SHE SHOOTS! SHE SCORES!: THE MUSICAL PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE VIOLENCE IN RECENT HOLLYWOOD FILM

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis examines the importance of the musical score in creating a film's meaning, through an analysis of the musical scores to several recent Hollywood movies. To show how film music is ideologically loaded, this thesis takes the case of the new, ultra-violent film (anti)heroine and demonstrates how the musical score works to explain, excuse or undermine her violence so that she can remain situated within the standard gender codes of Hollywood film. To do this, the theoretical section first discusses issues about the representation of femininity and the pleasures of movie violence, and then continues with a discussion of theories of musical meaning, both within and without film scores. The analysis section examines the scores to several well-known mainstream Hollywood movies, dividing the heroines into either action heroines or fatal femmes, to show firstly how these women potentially transgress gender codes, and how the music is employed - along with other filmic elements - to lessen the threat of the female character's transgression. It examines the presentation of women as mothers, victims, lesbians and jezebels - all of which roles act to frame the active heroine within some acknowledged stereotype. Finally, the thesis addresses the question of how specific this phenomenon is to Hollywood, by examining the scores to a test-case French film and its Hollywood remake. Through the analyses contained within this thesis, I show how violent Hollywood women are still subject to ideologies which position women as passive and specifically as non-violent, and that the musical score is a particularly effective means of neutralising their potential transgression of gender norms.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps because the pre-written film score did not become standard until after the sound era began, some thirty years after the birth of film, film music has always been treated as a second-class citizen not only within the film production system but also by film theory. And yet composers, critics and theorists of film music alike constantly emphasise its enormous potential to bind the film together and add an extra expressive dimension. Less commented upon is the ideological potential that this ability brings with it. In this thesis I attempt to show the impact that music has on our understanding of films and our relation to the characters, and how this impact works within the dominant ideologies of the film's social context. I have chosen to concentrate on violent women as a case study for two reasons. Firstly, because violence is a particularly emotive and yet increasingly graphic ingredient of films, and our expected reactions to it are almost always clearly presented through the accompanying music. Secondly, owing to the dominant social discourses which associate femininity with passivity, the active woman is an extremely problematic image, and much feminist film theory focuses on the way films try to contain or explain their strong female characters. By showing how important film music is in contextualising and modifying the violent woman, then, I hope to prove its ideological functions. I am not making universal claims about the way that films present their active female characters, or that all film scores work in the same way. Instead I am taking what I believe to be a representative selection of recent Hollywood films containing violent women, particularly texts that have received a lot of critical attention, to show how an analysis of the score gives a deeper understanding of the way the woman is framed and presented.

I am going to concentrate on Hollywood mainstream narrative film. Citron defines a mainstream narrative film as:

> "one that is aesthetically accessible to a broad audience and relies to a large extent on classical narrative conventions... a film which is theatrically distributed... A mainstream narrative is defined by the text itself and by its distribution and exhibition and not necessarily by its production history. The simplest test is to ask, 'Is it likely to be reviewed in the mainstream press and on television?' If the answer is yes, for my purposes it is a mainstream narrative film." (1988: 47)

I am concentrating on these mainstream entertainment texts because they attempt to reach and entertain as wide an audience as possible, and so usually try to remain within the boundaries of dominant ideology. It is important, though, to realise that these films will also act upon that ideology. as Dougary says, "at the very least the media has the power to reinforce attitudes and prejudices" (1994: xiii). Byars goes further, arguing that mainstream texts "are participants in an ongoing ideological process; real ideological struggle goes on in and with mainstream entertainment texts" (1994: 99). In this way film can act upon, as well as draw on, social convention. Its ideological process is often perceived in a negative manner, much film theory emphasising the way that Classical Hollywood production methods, such as continuity editing, serve to naturalise the picture and so disguise its mediated nature. Representations are always "coded" (Kuhn, 1982: 111), but present themselves as uncoded, hiding their ideological nature. Carroll, however, criticises this negative view, arguing that:

> "Of course it may be the case that many viewers do not recognise the ideologically skewed representations found in popular narratives. But again this may have less to do with some transparency effect or effaced enunciation than with the fact that viewers already accept the ideology embodied in such a narrative."(1988: 158)

In this way, a mainstream narrative film will at least demonstrate the dominant ideology of its social context, despite not reflecting the actuality of

most people's existence. As Rapping says, "movies are, and always have been, a lot more revealing of broad social feeling and fantasy" (1994: 38).

The fact that they reflect dominant ideologies, however, does not mean that all people will receive and understand these films in the same way. People will react differently to a film according to how it fits with their own social beliefs and attitudes. Most readings of a film will be, to some extent, "negotiated" (Hall, 1980). This lack of universality applies to the film music as well, although some would argue that because music is not normally given our full attention, it can have a more insidious effect and we are less able to reject it. Although I will demonstrate that film music builds upon and adds to a collection of codes developed from earlier film scores, as well as taken from wider society, in order to telegraph a certain meaning to the audience, it is always possible for any individual to accept or reject what they are being presented with. So what I am looking for in the film score is, rather, a preferred reading. Music is usually the last component added to the film - composed to a fine cut - and while the composers add their own feelings and impressions into the score they also work from the director's instructions. Also, as described early in chapter 2, film music is often expected to smooth over all the contradictions and problems present in the text. So the film score is perhaps a particularly good place to look for a preferred meaning. This preferred meaning is important less for discovering audience reaction, which will always vary, but for discovering something about the social context of a film. Altman advises us to see a film text not as isolated, but at the centre of two widening triangles, both of which open out onto the cultural milieu at large (1992: 4). From this model we can see the film text as drawing on social ideology in its construction, and then adding to it in its reception. Cinema from this perspective is a cultural event rather

than text-centred. This works with music as well. Film music draws upon and informs cultural musical codes.

When we see a film we are drawing upon several levels of knowledge in the way that we interpret the text:

1) Overall social knowledge (for example, old women are frail, a woman's place is in the home etc.), and musical knowledge (such as that minor keys are sad).

2) Overall cinematic knowledge (for example, bad guys have English accents, or four beats to a bar with an accent on the first plus open fourth and fifth intervals mean that Indians are coming over the hill).

3) Within the film text itself, and its prequels - what the film has already told us about the characters and how the music has portrayed them (for example, a character who is always accompanied by low ominous held notes is a possible threat).

4) What we are seeing and hearing at the moment and how that changes our understanding of what we have already witnessed. The music is particularly good at making connections here through the re-use of themes or motifs, although visual techniques such as scene mirroring are also effective.

These levels of knowledge constantly reflect and inform each other, film texts acting on their cultural context as well as drawing from them. For example, the famous shrieking violin sound from *Psycho* is instantly recognisable even to people who have not seen the film, and representations of the Mafia (or impressions of Marlon Brando!) are inflected by the theme from *The Godfather*. In this way meanings are never fixed, and change according to time and place. Representations of women themselves are fluid and changeable; for example it is now less likely that the heroine of a mainstream film will stand screaming usefully in a corner while the hero

fights the villain of the piece. Another point is that film audiences are not at all passive in their constructions of meaning from the film text, and so even within one particular social context, different people will read the film differently. But there are ways to "limit the range of readings available" (Kuhn, 1982: 14) and music is arguably a particularly powerful way to do this, in that its presence supposedly adds an emotional "truth" to the image and so guides audience reaction. It is important, then, to examine the way that the music produces meaning within the film text. As Gledhill says, "For feminists seeking to deconstruct patriarchal culture, the pertinent question is less "What does this film mean?" than "How is its meaning produced?"" (1994: 113-4) Music is a vital contributor to the production of meaning, and as such feminist film theory must begin to take account of it.

Definitions

I am now going to define a few problematic terms that I will be using throughout the thesis.

Femininity

Femininity is extremely difficult to define without being restrictive, in that defining femininity immediately assumes that there is a right way and a wrong way to be female. It is helpful to see "masculinity" and "femininity" as arbitrary categories, with no relation to biological sex, in order to prevent this difficulty. As De Lauretis states, gender "is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalised discourses" (1987: 2). In this way it has no natural connection with sex, and de Lauretis argues that thinking of gender as sex-bound is ultimately

restrictive for feminism. But in common sense terms the categories of masculinity and femininity are invested with their perceived connections to male and female. When a woman in a film shows "masculine" traits, she is deviating not just from a dominant understanding of femininity, but also from a dominant understanding of what it is to be a woman. Brown (1996) declares that the new action heroine is a sign that people are beginning to accept gender traits as arbitrary, but as far as mainstream film goes, I think this is overly optimistic. While the active heroine does begin to transgress common-sense understandings of gender, her transgression is (almost) always explained and excused in ways that can retain her feminine status in dominant terms. Humm too believes that the recent Hollywood preoccupation with cross-dressing, in movies like *Mrs Doubtfire* or *The Birdcage*, shows an interest in the collapse of gender rules (1997: 162). But the fact that the cross-dressing is always played for comedy undermines her assertion, as Shingler explains that the comic aspects of such performance serve rather to reinforce gender boundaries than destabilise them (1995: 188).

The general associations around the categories of masculinity and femininity are explained clearly by Lucy Green as follows:

> "In extreme polarised form, masculinity is defined as active and productive; as committed to the pursuit of knowledge, hence rational, inventive, experimental, scientific and technological; as bound up with the production of Art, hence creative. At the opposite pole, femininity is defined as passive and reproductive; as involved in the nurturing of others, hence caring; as occupied in the production of Craft, hence diligent. Whereas men's pursuit of knowledge is commensurate with masculine prowess of the *mind*, women's reproductive and nurturing functions (menstruation, gestation, lactation) derive from feminine obeisance to the *body*."(1997: 14)

Green also stresses, however, that these categories are fluid, and that while men overall have more power than women the relationship can change according to individual resistance or acceptance, and other social

groupings - race or class being large factors. But Green's description clearly delineates the general ways in which women are defined in mainstream film.

Violence

The difficulties in finding a good working definition of violence are outlined in the summary statement of the 1970 UNESCO conference on the impact of violence in the media (Burnet, 1971). They began with "The use of means of action which are harmful to the physical, psychic or moral integrity of others" (7) but found this definition did not account for many factors, ranging from defence, to legally sanctioned violence, to aggression without a specific target. For my purposes I am going to use the definition outlined by Kunkel et al., who define violence in the media as:

> "any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means. Thus, there are three primary types of violent depictions: credible threats, behavioral acts and harmful consequences." (1995: 286)

They restrict themselves hereby to depictions of physical violence against a person as this is a relatively unproblematic area of violence to identify. For the purposes of my study, however, I must relax the boundary slightly to include acts that are not directed specifically at a person. In this way Sarah Connor's attacks on the inanimate Terminator in *Terminator 2*, and the destruction of property in *Thelma and Louise*, can be included as violent acts.

Most research into media violence has concentrated on its effects on the audience. Some research has been very simplified, trying to find immediately measurable direct effects on audience members. More complex research, however, concentrates on the context of the portrayed violence

rather than a simple analysis of content. Kunkel et al. assess violence according to such factors as the attractiveness of the characters and the reasons given for the violence (1995: 288). Wilson, Linz and Randall try to ascertain the degree to which the violence is justified and the degree of similarity of the situations to the viewer (1990: 452-4). When these contextual factors are included they open up the possibility of differentiation between different types of film and their impact. Roger Brown intimates that "[o]nly by qualitative and aesthetically oriented studies of mass media content can we begin to understand how different kinds of people perceive violence and what kinds of meanings it has for them" (1970: 14). My thesis will concentrate on this aesthetic dimension through analysis of the musical score. But my discussions of violent women will focus on the portrayal of the women themselves rather than a catalogue of specific acts of violence, as the full meaning of these acts can only be discovered in their context.

Non-diegetic music

This refers to music which does not have a source within the mise-en-scene, as opposed to diegetic music which has an identifiable source within the film. Diegetic music, or "source" music, hence covers occasions where music is being played by musicians within the scene, or coming from a radio or stereo. Non-diegetic music is also sometimes referred to as "narrative music" because of its status outwith the mise-en-scene[1]. The two levels are fluid, and music often moves seamlessly across the boundary, such as when a character begins a song and a non-diegetic orchestra joins in. While there are varying amounts of diegetic music in some of the films I look at, I am going to talk almost exclusively about the non-diegetic music, because it is

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[1] For a discussion of the association between music and metaphorical narrator, see Levinson 1996.

this that does most of the commenting on the film. In films that utilise both types of music it is comparatively rare for the source music to accompany important and meaningful scenes. More often it is used to set the scene and perhaps to comment on the characters in terms of standard cultural codes - for example, a heavy rock song will bring connotations of masculinity. In these situations I will comment on its use, because here it is important to the story. It must be noted, however, that source music can be used extremely effectively when it does take on the role of commentator, and film-makers such as Martin Scorcese and Quentin Tarantino have made its use into an art form.

