream world. This was an influence when making changes to my recorded sounds, as well as a big influence from the sound of *Fight Club*, which uses sound in much exaggerated ways and often uses sound more than music. When finalising the Foley track for Centre of Attention I was surprised at how adding sound changed the experience of watching the film more drastically than I had first presumed. Before it had felt empty in ways, and with music it seemed almost like a silent film, but now it felt like reality. In fact watching the film with only Foley present was a completely new experience, to witness these fictional events with no emotional backing that can often be provided by the score, and to feel like part of the moment just the way it originally happened. Viewing the film in this way gave the sound effects more depth and purpose, without music often taking the lead the Foley suddenly had agency. Creating my own Foley track allowed me to fully understand the importance of the sound in *Fight Club*, and why it was more present and arguably more important than a lot of the music used. This did not however change my project, my goal was still to create a combination of all three tracks. Now however I would be aware that I should attempt to capture and include the importance and relevance of each track for the final score.

When combining the three tracks together I quickly became aware that there was a recurring pattern forming as I looked through the film selecting the most ideal pieces of music for each particular moment; the music written directly to the visuals

was often more suitable to the film than the off-screen score. When composing to the visuals I was specifically created tailor made music for scenes, the music was suitable for the screen because it was created exactly for that purpose. The timing and tempo for many of the off-screen pieces of music were not quite right when matching them to the scenes, alteration had to be made or more careful consideration of where the music could be placed had to be taken into account. With all of this having an effect, the final combined score consists of roughly one third off screen music and two thirds on screen music, with the Foley track running throughout. Looking deeper into the characteristics of each form of music I had composed, the on screen score mimicked the visuals well, syncing to cuts, and mirroring the current mood of the character, or the audience. Using Lissa Film Functions⁶³ I was able to create moments that would tie themselves to some of the functions that Lissa mentions, “Anticipation of Subsequent Action, Emphasis of Movement, Character’s Emotion, and Audience Emotion”⁶⁴. Composing music to the screen was more suitable when attached to the film, however it made less sense when listened to solitarily. The music that I had written off-screen sounded much more melodic and generally was more listenable, yet it was ineffective when combined with the visuals of Alistair’s film. A changing factor to this project would have been more time, as having the chance to spend more time altering the music created off-screen would have given me the opportunity to note how much development was necessary to achieve similar results audio-visually as the on screen score. Though for the time frame that I had it would not be beneficial to alter

⁶³ Lissa, Z, *Aesthetik der filmmusik*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Henschel, 1965).

⁶⁴ Lissa, Z, *Aesthetik der filmmusik*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Henschel, 1965).

any more of the off-screen score, as I had already created what I was trying to achieve with the on screen score. Although this is not to say that all other music was unusable, as I stated earlier the final score comprises of two parts on screen and one part off-screen. I found the off-screen music particularly useful as mood music with its more melodic qualities, this became useful towards the end of the film, especially for the last scene where the main character is leaving the house as the music could be used as a sort of summing up of the story, ending things in a more structured way than music that reacted to visual cues. This music however could not match all visual cues, and could only possibly try to match shot cuts at best in an attempt to synchronise itself with the film. For this reason most of the off-screen score was removed from the final score, and instead used to fill empty sections that needed more of a backing. The visual track however worked very well with the other tracks, adding more depth and life to the picture by giving actions a voice in which to express themselves. Movements and events in the film could now be more complicated and advanced, instead of being purely one thing; they could become a variation of an action. Something as simple as a ticking clock could now be experimented with, altering the norm and creating something that matched with the strange world of the mind in which the main character explores. The Foley further reinforced the themes of the film and added any emphasis that was required in order to assist the audience in understanding what was going on. Furthermore I believe that the sound effects gave more meaning the actions, the main character became more real with the ability to create sound, where before he was a subject in which to observe, now he was a living person like anyone in the audience, the Foley creates more relatability for the viewer, and at the same time it can push them away

using sounds that do not fit the norm and become abstract and strange. Sound has an ability to create much more meaning when added to visuals in a way that visuals alone could not accomplish. It is when all of these elements come together; visuals, music, and sound, interacting with one another and creating more purpose for themselves, that something truly fascinating can be made.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this work I asked the following questions: How does music impact a film's ability to immerse its viewers? How does the subjective nature of the viewer affect their likelihood of becoming immersed by a film? To begin with the first question, I think that music can impact a film in multiple ways. In one instance it can enhance the film, whether this through characters and their emotions, or onscreen action such as fight or chase scenes. Music used in this way matches the tone of what is being shown visually, and adds to it with audio, to provide a more complete version of a scene. This of course is not always how music is used in film however, and though this technique has been successful, particularly in films such as *Inception*, there are other ways in which music can impact a film's ability to immerse its audience. As stated in Chapter 5, *Birdman* uses a lack of music to its advantage, drawing the viewer in by giving speech more importance because of its audio based solidarity in the scene. Then there are films like *Fight Club*, which use social structures to strengthen the tone and meaning of a scene by adding music. I appreciate music for it, this referring back to the use of the track *Ikea Man*. This use of music impacts the audience by appealing to their own lives, linking something in