A final comment I would like to make is that I am aware of my biased relationship towards film music. As Carson, Dittmar and Welsch point out, "[o]ur own choices of subject matter and methodology are never politically neutral" (1994: 9). In this thesis I am trying to make a case for the importance of film music, and so my readings of the films under analysis will be biased towards an emphasis on their scores. In relation to this type of bias, Guck argues that an incorrigible statement, such as "an unexpected C-flat" (1994: 60) is acceptable as long as it is clear that this is simply opinion, and saying it will enrich the receiver's experience of the music. In all that follows, then, I would like to emphasise that the statements I make draw upon my own feelings and reactions to the film music, and I hope that my mission to create an awareness of the ideological function of film music will enrich and inform the existing analyses of the films under discussion.

SECTION 1: THEORY

CHAPTER 1: Gender and Violence

1.1: Film and Society.

As with any medium, discussions about the possibility of negative effects on the viewers have always surrounded film. One major area for debate has been the possible harmful effects of film violence. While violence has been an integral component of films since *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) it is generally considered that a new era of film violence was introduced in the 1960s. Amis asserts that "in the cinema, if not elsewhere, violence started getting violent in 1966" (1996: 12) and this escalation was marked by *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). French states that in classic Hollywood violence was framed by moral certainty but that since then there has been a "loss of innocence" (1996: 8). He sees the reasons for this alteration as a greater knowledge of what real violence is like, greater expectations of realism, and the increasing sophistication of special effects. Expanding on this, Jacobs (1996) attributes our greater knowledge of violence to the assassination of President Kennedy and the Vietnam War, both of which received much media coverage and brought the reality of violence home to the audience. This new knowledge and the ensuing demand for realism, coupled with improving technologies which made it possible to depict violence realistically on screen, totally changed the nature of cinematic violence.

A further, more common argument concerning the continuing increase in violence is that films must always provide the public with something new, something even more sensational and startling for an increasingly jaded audience. Amis, however, takes issue with the "half-formed view of Hollywood as an acropolis of conglomerates, or marketers and targeters, unsmilingly supplying the public with what it has come to want and need: more violence" (1996: 15). Discussing the system whereby films get made in Hollywood, he argues that in fact "violence is director-led or auteur-led. Films are violent because the talent wants it that way" (15).

Medved (1996) also disagrees with the demand theory, backing up his argument with box office figures which seem to indicate that family-oriented films consistently out-perform violent pictures in commercial terms. He believes that the Hollywood industry sees violence as artistic, and so it is a source of prestige for film-makers. As a prominent film critic, Medved is a major proponent of the widely-held belief that film violence is harmful to society, desensitising us to real life violence and encouraging imitation. He sees media violence as "an environmental issue" (31), believing that we are affected even if we do not watch the violent films ourselves, because we are not insulated from the harmful effects they have on other people. But in fact despite a huge body of research into the effects of media violence, a causal link to real-life violence has remained very difficult to establish. This lack of conclusive evidence is to a great extent attributable to the ethical difficulties involved in doing this type of research - turning people into serial murderers for example; and certainly there is far more evidence which would seem to suggest the possibility of direct negative effects than there is evidence supporting the possibility of direct positive effects such as catharsis - a

common defence against the anti-violence arguments[1]. However, as Cumberbatch and Howitt argue, media effects are far more diffuse than a simple cause/effect relation of watching violence and imitating it:

> "The aggressor is only part of the equation of violence as a social problem ... Are victims more or less vulnerable because of violence on television? Are witnesses more or less likely to report antisocial behaviour or even intervene because of violence on television? And what are the effects on the police, the judiciary or the legislature? Do governments become more or less active against crime and violence because of violence on television or the public concern over it?" (1989: 48)

Nevertheless the belief that media violence is harmful is widely held, and recent moral panics, such as the frequent comparisons of *Natural Born Killers* with various real-life crimes, and the connections drawn between the Jamie Boulger case and the film *Child's Play 3*,[2] demonstrate that media violence is seen as a relatively unproblematic scapegoat for the perceived rise in crime. This means we can avoid dealing with other, more difficult, social problems which lead to crime, such as unemployment and poverty.

Cumberbatch and Howitt's belief in the indirect effects of the media is similar to Ellis' argument in his book *Visible Fictions* (1982). In his discussion of effects research, Ellis states that "the links that are sought are far too direct. Cinema and broadcast TV do indeed have effects of various kinds, but they are much more diffuse than effects research is usually willing to admit. They have more to do with the creation and sustaining of meanings in modern society (the realm of 'ideology') than they do with any direct action upon individuals" (14). Representations in the media are hence creators of ideology, as theorised in the hypodermic needle model, which sees the media as injecting ideology into a passive audience. But representations are also products of ideology, a position championed in the

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[1] For reviews of research, see Eysenck and Nias (1980), Cumberbatch and Howitt (1989), and Kunkel et al. (1995).

[2] In fact it is not known whether the perpetrators of this crime ever saw the film.

mirror model evinced by Haskell (2nd ed. 1987) and Rosen (1973), where the media is seen to simply reflect what is happening in society at large. Most theorists see the place of the media as falling somewhere in between the two extremes. Turner describes how "[j]ust as film works *on* the meaning systems of culture - to renew, reproduce or review them - it is also produced *by* those meaning systems" (1988: 131). This is not only relevant to a discussion of violence, but also to a discussion of representations of women.

The basic dichotomy informing the theory of gender in film is that men are active protagonists, and women are passive objects to be looked at by the male spectator, restricted to stereotypical female roles such as wife, mother and sex object. As Turner says:

> "Conventions of representing the female in film are examples of the dialectic action of film upon society in that the production of such images has made it more likely that further examples of such images will continue to be produced until the convention itself is overturned ... these conventions have their social origin in how women are generally seen and valued within the community. The social construction of the feminine rules out most of the possibilities we might suggest as avenues for changing the representational conventions in film." (1988: 81-82)

A further difficulty in changing stereotypical images of women is that the meaning of a filmic text is created through its interaction with the viewer, who can thereby read the film in accordance with their previously held beliefs. This is partly due to the phenomenon of selective perception, meaning that viewers can see what they wish to see in the text, even things that are not actually there.

So while there has been a growth of active female roles in recent Hollywood films, this does not necessarily represent a triumph for feminist values. The reaction to female violence specifically is very ambivalent. Violent women have a long tradition in the cinema, including the femme fatale of 1940s noir, and the rape revenge heroines and Final Girls of the

1970s low-budget horror films. But in mainstream film as Pidduck says, "[w]hat is new in 1980s and particularly 1990s film is the sheer physicality, a graphic and protracted on-screen female violence..." (1995: 72). This alteration of the role of women in films is often linked to the Women's Movement of the 1970s and the changing role of women in society. Jermyn argues that "the female psychopath subgenre began to appear at a time when the media were becoming increasingly fascinated with exploring the notion of conflicting roles for contemporary women" (1996: 252), and this exploration of female roles can be seen across 1980s film more generally. Kaplan (1992) informs us that there are three major roles for women in recent film - sex, work and motherhood - but that all three cannot be embodied in the same character, and so female characters are still prey to stereotypical assumptions such as that working women do not have enough time for their children, or that mothers are not also sexual beings. The new violent woman, then, might be seen as striking a blow for feminism by providing a new role for women in the cinema, and in fact Turner does cite the films *Aliens* and *Terminator 2* as trying to resituate women in films. But he goes on to argue that

> "other examples, however, demonstrate how conservative ideologies of gender can be. The negative side to this new, narratively active, woman is apparent in films which see female power as desperately threatening: in *Fatal Attraction*, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, and *Basic Instinct* the powerful, self-possessed woman is insane, obsessive, and needs to be destroyed. Despite such films, it is certainly the case now that there is at least a competing set of conventions at work which problematise the traditional representation of women in the cinema," (1988: 83)

While this optimistic conclusion, may be true, it is not necessarily feminist. Theorists such as Pidduck (1995: 72) see violent women - even action heroines - as unhelpful to the feminist cause because they hide the reality of women's oppression. So we can see that attempting to change the

conventions of female representation brings with it a whole new set of problems. Pidduck does acknowledge, however, that these violent characters can bring their female spectators some moments of wicked escape.

So from this discussion two important themes for my thesis can be drawn: firstly we must discover how the new breed of violent women relates to gender stereotypes and in particular film stereotypes of women, and whether or not the films under discussion really are creating a new space for active women; and secondly we must examine the type of pleasures that these characters hold for both their female and male viewers. In order to address these two points I will firstly discuss the pleasures of screen violence generally, then the gendered nature of violence, and finally the process of identification with screen characters in order to see how the audiences can take up positions relating to this new, atypical, breed of tough women.

1.2: Violence: Why do we like it?

As I have mentioned, violence has been startlingly present on the screen since the late 1960s, and has been on the increase ever since. Whether or not this trend is driven by the film-makers or by audience demand, it is obvious that it would not have happened if the violence was problematic for those who watch it. But violence is a major cause of anxiety and fear in real life. This being the case, how do we come to enjoy something on the screen that would be so unpleasant to witness or experience in reality?

Thomas Leitch (1994) argues that as violence in Hollywood has become more present on the screen, the strategies for the disavowal of that violence by the audience have become more and more complex. Disavowal

is the process by which the audience suspends their knowledge of reality in order to enjoy the film, in the form of "I know..., but..." By disavowing the effects of violence on screen - "I know that this would be painful/would kill someone/is morally wrong, but..." - audiences are able to enjoy watching it. Leitch outlines five major disavowal strategies which revolve around the distinction between good violence and bad:

1) Our violence as opposed to theirs, as seen most often in war films.

2) Justified as opposed to unjustified, by means of moral rationalisation, such as in *Die Hard* or *Unlawful Entry*.

3) Violence which does not hurt its victims, as opposed to that which does. Here Leitch refers to "the legions of faceless warriors" (74) in *Rambo* or *Lethal Weapon*, and the scene in *Terminator 2* in which a guard is shot in the kneecaps, but this is better than the alternative, which is being killed.

4) Inconsequential as opposed to consequential violence, "stylizing it in ways that insulate both its victims and its spectators from its consequences" (75), such as in *Home Alone*.

5) Making the violence pleasurable by aestheticising it *(Apocalypse Now)* or eroticising it *(Basic Instinct)*.

In any of these ways, the presentation of violence can be sterilised and the negative implications ignored. Leitch believes that this has become a major feature of Hollywood spectatorship because "disavowal is as American as mock apple pie" (79). Violence, then, becomes something to be enjoyed and can even be portrayed as positive; Grist for example, points out Hollywood's "frequent validation of the solution of problems through violence" (1992: 269).

Leitch acknowledges, however, that his first four categories actually rest on a distinction between bad violence and not-so-bad. It is only the fifth category that actually presents it as good. The eroticisation or

aestheticisation of violence places it in the realm of spectacle, which is often cited as a major source of pleasure in film viewing generally, as well as with specific reference to screen violence. Thomson describes the appeal of film explosions as in "our exultation at beauty for its own sake and our glee at witnessing destruction" (1996: 158). Jacobs argues with reference to gun battles that "it is the cumulative effect of such spectacles - the sustained provision of visual and kinetic motion - which makes good gunfire sequences so enjoyable" (1996: 166). The ability of film-makers to turn violence into spectacle, into "sheer fun" (French, 1996: 11) is one of the major worries of the anti-violence lobby. They believe that by making violence pleasurable, and particularly by linking it to sexual pleasure, film-makers are encouraging imitation.

So spectacle is one major contributor to the appeal of screen violence. More of interest to me here, however, is another major source of pleasure which encompasses Leitch's first three categories, that of empowerment. Here the seizing of power by the hero or heroine of the film allows us to feel empowered through vicarious experience. Walkerdine reads the action film as "a counterpoint to the experience of oppression and powerlessness" (1986: 172). Jacobs argues that the deepest pleasure in watching gunfire sequences is "in the will to fight back, to gain mastery over one's life" (1996: 169). He points out examples of oppressive social situations that we cannot alter, such as disease, increasing inflation rates and job security, and argues that in this context "the desire to shoot back is positive, and even subversive..." (170).

The idea of empowerment, then, is very significant for our enjoyment of violence. In order to fully understand this it is important to understand how spectators come to identify with the characters in the film, in order to gain access to this empowerment. Particularly significant for my purposes is the way in which female spectators identify in films. The very fact that

women are usually placed as passive in the cinema as well as in society at large should mean that empowerment will have even more resonance for them than for male viewers. This raises the question of whether the active woman in recent film serves as a point of identification and empowerment for female viewers, as well as how the male viewers can relate to her. But while women's more usual passive positioning can bring more resonance to their empowerment, it also means that women in the cinema have a problematic relation to violence, and so an understanding of the gendered nature of violence becomes vital.

1.3: Violence and Gender

The equation of activity with masculinity and passivity with femininity has deep roots in western society and its cinema. Violence in particular is seen as masculine trait. In her discussion of folk tales, de Lauretis describes how the protagonist of a tale is always masculine, and the obstacles that he meets are feminine. She concludes that "the subject of violence is always, by definition, masculine; "man" is by definition the subject of culture and of any social act" (1987: 43). This binary is at the base of much film theory. Laura Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) was the first to point out the gendered nature of spectatorship in film. Mulvey argued that women in film are turned into objects to be looked at in the way that the camera views them, and through the looks of the male characters in the film. Women are either watched voyeuristically, without acknowledging that they are objects of the gaze, or fetishised in order to disavow their lack of the phallus. In this the nature of the cinematic look is gendered, because men look and women are to be

looked at. Through this schema, Mulvey argued that the spectator assumes a masculine position when watching a film. While this essay was revolutionary in demonstrating the gendered nature of the gaze, it negated any possibility of women having an active role. In this scheme of things any woman who demonstrates agency is symbolically male.

The presumption that an active woman is somehow masculinised is widespread. Moore, for example, explains that gender in society is a hierarchical category, and so comes to stand for hierarchies of power. In this way strong people are masculinised and weak people are feminised. Violence, she argues, is about maintaining control and power, so violent people are therefore masculine (1994: 154). This equation of violence with masculinity is especially strong. Medved posits that "repeated exposure to hyper-violent entertainment redefines brutal behaviour as the ultimate standard of manliness" (1996: 25). Violence is seen as a way to prove one's masculinity. In Grist's discussion of *Point Blank*, he argues that the main protagonist "consistently affirms his manhood through violence and intimidation" (1992: 268). Tasker (1993) states that action heroes are feminised through the display of their bodies, which places them in the usually female position of object of the gaze; but this feminisation is negated by their excessive violence and activity. To back this up she quotes Dyer's argument in his discussion of male pin-ups, that "images of men must disavow... passivity if they are to be kept in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity" (Dyer 1982: 66-7). Neale (1983) argues that the eroticism which the display of the male body generates is displaced by fight scenes. Sandell (1996) and Jacobs (1996) both reinforce this belief by positing that the heroes in John Woo's films are unusually intimate, and that this is allowable only through the extreme violence of the films which foregrounds the heroes' masculinity and so reduces the threat that intimacy poses to their

male identity. In reference to Hollywood, Jacobs argues that "somehow the pain and agony of gunfire legitimates a kind of male intimacy usually outlawed in the Hollywood film" (167). So it is strongly suggested that activity and violence is proof of masculinity. Kirkham and Thumim take this further, stating that the lack of violence or activity will feminise men. "The weak man is, simply, not a proper man, not a whole man. He is demonstrably <u>less</u> than a man and frequently feminised to emphasise that point" (1993: 18). (They do not elaborate, however, on exactly how he is "feminised"). Lenz (1993) adds another dimension to the equation of violence with masculinity, arguing that women are seen as the moral guardians of society and so female violence is problematised in a way that male violence is not. Violent women, then, not only run the risk of being seen as masculine, but simply by being violent lose their moral status and can easily be read as evil.

Despite the problems that female violence seems to raise, it is a growing feature in Hollywood film. So there must be strong reasons for its appearance, and somehow the difficulties it causes must be negated so that the audience will not find it too problematic to watch. So the questions that must be answered in the rest of this chapter are the reasons behind the appearance of the violent woman, the way in which she relates to more standard female representations, and the ways in which her activity can be enjoyed.

1.4: Reasons for Increasing Female Violence

Most of the reasoning around increasing female violence in film attributes it to the changing role of women in society. In this it is assumed that the media do reflect social reality to some extent, even if distorted, but also it could be seen as the media fulfilling an ideological role. Much theory places the rise of female violence in the context of what is seen as a backlash against the feminism of the 1970s. Backlash theorists centre on films which set a good mother against a bad mother; Faludi (1992), for example, cites *Fatal Attraction* as a clear example of 1980s backlash cinema, which she describes as dominated by morality tales where the good mother of the narrative wins and the independent woman is punished. *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and *Single White Female* have also been interpreted as glorifying domesticity for women and punishing those who transgress their stereotypical gender roles (Jermyn, 1996). This 'backlash' has often been compared to that of post-war films, Rapping for one arguing that 1980s films demonstrated a return to 1950s values, because "the people who have always hated and feared feminism were more influential than ever" (1994: 37). The post-war films have been interpreted as trying to persuade women to give up their jobs and return to the home when the men returned from the war, by glorifying domesticity and punishing transgressive or working women. Drawing a parallel with 1980s cinema, Kaplan argues that "[a]s in the 1950s, [the new emphasis on motherhood as fulfilling] marks a return to idealizing the domestic after a period when women invaded the workforce in large numbers" (1992: 199). She argues that this notion of childbearing as the ultimate fulfilment for women is a comparatively new discourse, contrasting to the nineteenth century when motherhood was seen as a duty involving sacrifice. Adrienne Rich (1976) discusses her experience of

motherhood and the guilt that she felt for not feeling totally fulfilled by her role as a mother, because dominant ideology had led her to expect this feeling of fulfilment. Although the nuclear family is no longer the usual family unit, and the proportion of working mothers is increasing, films still seem to portray the domestic realm as an ideal for women. As Haskell says, "the myth of motherhood as womanhood, i.e., that only in giving birth (and caring for her young) does woman become truly "herself" dies hard..." (1987: 391). It would appear, then, that motherhood is a central element of the representation of women in film, and childless women are often portrayed as either transgressive and deserving of punishment, or unfulfilled and miserable, because of their lack of children. Motherhood is an important element on many of the films I shall look at, and Hollywood's strong idealisation of this role will be of great importance in many of my analyses.

Motherhood is often also used as a recuperative strategy for transgressive film women, bringing them back into line with patriarchal ideals. Kuhn tells us that classic Hollywood cinema tries to recuperate its wayward female characters by making them accept a normative female role by the end of the narrative (1982: 34). This can be interpreted as ideologically loaded - teaching women how they should behave - or as commercially oriented, eventually reinforcing the dominant ideals of society in order to be unproblematic to as wide an audience as possible. However, there are many persuasive arguments negating the force of recuperation. Kuhn says that often the film's tensions are not properly closed and so the recuperation of the female character is not complete in the audience's minds. This openness gives us space to read the film according to our previously held beliefs on feminism, and perhaps to remember the transgressive woman as she has appeared throughout the rest of the film. Brundson expands on

this, arguing that making a distinction between a progressive text and a recuperative text privileges the ending over the rest of the film and implies that it has a fixed meaning, ignoring the context in which the film is seen (1987: 122). Cowie too sees recuperation as a red herring, ignoring the audience's ability to read differently from the dominant ideology (1997: 112). So even if many of these films do try to recuperate their transgressive female characters, it would appear that they are not necessarily successful. The very fact that this happens so often, though, strongly indicates the continuing constraints around the representation of women in film.

1.5: Identification

Identification is a major source of cinematic pleasure. Identifying with the characters involves us, the audience, in the narrative and gives us a stake in the outcome. It also allows us to vicariously experience situations that we would not experience in our own lives. This is very significant when discussing the pleasures of violence, because it is through identification with the characters that we experience and enjoy their empowerment, which is a major attraction of cinematic violence.

Stacey (1994: 130) outlines the different uses of the term "identification" in film studies. Often it is simply used to mean sympathy for or engaging with the characters; sometimes it refers to point of view, both visual and narrative; but mainly work on cinematic identification draws on Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the gendered nature of identification is related to the different subject formation of boys and girls.

The mechanisms of identification in the cinema have been hotly debated topics in recent feminist film theory. Since Laura Mulvey

introduced the idea that the spectator was central to the construction of meaning in film, and was always masculine, spectatorship has been a major focus for discussion. Much feminist theory has centred around the idea of the male gaze, trying to re-think the gender binary and open up a space for the female spectator. One difficulty is that the gender binary assumes that male spectators identify with male characters, and female spectators with female characters, making it difficult to see how women could get pleasure out of the cinema when their only option is to identify with the passive object of the gaze. In her essay "Afterthoughts" (1988), Mulvey herself tried to create a space for the female spectator. Using Freud's theory that there is only an active, aggressive libido but that girls suppress it, she argues that the female spectator in the audience can identify with male characters in films because it allows her "to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity" (71). This means of course that women now have a choice; to masochistically identify with the object of the gaze, or to become masculinised and deny their femininity to identify with the male gaze.

Another theoretical position argues that female spectators can create a distance from the image of themselves on screen, avoiding the usual emphasis on female experience as closeness and presence-to-herself. Mary Ann Doane argued that the over-identification with the image that this necessitates on the part of the female spectator can be dismantled through the use of masquerade (1991: 25). Here she draws on Riviere's discussion of the ostentatious display of femininity by powerful women (1929), which Riviere believes is an unconscious strategy used to hide their appropriation of the phallus. Riviere also asserts that there is no difference between true femininity and the masquerade; they are the same thing. Doane believes that the realisation that femininity is simply a show enables women to distance themselves from it, and thereby avoid over-identifying with the female

image. "The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image…" (32), and so free women from this restrictive identification.

Moving on from this, Linda Williams (1990) argues that in fact women can identify with more than one character at a time. Her discussion is based on Chodorow's theories of the subject formation of the female child (1979). Chodorow believes that because the young girl takes a present mother as a role-model, while the boy takes an absent father, the girl has no distance from her parent and lacks a clear boundary. This gives her a more fluid identity and a propensity to form triadic relationships, reproducing the desire to mother. Williams explains that this fluidity of identity and the ensuing propensity to see herself in terms of her relation to others means that women find it easier than men to identify with more than one character at the same time. In this, she argues, female spectators are automatically distanced from the image because they are simultaneously juggling several subject positions at any one time. Cowie takes this possibility of distance even further, arguing that identification is essentially a taking-up of a subject position, and to do this the spectator must first acknowledge that they are *not* in that position themselves (1997: 105). So for Cowie, distancing oneself from the image is a necessary component of identification.

Importantly, Cowie does not differentiate between male and female identification strategies. She believes that when watching a film we do not necessarily identify with a specific character, but with a position of view, with situations in the narrative which relate to our own experiences, and so our identifications are always changing (1988: 135-7). In this they do not have to be gender-specific. The possibility of multiple identification positions has its roots in social theory. Moore (1994: 141) argues that the construction of the personality is fractured, not unified. She states that the

subject is not a coherent individual, but is offered a wide range of subject positions in society and takes up a variety of them according to the current situation. Often these positions are unconnected or conflicting, and cannot be united into a coherent whole. This fractured nature of identity seems to connect naturally to our identifications with fictional characters. Ellis argues that "identification is ... multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche paraded before her or him" (1982: 43), and in this case it does not have to be gender specific.

The belief in the non-gendered nature of spectatorship not only allows women to identify with male characters without opting out of their femininity, but also allows men to identify with female characters. Clover argues that men must be able to identify with female characters, because there is no other explanation for the popularity of rape-revenge heroines or Final Girls in horror films for which the audience is mainly male (1992: 13). She believes that these films "operate on the basis of a one-sex body, the maleness or femaleness of which is performatively determined by the social gendering of the acts it undergoes or undertakes" (159). This idea breaks down the sex binary altogether, divorcing sex from gender. Clover's assertion that men can identify with these female characters is backed up by Peter Hutchings (1993), who argues from the perspective of a male viewer that men can and do identify with the female victim in horror films. Prince (1996: 72) criticises psychoanalytical arguments about identification along a similar line, saying that by and large they ignore empirical evidence on spectators, such as that given by Clover and Hutchings.

The idea of fluid identifications across gender boundaries means that men *and* women can identify with an active female character without seeing her as problematic for their own gender identities. This is vitally important because it allows an active woman to appeal to the audience. Through

problematising the gender binary that surrounds spectatorship we can also cast doubt on the idea that an active female character can only be seen as symbolically male. In the restrictive binary system, activity equals masculinity and so an active woman must be male. This would mean that a female spectator identifying with an active female character would still be identifying trans-sexually, which seems unnecessarily complicated. The limits these theories place on female activity have been criticised by Carson et al., who argue that one difficulty with film theory is "the tendency of psychoanalysis to draw film discourse into a phalloccentric orbit and ascribe to identities an aura of universality and inevitability that can lapse into an essentialist view of gender" (1994: 7). 'Woman', they argue, is a category full of differences. Byars informs us that as Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis are skewed in favour of the masculine, so are the theories based on those positions, and she states the need for a theory which does not place women as aberrant. These psychoanalytic theories "underestimate both the complexity and variety of mainstream narratives and the potential for consuming them in ways that challenge patriarchy" (1994: 95).

However, emphasising difference rather than likeness can create other problems. Stacey points out that the flexibility of multiple identification means "the investigation of the different psychic investments of men and women in the cinema becomes impossible" (1994: 31), and does away with the need for feminist film criticism. In order to counter this, she argues that "as well as analysing the unconscious processes of spectatorship, feminist film criticism needs to develop a theorisation of how identities are fixed through particular social and historical discourses and representational practices, outside, as well as inside, the cinema" (31-2). The importance of social identity to spectatorship is accepted by any theorist who acknowledges the importance of reception. Kuhn, for example, argues that

no text contains specific meanings because meanings are produced in the moment of reading, although it is possible to limit the range of readings available and present a preferred meaning (1982: 12). Berenstein, like Stacey, acknowledges the social nature of reception, but takes this further, arguing that spectatorship is performative. Drawing, as does Doane, on Riviere's concept of masquerade, she argues that spectatorship is informed by social roles which the viewers perform. "Cinema spectatorship is a cultural venue in which [gender] roles are temporarily, unevenly, and alternately worn and discarded during the viewing experience" (1996: 37). For example, women watching horror scream in artificial fear, masquerading as weak women. Berenstein argues that this social practice can actually be transgressive because it means that women are aware on some level of the artificiality of their femininity, and demonstrates the performative nature of gender roles in cinema watching.