the music to an experience they may have themselves gone through, for example shopping in Ikea. This leads onto the second question that was asked: How does the subjective nature of the viewer affect their likelihood of becoming immersed by a film? The last point regarding music used in *Fight Club* is useful here too, as it is the subjectivity of the viewer that enables them to relate to the Muzak genre of music used in the scene. If a member of the audience has not experienced such music in a shopping setting, then it may in fact stop them from becoming immersed. Yet if they have, then it may give them enough relatability with the scene to engage completely, and become immersed.

The references in the literature review chapters contextualise and support my own ideas around Immersion and subjectivity. It is this chapter surrounding immersion where more film history knowledge has been included, being used to reference certain moments where immersion has been perceived, using not only professionals' opinions, but actual events as research. I find this to be a careful balance that can impact the writing positively, to show that some research has been done into factual happenings. In a longer project, it would be interesting to include discussion of immersion in video games, having researched this briefly in my past, I feel it would have been useful information when compared with the research I have already gained. However for this project it would have certainly been far too broad in terms of research areas, and it is because of this that I chose to keep a more narrow approach.

Working on chapter three of my dissertation proved slightly more trying than the

first. In this area I delved into the possibilities of subjectivity, and doing so required a vast amount of research to fully grasp what this term included. Yet even with a topic that is so varied in its scope, it is something that everyone has had some sort of interaction in, and therefore is relatively simple to convey to a reader if the correct examples are given. One of my biggest tasks in chapter three was to make sure the reader knew exactly what I was referring to, so that there could be no confusion, once again examples of incidents where being subjective could occur proved useful here. Once the defining aspect of this chapter was written, I was able to join the concept of subjectivity with the action of watching films, and later becoming immersed within a film. If I had been given the opportunity to add more into this section I would have certainly liked to find more research to support my ideas. I found it difficult to source relevant information when it came to subjectivity, often finding something that mentioned the term but was slightly off topic with its theme.

My earlier research of *Inception* had very much caught my interest and was partially responsible for my initial fascination with immersion, yet I was very aware that only the surface had been scratched with this film. Using what I was able to find, I started to notice a trend in not only the film itself but with the music for *Inception*, composed by Hans Zimmer. What was at first an analysis of one particular scene soon became slowly picking apart the entire film, scene by scene, noting down anything interesting that I had seen or heard. One such occurrence that I had witnessed was that the music did not seem to be entirely written for the screen. For the most part of the film, the music sounded like it had been created off-screen, as a set of pieces rather than a visually connected score. After further research I

discovered that this was in fact the case, in an interview with Zimmer and Nolan⁶⁵ they state that the music had been composed to the ideas and concepts behind the film and later matched to become in sync with the visuals. This discovery led me to choose to do the same in my composition, resulting in two versions of my score; one written to the visuals, and the other composed off-screen to the ideas surrounding the film.

Fight Club was certainly the most difficult of the films to analyse, with its lack of music and emphasis on sound effects and Foley, I had to slightly broaden my research into an area yet unexplored. Still I was open to the challenge of including elements of sound effects into my work, especially with how interesting they were being used in *Fight Club*. Using a similar process as before, I slowly watched the film and noted down anything worth noting, re-watching moments where necessary. I began to pick up several moments that could fall under the classification of film terms created by Lissa⁶⁶, as I have stated in that section. In conclusion, I found *Fight Club* to be a very stylistic piece of film, not necessarily using music to further any kind of intellectual bond with the audience, but instead enforcing its genre with different formats of the same genre. Using music to support its point of making a particular statement piece, telling its audience who it is without having to say it outright, an important statement in building an image.

Where the music for *Inception* had been created off-screen, the music composed

⁶⁵*Inception*, Hans Zimmer - Making Of INCEPTION Soundtrack, (2011), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Flv7rFbv4>>.

⁶⁶ Lissa, Z, *Aesthetik der filmmusik*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Henschel, 1965).

for *Birdman* was clearly (even at a first viewing) composed for the visuals. Though the soundtrack mainly consists of percussion, it responds to many of the visual elements that take place. Tempo, timbre, dynamics; all of these can develop with whatever is happening to a specific character or whenever something changes the norm of steady paced life, and I say this because for much of *Birdman* it portrays a pretty accurate representation of life, stress, excitement, anger. This is of course completely separate to the other moments in *Birdman* that are entirely different to the normal circumstances of regular, everyday life, referring to moments where the character of Birdman himself shines through.

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