Bennett and Woollacott (1987) also see the social realm as determining film viewing. They argue that the cinematic address does not constitute the subject as gendered, but that women bring different desires and expectations to film-watching from men as a result of their social roles. Thus, shifting forms of identification are "partly organised by existing and socially constructed categories of male and female" (220). In a sweeping generalisation, they state that female viewing is informed by the reader positions that women take up in their common pursuits of reading romance novels and watching soap operas. This means that they either view films in terms of romance, or slip into the maternal position which Bennett and Woollacott say soap opera viewers take up. Although sadly generalised, this idea does demonstrate the importance of other social activities in determining our film viewing.

It would seem, then, that it is possible for people of both sexes to identify with film characters of both sexes, but their ability to do so may be constrained by their social positioning. However, the idea of social positioning has another significance in terms of the pleasures of violence viewing for women. I have demonstrated that masculinity is associated with power, and that women are generally positioned as weak and passive in society. This being the case, it must be asked why anyone would want to identify with women in films at all, when they are consistently presented as passive and victimised. As Moore argues, female role models are negative and so identification with the category "Woman" is difficult. Hence people will identify with the male: "[o]ne consequence of this is that fantasies of power are fantasies of identity" (1994: 148). 'Woman' has actually come to signify 'passivity'. "The image of woman has become conventionally accepted as very often meaning something other than herself. In semiotic terms, the signifier supports a symbolic as well as a literal signified and the two terms come to inflect and inform each other" (Mulvey, 1995: 4). Women, then, are represented in limited and stereotypical ways, and remain the recipients or spectators of the action rather than the protagonists. Modleski argues that this is where the pleasures of identification lie for the male spectator, in that he can vicariously experience victimisation whilst simultaneously disavowing his identification with the female character on gender grounds. But this identification cannot hold the same pleasure for female spectators, who are normally located in this passive and victimised position. So it is only reasonable to assume that empowerment through identification holds even greater pleasures for women than for men. Berenstein, for example, argues that the pleasure of identification can come from identifying against yourself, experiencing a different social situation. This must be particularly true for those of lower social status, who can use

the cinema to escape their everyday oppression (1996: 47). Tasker (1993) tells us that standard action films contain a period when the hero loses control of events and is shown to be vulnerable, often through torture. After this the hero reconstructs himself as masculine by overcoming his vulnerabilities, regaining control and coming out victorious. It is Tasker's assertion that the pleasure offered by these scenes is in the vicarious experience of the loss and then regaining of control. Lenz (1993) expands on this idea. She believes that while in action hero films the excitement of these scenes comes from a momentary loss of control, the appeal of action women films comes instead from the heroine's temporary empowerment. Whereas for male characters the time of victimisation can be pleasurable because we know that it is only temporary, for female characters it is not enjoyable because victimisation is their usual position, and it is their agency which is temporary. The usual position of women as victims, then, makes their empowerment doubly thrilling (378). In this way violent women in films can be seen to be not only related to women's changing roles in society, but also as offering particular pleasures in the portrayal of their empowerment. And while female spectators can identify with the male characters in movies, the social discourse of passivity surrounding both female spectator and female character makes this empowerment through identification particularly resonant.

Lenz also says that "central to the construction of women as the subjects of violence is the relationship between 'woman' and that technology which removes her from her more common positioning as 'victim': her gun" (p374). The gun has been seen as a phallic signifier, suggesting that when a woman becomes active she also becomes masculine. Jacobs' discussion of gunfire (1996) describes this position clearly, pointing out that:

"the pleasure gained from watching gunfire sequences is bound up
with issues of control and its loss ... Mastery and power (the cool handling
of high-tech weapons) are directly contrasted with the loss of control over
the body, the messy exit of blood and the involuntary convulsions ... This
quick transition between mastery and vulnerability is certainly the
characteristic trajectory of the male orgasm..." (168)

Clover, too, sees the gun as a phallic symbol, but argues that the knife
is more so because it is an extension of the body (1992: 32). This
differentiation between weapons is a salient point, and I will elaborate on
this in chapter 4. But here I want to argue that this equation of weapons
with phallic symbols seems reductive, returning to the binary that states an
active woman must be masculine because femininity is passive. As Creed
says:

"One response to the castrating heroine of the horror film is to
argue that she is actually phallicised, that is, that she has been reconstituted
as masculine. This view appears to be based on the argument that only
phallic masculinity is violent, and that femininity is never violent, not even
in the imagination." (1993: 155)

I would argue that the appeal of a gun for an active woman is more
likely to be associated with its ability to be used by people of different
physical strengths. In this it puts a woman on a par with a usually stronger
man in a way that nothing else can do. Tasker also argues that guns are a
sign of power in Hollywood film, drawing on the US construction of the
right to bear arms. She believes that women controlling guns, cars,
computers and other technologies representative of freedom is transgressive
(1993: 132).

However, it would appear that this transgression must be qualified.
As Lenz tells us, "a woman (as opposed to a man) with a gun is not an
entirely unproblematic cinematic image" (1993: 375-6). Women's
appropriation of power needs to be qualified in order for it to be acceptable

to audiences. Tasker comments that in Hollywood cinema women who fight need justification for their violence, whereas in Hong Kong cinema they do not (1993: 24). Citing the difference between Cynthia Rothrock's Hong Kong and her American films, Tasker says that in the US Rothrock very often needs the excuse of stepping into her father's place in order to resolve situations with which he would have dealt if still alive. In this she is only temporarily empowered, and only then in the name of a man, making her power acceptable in terms of American film. Other justifications for violence are more commonplace in big-budget films of the 1980s. Tasker mentions that "the rape-revenge narrative is often used to provide a justification (since one is generally needed) for female violence in movies" (1993: 152). Lenz also comments on this, saying that films with active women often draw on the social discourse that women need to arm themselves against potential rapists. Defending oneself against men, then, is one legitimate reason for women to become active, and it draws on the stereotypical position of woman as victim, making the empowerment easier to accept because it can be understood as only temporary, or still less than male power. The Final Girl of horror films also draws on this discourse, and Clover (1992) argues that in many ways the Final Girl is figured as masculine in order to make female power less of a potential threat to men. Another major stereotype surrounding women is, as has already been discussed, that of motherhood. The use of motherhood to excuse violence, the woman fighting for her family, is seen clearly in films that set good mothers against bad, mentioned earlier.

It would appear then that violent women in Hollywood cinema need particularly feminine justifications for their violence in order for it to be acceptable. Holmlund tells us that "[m]any are given multiple reasons to murder because Hollywood and its audiences are both fascinated by yet

uncomfortable with violent women" (1994: 32). The peculiarity of this to Hollywood films will be discussed in my analysis of *Point of No Return*.

The continuing association of femininity with weakness and passivity can also be seen via extra qualifiers that appear in these films, other than the direct reasons and justifications given for the central character's activity. In their discussion of horror films, both Clover (1992) and Berenstein (1996) emphasise that while these films often feminise their male protagonists by making them powerless against the threat, the women must always be a few steps ahead. This, declares Berenstein, is the reason for so much obvious fear and screaming on the part of the heroine. In the films I will look at this strategy is often inverted, with the active woman feminised in comparison to another woman who is less feminine than the heroine. This gives the heroine space to be more 'masculine' than would otherwise be acceptable. It has also been argued that films with active heroines are more open than most for alternative readings. Kuhn quotes Lesage as saying that "[t]he industry wants to let everybody have their ideological cake and eat it too. In other words, you'll see deliberate ambiguities structured into almost every film to come out about strong women" (Kuhn, 1982: 140). Kuhn sees this openness of meanings to allow readings which "accord more or less with spectators' prior stances on feminist issues" (139), whatever they may be. In this way, Hollywood is trying to maximise its audience and minimise potential disruption to the dominant ideology. *Thelma and Louise* is a particularly clear example of this strategy, as I will discuss later.

1.6: Conclusion

In conclusion, then, it can be seen that the place of active women in film is extremely problematic. The almost overwhelming equation of femininity with passivity, seen not only in film theory and spectatorship models but also in social discourse, seems to restrict any space that films offer for violent women to inhabit. Their violence is almost always seen to masculinise them, and the strategies employed to excuse or disavow their violence and activity seem much more complex than those for men. I will discuss this further in Chapter 4.

To return briefly to the argument surrounding spectatorship, it is my belief that the social aspects of spectatorship are very important to our understanding of films. Kuhn states that "spectators, as part of their socialisation as cinema-goers, build up an understanding of how to read films, so that the act of reading may eventually become automatic or taken for granted" (1982: 21-2). The automatic nature of reading films seems to apply particularly well to the audience experience of listening to the music. Many film music critics assume that the score's power to alter our perceptions of the film derives mainly from our lack of attention to it. It is my belief that Hollywood film scores rely on a set of musical codes which are culturally familiar to their audience through their exposure to Western music - and more specifically Western *film* music - in order to create particular meanings which contribute to the preferred reading. If we understand these codes automatically, it is perhaps harder to guard against their message, giving music a strong ideological potential.

Finally, it is important to note the usual reliance of film theory on the visual dimensions of a film. Commenting on this, Humm argues that the voice has far more importance than is usually understood for purposes of

identification with characters. She states that "the eye of the beholder has been under a feminist optometrics but his [sic] ear has escaped attention" (1997: 57). This comment applies equally well to film music as to voice, and here I hope to demonstrate the importance of the understanding of music to film analysis.

CHAPTER 2: Music in Film

2.1 Film Music and Emotion

It is generally accepted by the industry and theorists alike, that music has a powerful emotive affect in a film. After all, if it does not have an important function, why is it there? Thomas tells us that:

> "music comes to bear in helping to realise the meaning of the film, in stimulating and guiding the emotional response to the visuals. ... It is this unique ability of music to influence the audience subconsciously that makes it truly valuable to the cinema. Moreover, music can complete the total picture and produce a kind of dramatic truth, which the visual element is not always capable of doing." (1973: 16)

Thomas goes on to detail what he sees as the particular functions of film music. On a lower level, he sees it serving as a glue between scenes, building up a sense of continuity throughout the picture, underlying the theatrical build-up of scenes, pinpointing various emotions and actions and then rounding it all off with a sense of finality. At a higher level of action he sees its purpose as to create an atmosphere, and to colour the tone of the picture. By this he is referring to:

> "the psychology of scoring, being able to shade emotions, to lighten or darken moods, to heighten sensitivities, to imply, to suggest, to define character and refine personality, to help generate momentum or create tension, to warm the picture or cool it, and - most subtle of all - to allude to thoughts that are unspoken and situations that remain unseen. Such music plays upon the minds of the audience." (17)

These quotes from Thomas, which are typical in their outlines of the functions of film music, show just how much music is expected to contribute to a film[1]. So much so that many composers have complained of film-

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[1] Here, Thomas is building upon Aaron Copland's well-known five functions of film music:

makers expecting them to solve all of the film's weaknesses. Bazelon describes the popular belief that "by doctoring the dramatic failures of the film, music could save the picture" (1975: 22). But the most important function of all is music's perceived ability to tell us how to feel about what we see. This belief in the expressive nature of music is epitomised in the following quote from Carroll:

> "In reaching out for music, the movie is seeking to incorporate an added, particularly powerful, augmented means of expression along with the visual, narrative, and dramatic means already at its disposal. The addition of music gives the film maker an especially direct and immediate means for assuring that the audience is matching the correct expressive quality with the action at hand. This is not to say that music is the film's only expressive lever; rather, that it is a notably direct and reliable one." (1988: 222)

Music's expressive abilities have been a point of contention in traditional music philosophy for a very long time. Many believe as does Stravinsky, for example, that "music is essentially powerless to express anything at all" (quoted in Bernstein, 1976: 389). Bernstein takes issue with this, however, pointing out Stravinsky's use of terms such as 'dolce', 'tranquillo', and even 'espressivo' in his own work! (390)

Perhaps the most famous argument against music having the ability to express emotion is that put forward by Eduard Hanslick in *The Beautiful in Music* (1957). He argues that music cannot express emotion because emotion is based upon and differentiated by thoughts, and it is part of music's nature that it cannot express specific non-musical things. This has been modified by

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"1) Creating a more convincing atmosphere of time and place. 2) Underlining psychological refinements - the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of a situation. 3) Serving as a kind of neutral background-filler. 4) Building a sense of continuity. 5) Underpinning the theatrical build-up of a scene, and rounding it off with a sense of finality." (in Thomas, 1991, p13). These are by no means exhaustive; Evans (1979) outlines seven functions, and Levinson (1996) gives fifteen.

other theorists such as Davies (1993), who argues that this only holds true for the so-called Platonic or higher attitudes (e.g. love, hate) and that there are lower feelings such as cheerfulness which do not require specific thoughts. But the idea that music can express extra-musical things is still very contentious.

What follows is a discussion of the main theories about music's ability to express. Here I am basing my discussion very much upon the work of Stephen Davies (1993), whose theory seems to me the most practical. I will then go on to discuss the main theories about the place of music in film, followed by a discussion of how it functions.

2.2: Expressionist theories of music

Broadly speaking, music theorists can be divided into two camps - those who believe that music is primarily intellectual and can express nothing (Formalists), and those who believe that music can express something, even if it cannot express anything outside itself (Expressionists). Film music theorists fall into the latter, necessarily so because if music expresses nothing it would be pointless having it in a film.

There are several different theories about how music expresses. I shall concentrate mainly on the classic positions.

2.2.1: Music as Language

One popular way to argue for the capacity of music to express is by describing it in the same terms as language. However, the theory that music is, or acts like, a language always faces the difficulty that music cannot be translated. Many theorists try to avoid this standard objection by claiming

that music deals with areas of experience that language cannot deal with, and so there is no possibility of translation. This is clearly seen in the popular description of music as a language of the emotions.

Deryck Cooke

One of the most famous proponents of this theory is Deryck Cooke, who in his 1959 study *The Language of Music* not only claimed that music was a language, but attempted to set out a basic vocabulary of musical sounds and their meanings. He saw meaning as arising from the natural harmonic series and its tensions, and strengthened by constant usage. This theory has been widely criticised. Jones (1970), for example, argues that Cooke ignores the contribution made to expressiveness by instrumentation and form. He also makes the point that the meaning of emotions cannot be taught using musical examples alone, and so music cannot be a language of the emotions. Durant (1984) also criticises Cooke, foregrounding his lack of attention to social contexts and the position of the receiver in creating meaning. "It is this indispensable element of position, and of the historical construction of positions available, which is never acknowledged in *The Language of Music*" (12).

Wilson Coker

Another champion of the idea that music functions as a language is Wilson Coker (1972). He argues that music has a prelinguistic meaning when we do not consciously attend to it, which arouses an instinctual response born from experience. But he says that when we do attend to music consciously it has linguistic meaning - it becomes a language if we *read* it. He argues that the composer can communicate with the listener by taking the position of the listener and understanding the meanings of what he

writes from that point of view, "and in that case the musical gestures become potential linguistic symbols" (150). In his study he outlines the syntactical workings of language and tries to argue that certain musical elements can be seen to work in the same way, though having a meaning through acquaintance rather than a discursive meaning. "Musical gestures <u>do</u> overtly what 'is' stands for discursively" (114).

Davies criticises Coker for this equation of music with language. Coker has argued that music is propositionally true, that it <u>is</u> what language <u>says</u>. But Davies points out that music cannot assert anything as words can, and so cannot be equated with a language. "In Coker's theory, sign and signified tend to collapse into each other" (11).

However, Davies continues, Coker has at least understood what needs to be shown in order to demonstrate that music can be equated with language. Leonard Meyer's analogy of the two does not demonstrate the same understanding.

Leonard Meyer

Leonard B. Meyer's classic study *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956) is based on the theories of Gestalt psychology, which argues that human beings organise the information with which they are presented in patterns in order to understand it more easily. Meyer argues that the patterns we form when we listen to music are based on our knowledge of musical style and conventions, which then create expectations as to the continuation of the pattern we hear. In this way "an understanding of the cultural and stylistic presuppositions of a piece of music is absolutely essential to the analysis of meaning" (ix). So for Meyer, musical meaning derives from the arousal, suspension and fulfilment of expectations according to our stylistic knowledge. "Embodied meaning is, in short, a product of expectation" (35).

Meyer argues that emotion results when a tendency is blocked or inhibited, and so music expresses emotion through suspending and then resolving our expectations of pattern continuation. "If intellectual activity is allowed to remain unconscious, then the mental tensions and the deliberation involved when a tendency is inhibited are experienced as feeling or affect rather than as conscious cognition" (31). Both Davies and Budd, however, criticise this argument for making intellectual and affective responses mutually exclusive. As Budd says, "the conceptualisation of an expectation does not preclude the experience of affect" (1985: 167).

Meyer believes that musical meaning is intramusical, but he also argues that music *can* take on extramusical meanings not only for the individual listener, but on a wider cultural basis. For example, in the West, death is connoted by slow tempi and low ranges according to the sombre attitude we hold towards it. There are also traditional connotations, such as an organ signifying church, or a gong indicating the East. Meyer argues that "a particular epoch may develop quite an elaborate system of connotations in which certain melodic, rhythmic or harmonic practices become signs of certain states of mind or are used to designate specific emotional states" (260). When learned, these come to seem natural.

Finally, Meyer believes as does Coker that communication is possible between composer and listener as long as they are both familiar with the same set of musical gestures. When this is the case the composer can assume the attitude of the listener in order to communicate through the music. "Communication depends upon, presupposes, and arises out of the universe of discourse which in the aesthetics of music is called style" (42).

Meyer's position has been criticised on a number of counts. Budd (1985) sees his belief that emotion arises from the musical inhibition of a tendency as fundamentally problematic. He argues that not all tendencies

are pressing desires and so the inhibition of these tendencies will not cause the tension that Meyer claims. Also he makes the valid point that emotion can also arise when things happen exactly right. In this way the arousal of emotion is not dependent on the inhibition of a tendency. For Budd, Meyer has made a fundamental error in taking tension and emotion to be the same.

Davies also criticises Meyer, but does so mainly on the basis of Meyer's belief in music as a language. He argues that the "information" which Meyer sees in music [its meaning] is not like semantic information; for example it cannot be paraphrased. He also points out that music is not a language because "musical 'signs' stand alone and do not depend for their significance on their place within a wider symbol system" (48).

Harold Fiske

A further in-depth criticism of Meyer can be found in Harold Fiske's book *Music and Mind* (1990). Fiske goes further than the aforementioned critics, in that he does not believe that music can communicate in any way at all. He states that musical meaning does not lie in the listener's ability to produce appropriate expectations, but in the process of realising pattern relationships, and that the patterns we find will be individual to each listener, prohibiting communication.

For Fiske, music is a language but only in a syntactical sense, whereas spoken language also has a semantic component. Music, then, is a "metalanguage" which cannot refer to anything outside itself. Fiske discusses in detail the process whereby humans create patterns. He believes that the process whereby humans search for patterns in music is universal, but that the patterns we actually find depend upon our social and cultural context (83). While from this it would seem that Fiske believes communication would be possible within the same cultural context, he

argues further that the patterns we find depend on a much finer, individual level of experience. Firstly we will all pay differing amounts of attention to any given piece of music, which restricts possibilities for communication: "[m]usic communication between a composer/performer and listener extends only to the level of the music decision hierarchy that is successfully accomplished by the listener" (84). Secondly, there can be no communication process because in order for music to communicate successfully, the composer and listener would have to have exactly the same frame of reference for whatever it is supposed to communicate, emotion being the most prominent example. Fiske believes that this is an impossible expectation, as our emotions are so highly personal and difficult to vocalise that we can never understand exactly how someone else is feeling. If one person says to another that they are very sad, the other person will not know exactly how sad they are. Fiske also says that feeling is notoriously difficult to store in the memory, so even to the same person the term "very sad" will mean something different two weeks later. In the end the individual listener is the site of the meaning, although similar responses can be accounted for by similar acquisitions of musical language and life experience. While a consensus in response can be accounted for in this way, Fiske points out that variance of response cannot be accounted for by expressionist theorists. Davies too makes this point. He gives examples of several studies which have found a high level of similarity between responses, but states that there are serious methodological difficulties in studying this area. Sloboda (1996) details some of these difficulties. For example if emotional reactions are recorded while the participants are listening to music, then the focus of their emotional response will be on the task rather than on the music, meaning that the experiment destroys the very reaction it is trying to measure. However if measurements are taken after listening, then the experimenters

run the risk of memory loss or the introduction of other biases. So it would seem that the evidence for a wide similarity of response to music is not necessarily reliable.

Interestingly, Fiske addresses the question of film music directly. He states that film music is intended to create a specific expressive response across all listeners, but only does so when the listeners share a similar musical language and personal experiences. "The result is an illusion of communication created by a co-incident event" (127). There are several difficulties with Fiske's assumption. Firstly he is ignoring the contribution of the picture to the meaning of the music, which I will discuss fully later on. Secondly, language will also mean different things to people with different personal experiences, but this does not prohibit communication between them. Finally, it can be argued that while music cannot actually make a person feel one way, it can probably prohibit them from feeling another way (Sloboda 1998). In this, then, it would appear that music can have a certain amount of communicative ability. However, the point that music cannot be communicative on a wide level as a language can is very convincing.

2.2.2: Music as symbol:

Suzanne Langer.

It would appear, then, that music cannot be seen as a language. Another well known theory on musical communication is that advanced by Suzanne Langer in her ground-breaking 1953 study *Feeling and Form*. Langer is a strong proponent of music's peculiar ability to express the emotions. While it has no fixed meaning, it can convey what language cannot: "music is a tonal analogue of emotive life" (27). Music symbolises not occurrences of feelings, but the conception of them, and so the creation of the emotion in the listener is not necessary in order to prove music's expressive abilities. It

can express the conceptions of emotions, she argues, because it has the same morphology, the same essential, underlying movement that the emotions have when stripped of all their distinctive thoughts and situations. But it does not function like a language, it has no assertoric function. It is a presentational symbol rather than a discursive symbol, and so does not rely on a system of symbols for meaning, as does language. We cannot say what its meaning is, but we can know its import through direct acquaintance with it. In its lack of fixed meaning, then, music is an "unconsummated symbol".

In his criticism of Langer, Budd (1985) makes the unarguable point that different emotions can have the same form, for example anger and fear, and different instances of the same emotion can have different forms, such as a quick flare of anger and a slower, sustained anger. Davies extends this point, saying that it is possible to find musical (or extramusical) works which share the same form but not the same emotion. A train, for example, could have the same movement as a regularly rhythmic musical work. This brings Langer's theory of morphology seriously into question. Davies criticises her further, firstly for incoherence over the difference between discursive and presentational symbols, which he argues are not actually exclusive, and secondly for ignoring music's capacity to evoke an emotional response. In removing emotion from art and replacing it with conceptions of emotions, "her theory undermines the basis for emotional responses to musical works and makes mysterious the power of art to evoke such responses" (134).

2.2.3: Expression Theory and Arousal Theory

Two further theories outlined by Davies are the expression theory (which takes the position that one can read off the composer's emotions from the piece), and the arousal theory (which states that the emotions expressed

in the music are those aroused in the listener). Davies notes that these two theories, though widely disreputable, are very popular and must be discredited. Against the first, he raises the simple and compelling objection that the composer does not usually feel the emotions which listeners may believe are expressed in the piece while writing. In fact he argues that strong emotion is usually an inhibitor in the creative process. Also, as many works are written over a long period of time, it would be difficult for the composer to sustain the same strong emotion throughout the writing. Works are consciously contrived. Against the second theory, he raises another simple but unarguable objection - what about the instances when affect is *not* generated? The arousal theory cannot account for any lack of emotional response to music.

2.2.4: Stephen Davies

Davies, though, does believe that music can express emotion. Building on Kivy's 1980 discussion of the way in which humans are inclined to animate inanimate objects, Davies says that we find music expressive in the same way as what he calls "emotion characteristics in appearances" (222). From this point of view it is possible to see and understand the appearance of an emotion without feeling it yourself, and without necessarily believing that the author feels the emotion either. For example, we can say that a person looks sad, without this necessarily meaning that they are sad, or that we feel sad when we look at them. We can then attribute this sad appearance to such things as St Bernards or weeping willow trees, but certainly without believing that they are sad. This avoids the difficulties of accounting for variance of response because it leaves the listener free to be affected by the emotion characteristics in appearances, or not.

Davies believes that music is expressive of emotion through the relationship "between the dynamic character of music and human movement, gait, bearing or carriage" (229). This is an interesting point because it has been argued, for example by Budd, that it is impossible to talk about musical movement because nothing actually moves. Notes do not go up and down, and in fact cannot even be seen to be higher or lower than each other because musical space is a non-existent concept. Davies disagrees, arguing that while musical space and movement do not exist, we can still talk about them as "virtual" (Langer, 1956) because this is how we perceive music. We talk of many things moving that do not move in reality, for example the Dow Jones Index falling, or time passing. Furthermore, Davies believes that it is impossible to eliminate these terms from the discussion of music because the removal of terms such as these would make the discussion of music impossible. This is a salient point for the following discussion because the majority of writing on film music simply takes these sort of perceptions for granted and does not question them.

Davies' theory, then, makes it possible for us to recognise emotion in music even if we do not feel it, because we automatically make connections between music and non-musical things. Again this is important for the following discussion, because it makes it possible to assume that music *can* have extramusical meanings, which is absolutely essential for an understanding of film music theory.

2.3: Film Music

2.3.1: Why is it There?

There are several different types of theories as to how music came to accompany film in the first place. In her book "Unheard Melodies" (1987) Claudia Gorbman outlines the main arguments.

1) Historical arguments: - drama has a long history of being accompanied by music. Both Gorbman (36) and Brown (1994: 15) point out that this does not explain why music continues to remain in the face of technological change.

2) Pragmatic arguments: - such as the reasons put forward by London (1936) or Bazelon (1975) who say that music was introduced in the silent era to cover up the sound of the projector and the distracting noises made by the audience. Gorbman finds the projector argument unconvincing, asking why music should have remained after the invention of the soundproof booth; and Brown points out that this does not explain how the accompanying music came to be dramatically motivated, as in the beginning it was simply a selection of songs unconnected to the film. Altman (1992: 38) makes a wider theoretical objection to these arguments and also to the historical arguments, saying that they are universalistic and make it impossible to see sound as anything other than secondary to the image.

3) Aesthetic arguments: - that music was introduced to counteract the strangeness of silent moving images, or to compensate for the lack of a spatial dimension. This theory can be found in Kathryn Kalinak's book "Settling the Score" (1992). She sees music as adding a third dimension to

the two-dimensional image by sending out sound waves into the auditorium. Gorbman, however, argues that there is no reason why music should affect our visual perception of depth (38). Kalinak also makes a further point, that music gives film a temporal quality, which is important as the film "lacks a clear system for marking its own chronological progression" (47). This is a very popular argument, and can be related more generally to film sound. Michel Chion (1994) states that the importance of film sound is that it animates the image, adding movement and vectorizing it (i.e.: giving it a sense of orientation towards a future). By giving the film a sense of chronological progression, "the most widespread function of film sound consists of unifying or binding the flow of images" (47). Altman expands on this, attributing our ability to cope with the constant displacement of ourselves visually through edits as coming from being rooted in continuous sound. "It is thus the soundtrack that provides a base for visual identification, that authorizes vision and makes it possible" (1992: 62).

A further aesthetic argument is raised by Royal S. Brown. He argues that from the beginning cinema found it difficult to gain the status of an art form because of its perceived iconic nature - it was seen as too close to reality. Because of this, he argues, cinema reached out to a more abstract art form in order to de-iconify itself and thereby raise its status. Hence film music functions "as an aesthetic counter-balance to the iconic/representational nature of the cinematic signs" (32). Carroll also sees music as having this sort of effect on film, stating that "for its part, music *mythifies* the image" (1988: 27).

4) Psychological and anthropological arguments: - such as Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler's classic study *Composing for the Films* (1994: first

published 1947 under Eisler's name only). They argue that the two-dimensional, insubstantial images of people on screen remind us of ghosts. Music, they state, is present in films to breathe life back into the dead images, which life they have lost in the process of mechanical reproduction. Music supplies "momentum, muscular energy, a sense of corporeity" (78). They also believe that music acts as a cement, bonding the spectators to the screen and to each other, and thereby making the film seem a natural event. They strongly criticise this function, wanting film music to break away from the standardisation of the industry and become objective, emphasising rather than disguising the mediated nature of the film. If this happens "the listener is stimulated to grasp the scene in itself; he not only hears the music, but also sees the picture from a fresh point of view" (35).

Eisler and Adorno's explicit attempt to demonstrate the ideological function of film music is fascinating and useful. But they can be criticised on several grounds. Firstly, as Gorbman notes, they provide no real solution to the problem, no alternative to the practices they criticise (1987: 109). Gorbman also points out that they ignore the desire of the audience for identification with the picture. Because of this strong desire on the part of the audience, progressive music alone will not raise consciousness, it will just sound wrong in the context of the picture. Flinn raises another objection as to their theory that music cements the audience together. She argues that this bonding must be "achieved at conspicuously individuated levels since the darkened theater allows precious little to intrude on individual consumers' private communion with the artwork" (1992: 46).

The bonding of spectator to the screen, however, is a standard psychoanalytical argument for the presence of music in film. Gorbman quotes Metz's belief that because cinema signifies the presence of what is in reality absent, it signifies a lack, and argues that film has therefore

"developed strategies to make good the lack" (1987: 39), one of which is music. She argues that "music removes barriers to belief; it bonds spectator to spectacle, it envelops spectator and spectacle in a harmonious space" (55). More interestingly, she places an ideological slant on this function: "the overall purpose of film music is very much like easy-listening music: it functions to lull the spectator into an *untroublesome* (less critical, less wary) *viewing subject*" (58).

What, then, gives music the ability to fulfil such a role?

2.3.2: Psychoanalytic Theories

Much psychoanalytic theory of film music is based on the idea that music recreates the experience of the pre-Oedipal, restoring the bond with the mother. In this it draws on the work of theorists such as Guy Rosolato (1972), who posits that music is associated with the maternal from before birth, recalling the sounds of the mother's body heard in the womb. Rosolato also posits that the dissonance and resolution in tonal music replays the subject's desire for reunion with the mother. But as Caryl Flinn (1986: 59) points out, this does not account for music which is not based on the principles of tonality.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the "chora" is based on this idea of a pre-Oedipal space which is inhabited by the sounds and movements of the maternal body. Kristeva (1980) sees music as a non-Symbolic language closely associated with the chora, which as Flinn (1992) describes, is seen to exist outside of dominant (patriarchal) representational systems. As such, feminists can interpret music's fluidity of meaning as potentially liberatory. Flinn points out, however, that it should be realised that women cannot escape patriarchy altogether.

Through these associations with the return of the maternal, Flinn believes that music provides a utopian function. She says that its subservience to the image results from its raw emotionalism being perceived as "an especially marked threat to the alleged plenitude of the image track" (1986: 63). Music, then, "serves to anchor and reinforce ... the visual meanings of the film" (63). She connects this to a patriarchal association of music with femininity and the association of the visuals with masculine desire. "Music's subservience to the visual aspect of cinema proceeds from the fact that its pleasures and meanings remain defined by and entrenched within a scopophiliac, masculinised economy of desire (think how often swelling music plays lackey to the gaze of male characters in romantic dramas)" (63-4). Flinn sees film music as warding off uncertain significations using cultural codes to fix a meaning in the image. She argues that:

> "music, in short, functions as a sort of blanket, a suturing cover to render invisible the occasional glimpses we get of patriarchal lack in the cinema - scenes with uncertain visual meanings, mis-paced moments, transitions between scenes that are less than smooth, the lack which in fact structures the apparatus of film technologically." (64)

To a psychoanalyst, then, music helps to ward off the displeasures of uncertain signification - what Barthes terms "the terror of uncertain signs" (1977: 39) - and also the potential recognition of the technological basis of the film. Its ability to smooth over potentially disruptive moments rests on its subconscious connection with the womb and the mother, which creates a feeling of wholeness and fusion. In this it can bring an extra dimension of believability to a film. "The threat to our belief is not in [a scene's] overexplicitness, but rather its *underexplicitness*, its inadequacy to represent their words' "truth"" (Gorbman, 1987: 67). Music, because of its pre-

linguistic status, lends the film an emotional truth, and its non-referential status makes it a safe language.

For psychoanalysts, music's special connection to the subconscious is strengthened in film music because our attention is focused elsewhere. We concentrate on the narrative, and so the music pervades our unconscious, while our barriers are down. "If it is in the background, it works on the spectator-subject most effectively, fusing subject to film body, bypassing the usual censors of the unconscious" (Gorbman, 1987: 64). Chion states that sound generally "can become an insidious means of affective and semantic manipulation" (1994: 34) because we are unable to cut it out of our perception in any way. When we are concentrating on something else, then, it affects the subconscious and we cannot evaluate it rationally. In fact, music's affect is *dependent* on our lack of awareness: "[w]ere the subject to be aware (fully conscious) of its presence as part of the film's discourse, the game would all be over" (Gorbman: 64). Gorbman posits that the "unheard" nature of film music draws the spectator in to the film, involving us in the narrative. But she does allow that this is not always the case, arguing that sometimes music will place us in contemplation of a spectacle, a pause in the narrative movement, and will then "bond the spectator not to the feelings of the characters but to his/her fellow spectators" (68). Gorbman says that this latter type of music is more likely to be noticed, although she seems to believe that it should aim to remain unheard even at these moments.

2.3.3: Hearing the Music

The idea that film music should be unheard has a longer tradition than psychoanalytic theory, however. Most histories of film music comment on the belief by classical Hollywood producers that film music should be inaudible and not distract the audience from the picture in any way. Stilwell

says that this is still common today: "[t]he scoring ideal is still, to a very great extent, that of the classical Hollywood cinema; that it should be unobtrusive, invisible, 'unheard'" (1997: 61). Thomas (1973) quotes several composers trying to refute this belief. Henry Mancini for example flatly states: "I don't know who started this theory of the best film music being that which you don't notice, but it isn't true" (197), and Bronislau Kaper points out that "if you don't hear the music on any level of consciousness, then it has served no purpose" (90). However, it would appear that some confusion surrounds the use of some of these terms. Thomas quotes Max Steiner as saying: "[m]y theory is that the music should be felt rather than heard. They always used to say that a good score was one you didn't notice, and I always asked, 'What good is it if you don't notice it?'" (122) There seems to be some uncertainty, then, about the difference between being heard and being noticed, which makes this area difficult to discuss.

For his part, Jeff Smith (1996) launches a strong attack on the whole concept of music being unheard, believing that the accepted narrative functions of film music, such as describing what the character's are thinking and feeling, can only work at some cognitive level: "[i]ndeed, if film music is to play any part in the text's construction of meaning through its cuing functions, it could not only act on the unconscious, but would need to be perceived and cognized by film spectators" (235).

Smith backs up his claim by giving examples from films like *Gone With the Wind* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where he posits that the music is supposed to be perceived at a conscious level. In his examples, he argues,

"music is foregrounded in order to further the spectator's sense of structural unity or narrative coherence. The range and frequency of such moments in classical cinema suggest that filmgoers are quite commonly made aware of film music as a part of the cinematic experience, and that these moments are so highly codified and conventionalized that they neither

disrupt nor weaken the cinematic illusion, but rather encourage narrative comprehension." (236-7)

In this way, he posits that hearing music does *not* present a threat to the bond between spectator and screen. Furthermore, he argues convincingly against the belief that music's sole purpose is to bind the spectator in this way: "if music is so spellbinding, why don't all mainstream films use it all of the time?" (237) Very few films have continuous musical accompaniment, and Smith points out that this being the case, films cannot rely on music as a bonding agent, because what would happen when it stops? Some might argue that music only appears at moments when there is the threat of rupture, but Smith says that we know from viewing experience that we cannot draw distinctions between the way we watch scenes with or without music: "[w]e view a film in its entirety in roughly the same way" (238).

It is Smith's position, then, that we understand film music cognitively and it is this that enables the score to tell us things about the film:

"Even when a viewer fails to recognize a particular theme or leitmotif, the immediacy of the music's modality, tempo, timbre, and dynamics often encourages spectators to make hypotheses and draw inferences about a scene's structural features and expressive qualities." (244)

Music's ability to contribute to how we understand and feel about the narrative is absolutely primary to film music theory and practice. It is not only how theorists see music as functioning in the film, but also how composers rationalise their work. In this, music's special power as an emotive force is taken for granted and used. It is believed that music can "complete the total picture and produce a kind of dramatic truth, which the visual element is not always capable of doing" (Thomas, 1973: 16). This idea that music provides something that the visuals cannot is accepted across the board. Karlin (1994) says that music is the most effective way to import

what the characters in the film are thinking and feeling. Jerry Goldsmith
tells Thomas that his job is:

> "to supply additional understanding to what is being said or what is
> being done. ... The composer must wait for those moments in a picture where
> there is a scene so special, where there is something to be said that only
> music can say. Then the presence of music will bring that extra element you
> need, and if it's done right, it will elevate the scene." (1991: 292)

Kaper, too, makes a succinct statement on this subject. He says
simply that "if you can't add something, don't bother to write it. Music
without a statement is no music" (Thomas, 1973: 90). Elmer Bernstein gives
a longer and more theoretical discussion of how music can add something to
the movie:

> "You must use your art to heighten the emotional aspects of the film
> - music can tell the story in purely emotional terms and the film by itself
> cannot. The reason it can't is that it's a visual language and basically
> intellectual. You look at an image and you have to interpret what it means,
> whereas if you listen to something or someone and understand what you
> hear - that's an emotional process. Music is particularly emotional, if you are
> affected by it you don't have to ask what it means." (ibid.: 193)

This is fascinating because it shows the absolute acceptance by film
composers (and theorists) of a point that in traditional musicology is
extremely contentious, that of music's ability to create or express emotion.
So is it possible to back up theoretically this general belief in music's
expressive abilities?

Much of the argument against music being able to express anything
seems to come from the idea that it lacks the ability to refer specifically to
anything outside itself. It cannot express emotion, then, because it cannot
represent the thoughts that lie behind at least the Platonic attitudes, if not all
types of feeling. But with film music it is possible to argue that the film itself
provides the specific referent which then gives music the power to express.

Karlin, for example, says that music expresses affect, and then uses themes, melodies, instruments, or other aspects of music - for example a leitmotif associated with a particular character - to provide the thought behind the emotion (1994: 83). In this way a particular emotion *could* be identified. As Noel Carroll puts it: "[w]edding the musical system to the movie system, then, supplies the kind of reference required to particularize the broad expressivity of the musical system" (1988: 220-1). He then describes the way music modifies what we see in the picture by imbuing it with certain expressive properties, while the other elements of the film serve as indicators, establishing specifically what the scene is about. Brown actually refers to traditional musicological arguments to back up this idea. Drawing on Langer's concept of music as an unconsummated symbol, he says that cinema can transform the morphological effect of music into specific emotions. Music is "unconsummated affect, and as such it is ripe as an art form for the consummation provided by the representational nature of the moving picture and/or of the specific, narrative situation" (1994: 27).

Associating the music to the picture, then, can explain how movie music creates feeling where concert music cannot, because the film provides its audience with the concrete thought believed necessary for the experience of at least the higher emotions. But of course we do not all react to the same films in the same way, and a scene which deeply affects some people can leave others cold. This could result from the failure of the picture to present the thought in a compelling way to its viewers. But Davies' model of emotion characteristics in appearances can also help account for the situations in which movie music fails to create emotion. Because of its "mood music" (Frith: 1984) function, film music relies far more than concert music on these recognisable musical expressions to create meaning, such as Davies' example of the dynamic character of the music imitating human

movement. In this way we can recognise the feeling 'expressed' in the music, connect it with the feeling currently being portrayed on-screen, but are still free to be unaffected by it without thereby refuting its expressiveness.

It is important to note that film music does not always create emotion, although that is seen as one of its greatest abilities, and that there are different ways in which music can create feeling. Chion (1994) identifies two different types of emotive music. The more usual empathetic music participates in the feeling of the scene, using cultural codes for things like happiness or sadness. Anempathetic music, however, expresses conscious indifference to a situation by using its temporal nature, continuing to play no matter what is happening on screen. An obvious example of this is the torture scene from *Reservoir Dogs*, or the death of Sean Connery in *The Untouchables*. Chion also points out that music can simply be abstract or functional, serving as a signpost, without any emotive import at all. But the idea that music can act as a signpost is also contentious for traditional musicology, as it insists on music's ability to refer to specific extra-musical objects or situations. This is what Gorbman describes as 'narrative cueing': deploying music to "create or emphasise a particular character's subjectivity" (1987: 83). This is another standard function of film music as far as composers and theorists are concerned.

2.3.4: Cultural Codes

Gorbman outlines three levels of meaning in film music:

1) pure musical codes - referring to the musical structure itself.

2) cultural musical codes - drawing on cultural references and importing them into the film.

3) cinematic musical codes - the way the music "bears specific formal relationships to coexistent elements in the film" (1987: 13). Here Gorbman argues that music can carry representational meaning within a film if it repeatedly occurs in conjunction with certain images.

The first level of meaning is that which traditional musicology tends to concentrate on, believing either like Hanslick that music can mean nothing outside of its intramusical relationships, or like Meyer that music's capacity to express is inherent in these very relationships. The second level is more referential, and as such is considered rather disreputable, but this level is very important for film music meaning and in particular for the use of music as a signpost. Altman's model of the creation of film (1992) shows how it lies at a central point of two widening triangles - production and reception - which both open out onto wider culture. This also holds true for film music. Created in a cultural context, it cannot escape from extra-filmic references. Levinson (1996) differentiates between original scores written for the film and appropriated scores, and comments that appropriated scores import specific references into films and are more likely to be noticed because of the cultural location of the music. But all film music is imbued with cultural reference which can be used to good affect in film soundtracks, as I will show in my analysis of *Lethal Weapon* which follows. Film music also acts on the wider cultural milieu as well as being influenced by it (think of Altman's triangles again). Frith argues that "there are widely shared conventions of musical meaning and ... these conventions are partly derived from people's shared experiences of soundtracks" (1984: 79). He goes on to discuss the music for *Zorba the Greek* which he states has become such an accepted sign of Greekness that even in Greece restaurants play it to indicate their

authenticity. Philip Tagg explains the process whereby film music contributes to cultural codes:

"with its means of expression well and truly rooted in the bourgeois tradition, it has been able to develop a codal system which is understood by the vast majority of citizens in the industrialized capitalist world. Time and time again the average listener/viewer has heard a particular sort of music in conjunction with a particular sort of visual message. Thanks to this frequently repeated audio-visual learning process, the listener-viewer has acquired sufficient competence to connect certain musematic structures with certain extramusical fields of association..." (1983: 9-10)

These associations, then, function like codes for the listener, and are a standard feature of film music. Composer Dmitri Tiomkin, for example, tells Thomas that he uses "a telegraphic code that audiences recognize" (Thomas, 1991: 128). Carroll sees this coded nature as one of music's most useful features for films, because it allows meaning to be instantly signalled to the audience. Movies, he argues, are aimed at mass audiences, and as such they need quick and easy ways to communicate their message:

"[music] contributes to movies being larger and clearer than real life. Though modifying music is not a unique feature of movies, its capacity for promoting immediately accessible, explicit, and continuous emotive characterizations of the ongoing, onscreen action makes it *so suitable* to the presiding commitments of mass movie communication that *it would be a mystery* had movies failed to exploit it." (1988: 224)

This, then, is a reinforcing circle. The movies draw on cultural musical codes to create accessible sounds, which then themselves become signifiers of certain things, and come to influence not only the cultural context, but future films which have an investment in keeping codes that audiences are already familiar with. There are many examples of these musical codes - Brown (1995) tells us how entire ethnic groups have musical tropes, for example, or Prendergast (1992, second edition) outlines how Miklos Rozsa's score for *Quo Vadis* became the absolute standard for Roman

music in the big religious epics of the Fifties. On a less specific level, Gorbman tells us that:

"In typical classical fashion, scenes of rapid action or dramatic tension are paralleled by appropriately fast and tense music. Distinct idioms and moods of music match characters and narrative moods. "Stinger" chords typify the music's mission to provide dramatic underscoring". (1987: 153)

As Smith has pointed out, we are so used to these conventions that they are not disruptive and do not detract our attention from the film.

Kalinak also discusses the way that music has a predictable effect through physiological impact, saying for example that "quick tempi tend to intensify stimulation of the nervous system; slow tempi tend to dissipate it" (1992: 11). She also points out that composers use existing cultural conventions for quick communication. More significantly, though, she uses this knowledge to show how conventions of scoring can be put to an ideological use, stereotyping women. In her article "The Fallen Woman and the Virtuous Wife" (1982), she analyses three films from Hollywood's classical period to show how they use musical conventions associated with these two stereotypes in order to shape our reactions to the female characters. Fallen women, she states, are characterised by dotted, syncopated rhythms, chromaticism, falling lines, and jazz instruments like the saxophone, whereas virtuous wives are accompanied by simple harmonies and rhythms, climbing lines, and violins or woodwind. She concludes:

"The musical score in Hollywood film presents a complex and highly developed system of characterization which carries subliminal power to mold audience perception. An analysis of how music functions in individual films, particularly with regard to women, is a necessary step in coming to understand how stereotypes work." (82)

I hope to work towards this in the analyses that follow.

2.3.5: Working with the Film

From all the above it might be thought that although music is extremely powerful from an emotive point of view, it plays lackey to the visuals, which have an autonomous meaning. It is important to dispel this common sense theory, then, in order to understand better the relationship between film and music.

In his book *Audio-Vision* (1994), Chion introduces two relevant concepts. The first is "synchresis" (5), which relates to the weld of visual and auditory phenomena when they occur together. In this he is pointing out that in fact the sound we hear and the image we see in the cinema do not come from the same place, and, very often, are not connected in reality. The sound of a punch in the cinema, for example, is not what a real punch sounds like, and Chion attributes the exaggeration of sound to a need for it to render the impression of power, violence and suddenness that is lost in the cinema. The point, then, is that we make a connection between a sound event and a visual event simply because they occur together. As Kaper says, "At certain moments in films, nobody knows the difference between what is visual and what is acoustical. It all comes together. It's like seeing and hearing lightning - it's one effect" (Thomas, 1973: 90). Burt supports this idea in specific relation to music, saying that "there is no question that when we see pictures and hear music at the same time we invariably make a connection, if only on an unconscious level" (1994: 9-10).

Chion also introduces the concept of "added value", which he defines as "the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image" (5). He goes on to describe how we then think that the information comes from the image itself, and the sound can seem like an unnecessary duplicate. The example he uses is of an image of three small planes flying through the sky, with the commentator saying "here are three

small planes". Chion says that this always creates a laugh from his students, but in fact the commentator could have said, "the sky is completely cloudless" or "where did the fourth plane go?" and our perception of the image would change completely, while we would still consider his comment to be superfluous.

Gorbman (1987) uses the concepts of synchresis and added value in order to criticise a traditional argument of music running either parallel or counterpoint to the image. This is most clearly embodied in Eisenstein and Prokofiev's attempt to create an exact parallel of the film image in the music in *Alexander Nevsky*. For example, falling rocks are accompanied by falling music. This has been strongly criticised because it assumes that music can fall in the way that rocks can fall, when of course it cannot - the notion of musical space or movement being "virtual" rather than actual. But the importance here is the assumption that music can run either parallel or counterpoint to the image (presumably a counterpoint score would have a rising musical figure as the rocks fall). Gorbman points out that this is impossible because according to the concepts of synchresis and added value, what we see in the image would change. It could be argued that an image of an army winning a battle would be paralleled by victorious music, and counterpointed by sad music, but of course the sad music would be drawing our attention to other things - the deaths of particular soldiers, for example, or the horror of war. In this way, the relationship between music and image is far more complex than might otherwise be understood. The music can actually change what we see, not just create an emotional reaction to it.

So it would seem that music is very important to our understanding of and reaction to a film. As Gorbman says, "The moment we recognize to what degree film music shapes our perception of a narrative, we can no

longer consider it incidental or innocent" (1987: 11). In my analyses of the *Lethal Weapon* films in the next chapter I will attempt to demonstrate the importance of music and the way in which it shapes our attitudes, with particular reference to the main female character, Lorna Cole.

Chapter 3: Music in the *Lethal Weapon* series

3.1: The films

The first three *Lethal Weapon* films[2] are prime examples of big-budget Hollywood action movies and have a very wide appeal. More importantly, their scores clearly demonstrate the different levels of meaning outlined by Claudia Gorbman, and so I am going to look at them to try and show how the theory works in practice. My other reason for choosing this particular trilogy of films is that they extend over the rise of the action heroine, the first being made in 1987 and the third in 1992. In this way, they present an interesting case study of the representation of women in contemporary action movies.

The 1987 production of *Lethal Weapon* (dir. Richard Donner, m. Michael Kamen) centres around Sergeant Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson), a police officer disturbed to the point of suicide over the death of his wife; and his relationship with Sergeant Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover), a happily married 50yr old with three children, the oldest of whom, Rianne (Traci Wolfe) is fast approaching womanhood. The two are partnered in an investigation into the death of Amanda, the daughter of Michael Hunsacker (Tom Aitkins) who is an old Vietnam buddy of Murtaugh's. Amanda's death turns out to be related to the post-Vietnam drug-smuggling activities of Hunsacker's comrades, Shadow Company, led by the General (Mitchell

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[2] *Lethal Weapon 4* was released in the cinemas last summer but is not yet out on video, so it has not been included here. From initial analysis it does not appear to have extended Lorna Cole's role or musical representation in any way, and in fact would appear to be a step backwards from its 1992 forerunner.

Ryan) and his devoted second in command Joshua (Gary Busey). When Riggs and Murtaugh get too close, they murder Hunsacker, try to kill Riggs and kidnap Rianne, eventually capturing Riggs and Murtaugh after their failed rescue attempt. Riggs and Murtaugh are tortured but the three finally escape and kill all the bad guys, Riggs and Joshua first fighting in hand-to-hand combat. These happy events obviously cure Riggs of his suicidal intent and produce a close relationship between Riggs and Murtaugh.

Lethal Weapon is a typical 80s action movie in many ways. Tasker (1993) identifies four standard plot elements of the 80s action film. Firstly, they place a great deal of emphasis on a traditional concept of tough masculinity, widely believed to result from a backlash against the feminism of the 70s (see Tasker 1993, Faludi 1992). In *Lethal Weapon* the relationships between men are unabashedly macho, exalted and exclusive of women. Early on in the film, a male policeman describes the concept of the "80s man" to Murtaugh as sensitive and able to show his feelings to women. He tells Murtaugh' "I cried in bed last night". When Murtaugh asks if he was with a woman he replies with a smart-ass smile "No. Why do you think I was crying?" This scorn of the sensitivity of the New Man encapsulates the mood of the film. Riggs in particular is a caricature of masculinity despite his suicidal grief over the death of his wife. He lives in a messy trailer, drinks beer for breakfast, shows off his shooting prowess to Roger, and takes the most violent route through every situation he faces. Murtaugh is not so overtly macho but he is a traditional man all the same. He lives in a "traditional" family set up with his wife at home taking care of the children, never even considering the possibility of cooking himself although his wife's cooking is the butt of all his jokes. His contribution to the domestic realm is

restricted to forgetting to take the garbage out, he is more interested in his hobby room and his boat, and he has never heard of the "80s man".

The most obvious assertion of Riggs overstated masculinity comes late on in the film. The General is getting nowhere torturing Murtaugh and so brings in Rianne and threatens to destroy her looks. Murtaugh ineffectually curses him but the General tells him to forget his idea of escape and revenge, saying "there's no more heroes left in the world". At precisely this moment Riggs bursts through the door carrying the body of his torturer and proceeds to rescue Murtaugh and Rianne, killing at least one man with his bare hands. The obvious implication is that Riggs is a hero in a world where the macho hero has become increasingly outdated.

The second aspect of the film which is a standard action movie device is the importance of the male relationship. Here, despite their original antagonism to spice up the plot, Riggs and Murtaugh become very close friends throughout the course of the film, and Riggs is eventually saved from his suicidal state by Murtaugh's friendship. However, both men have their heterosexuality confirmed through female foils. Tasker argues that this confirmation of heterosexuality is very important in action films, to disavow the homoerotic implications of their focus on the perfect male body and on male bonding (1993: 16). It is important to note that Riggs' wife is dead, as Tasker says an action hero cannot be in control of an adult sexuality, despite the need for his heterosexuality to be confirmed. The fact that Riggs' wife is dead enables this confirmation without involving him in a sexual relationship.

A third standard element is that of the protagonist of an action film acting alone. The hero is almost always in conflict with an unsympathetic authority, and saves the day by himself. This disillusionment with authority touches genres other than the action cinema - Tudor (1989) tells us that it is a

major element of the horror movie since the Fifties. But in the *Lethal Weapon* trilogy this is rather unconvincing. The police force is shown to be sympathetic, the captain always supportive of his renegade officers. Nevertheless Riggs and Murtaugh always end up acting on their own. In the first movie this is unconvincingly justified by Rianne's kidnapping, Riggs telling Murtaugh that the smugglers will kill her if they try to mount a police operation to get her back. In *Lethal Weapon 2* it is unconvincing again, coming from thir anger at having their friends - including the police themselves - attacked. In *Lethal Weapon 3* there is no attempt at justification at all. But the "acting alone element" of the action narrative is always carried out.

The final aspect of the 80s Hollywood action movie that Tasker identifies is a fascination with other, mysterious places, and in particular Vietnam. The action movie can take place in a world where normal Western rules do not apply, and Vietnam is a popular theme because it is a major part of American consciousness. Tasker explains that the fascination with Vietnam is a symbolic re-enactment of the war, this time with the Americans - in the shape of our hero - winning.

Lethal Weapon demonstrates this fasination with Vietnam. Riggs and Murtaugh are both veterans of the war, as are the smugglers. They are the remnants of Shadow company, one of the toughest companies of the Vietnam troops, who have turned renegade and are smuggling drugs under the direction of their previous leader, the General. Their unquestionable loyalty to him, as befits American troops, is demonstrated early on when a criminal associate calls them mercenaries and asks how he can be expected to trust them. In reply the General demonstrates their loyalty by ordering Joshua to hold his arm out and burning it with his lighter, which Joshua endures without a murmur. The Vietnam associations are further continued

by the General's chief torturer, Enzo, who is Oriental and tortures Riggs with electric shocks. The strong implication through a few words is that Riggs has been tortured in this manner before, in Vietnam. Riggs himself is a master of martial arts and his final fight with Joshua is a hand-to-hand combat, with both trying to prove their greater prowess in this Oriental skill. Riggs, our all-American boy, wins out, the defeated enemy here not so much Vietnam itself, but the effect that it had on so many of the veterans that returned. It is also noteworthy that the evil they are fighting is drugs, a more recent evil in American society and one which again has great currency in the political consciousness of America, having been used as a justification for the invasion of Panama.

In *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989) much of this formula is repeated. Here the enemies are again drug smugglers but this time they are attachés of the South African embassy, using their diplomatic immunity as a cover for their operation. Riggs and Murtaugh stumble across their trail accidentally and the boss of the operation, Arjen Rudd (Joss Ackland) immediately sends his lieutenant Pieter Vorstedt (Derrick O'Connor) to warn off Murtaugh, breaking into his house and threatening his family. To keep Riggs and Murtaugh away from further danger, Captain Murphy (Stephen Kahan) puts them in charge of guarding government witness Leo Getz (Joe Pesci), but when they find out that he was laundering drug money for South Africans they raid the premises that Leo leads them to, only to be warned off because the house belongs to the embassy and as such is immune. At the embassy Riggs meets Rika van den Haas (Patsy Kensit) an innocent secretary, and falls for her. But the gang goes on a rampage against the police force, killing several officers and kidnapping Leo. Riggs and Murtaugh both escape but not until Pieter has killed Rika and revealed that he also killed Riggs' wife a

few years ago. Angered by these events, Riggs and Murtaugh destroy their headquarters and rescue Leo, and finally battle it out with the gang in a deserted shipyard from which they are trying to escape, killing them all.

This film still follows the 1980s action formula quite closely. This time our heroes not only act alone, but the "acting against authority" angle is fulfilled in part by the granting of diplomatic immunity by the government to the criminals, constraining the actions of our heroes. The characterisation of the villains as South African is also very significant, the heroes no longer fighting the spectre of Vietnam but a problem much more topical for 80s America, that of racism. Guerrero sees the bi-racial buddy movie of the 80s as providing "escapist fantasy narratives and resolutions, which in some instances articulate allegorical or metaphorical dimensions that mediate America's very real and intractable racial problems" (Diawara 1993: 240). This is applicable here not just to the central relationship between Riggs and Murtaugh but also to the wider narrative context. In the film the racial tension in American society can be nullified by the displacement of that prejudice onto a much more racially segregated society, South Africa. The disgust shown for this attitude by the American heroes of the film, one of whom is black, provides a reassurance that despite the high profile of racial tension in American society it really isn't anything like as bad as other places. So again the Hollywood action movie is fighting and destroying a spectre that haunts American society.

The place of the woman in the narrative is also typical. This time Riggs has a love interest, Rika, but her importance in the film is minimal. She functions to prove Riggs' heterosexuality before usefully dying, so that Riggs again avoids being in control of an adult sexuality. Her death also means that Riggs can seek vengeance, but is unnecessary as the film provides us with another reason for his vengeance, the death of another

woman, his wife. This seems a little like, dare I say it, overkill. As with Rianne, Rika is a very passive character, doing little other than decorate the screen and scream when required.

The 1992 production of *Lethal Weapon 3*, however, is drastically different. *Lethal Weapon 3* is a tongue-in-cheek version of the *Lethal Weapon* formula, perhaps acknowledging that this action form is becoming dated. Much of the action is played for laughs and there is no real organised social spectre to be confronted for the good of America. Here the enemy is Jack Travis (Stuart Wilson), a renegade ex-cop who is using his knowledge of police procedures to steal and sell banned weapons from police depots. Riggs and Murtaugh stumle on the case when they catch two of Travis' employees moonlighting as bank robbers, and immediately come into conflict with Sergeant Lorna Cole (Rene Russo), an internal affairs detective who is leading the investigation into the case. When Murtaugh shoots and kills a friend of his son, who is firing at them with a weapon bought from Travis, it becomes more personal and Lorna lets them in on the case. With the help of Leo Getz, now a real estate agent, they track down Travis and fight everyone that gets in their way, eventually killing Travis with one of his own weapons and burning his construction project to the ground.

The parodic aspect of *Lethal Weapon 3* allows it to do many things that the previous, much more serious, films could not. The emphasis on masculinity is undermined by Riggs' attempt to save Rianne from an armed attacker, early on in the film. This parallels his dramatic rescue of Rianne and Murtaugh in *Lethal Weapon,* where he is unproblematically cast as a hero. But here, Rianne turns out to be acting in a movie and Riggs' attempt to save her nearly gets her fired. This situation slickly implies that Riggs'

brand of heroism is unnecessary and out of date. The attack on masculinity is continued by the presence of Lorna Cole. She is a tough martial arts expert who can fight, shoot and wisecrack just as well as Riggs. She is given little excuse for her toughness, only a passing comment about being raised with four brothers and a joke about catholic school. Although tall, athletic and dressed most often in trousers or power suits she is not constructed as masculine, with her graceful movements, floral headbands and long hair. There is even a photo on her mantlepiece presumably of herself as a young girl wearing a frilly white dress. Despite becoming romantically involved with the hero she survives the film, saving her own life by wearing two bullet-proof vests to protect her from the armour-piercing bullets. She can look after herself, and Murtaugh's attempt to help her when she is fighting five men almost gets him punched for his trouble. All in all, Lorna is very different from the female leads of the first two movies, and the traditional concept of masculinity that we saw in Riggs and Murtaugh in the first two films is now shown to be obsolete.

Of course the parodic aspect of the film is a major enabler of this transgression of gender boundaries, but this is problematised in that *Lethal Weapon 3* is still an action movie. It could be argued that Lorna functions as comic relief, and her femininity is eventually re-established by Riggs saving her in the flames and asking her what she is trying to prove. But the film is ultimately an action movie rather than a comedy, and although its parodic aspects make Lorna's toughness less problematic, she is still an action heroine. This becomes particularly clear if we compare her to Dolores, the driver of the armoured van in the first chase scene who develops a crush on Murtaugh. Dolores is a real comedy character, flirting outrageously with Murtaugh and singing gospel whilst driving her van in pursuit of the robbers. By contrast to this, Lorna Cole's action can only seem more serious,

and as she is the heroine of the film we must believe her in actual danger in order to be concerned for her welfare. I will return to Lorna's portrayal in the film later on.

3.2: The Scores

The relative homogeneity of the soundtracks makes it possible to look at them all together. All three were written by Michael Kamen and contain the same thematic material and sound coding.

The most obvious musical coding in the *Lethal Weapon* films is that the male characters have their own instruments. Riggs' is a guitar, usually electric but acoustic at quieter moments of emotion, the softer sound gently backing the scene. Murtaugh's instrument is a saxophone. Immediately we can see the film scores drawing on a cultural web of musical associations as argued by Gorbman; the electric guitar carries connotations of masculinity through its prominence in heavy rock music, and so brings its cultural baggage to the characterisation of Riggs. The saxophone with its obvious association with jazz and blues is used simply because Murtaugh is black. Perhaps not the most subtle instrumentation, still it works in that the audience will easily associate each with their respective character. At this point the instruments come to signify the characters themselves, not just their masculinity or blackness, and so take on meanings at the filmic level. Other characters also have their own instruments, and I will discuss this further later on.

At this point I would like to detail the main themes and motifs of the *Lethal Weapon* scores. I am using the term "theme" to indicate a melody of

some length, which can develop musically. The term "motif" indicates a short and undeveloped melodic or rhythmic pattern.

There are two major themes in the *Lethal Weapon* films. "Riggs' theme" (fig. 1) is always played by a guitar - usually acoustic - and also acts as the major buddy theme. It appears at moments of emotion and also at moments of male bonding. Its association with Riggs makes it apparent that Riggs, in fact, is the main focus of the movies. If the theme appears at moments of bonding between Riggs and Murtaugh it is placing the emphasis upon Riggs in the interaction. An interesting example is when the two discuss Murtaugh's imminent retirement in the car, quite early on in *Lethal Weapon 3*. On the CD soundtrack this is played by the saxophone with the guitar accompanying and improvising around it, but in the film the guitar is more prominent. Obviously within the world of the film this is too strongly coded as Riggs theme to be played by Murtaugh's instrumentation. Murtaugh's own motif, however, is closely related to Riggs' theme, a jazzy, chromatic version of the first phrase. Riggs' theme is a descending minor scale starting on the fifth note of the scale and so sounding relatively consonant. It is played by a guitar with little or no orchestral backing, and as such its quietness and understatement makes it a perfect underscore for moments of tenderness.

figure 1: Riggs

The other major theme in the *Lethal Weapon* movies is the "evil" theme (fig. 2). We first hear this at the beginning of *Lethal Weapon*, as Amanda Hunsacker prepares to jump off her balcony, where it takes over from the inane Christmas song "Jingle Bell Rock". The theme is again based on the descending minor scale but it is the harmonic minor with the sharpened 7th, and the theme starts on the tonic note of the scale descending to the fifth, so including two semitone intervals. Each note is played with equal value, maximising the effect of the semitones. Riggs' theme minimises its semitone by placing the mediant on an unimportant beat moving to the supertonic on the main beat, so that the effect is of a minor third interval with the note on the previous main beat, the subdominant. The evil theme also rests on the same chord all the way through, the lack of harmonic progression meaning that it cannot resolve its tension. Moreover, it is played slowly on high strings. This is not in itself enough to sound tense but the combined effect of this instrumentation with the falling semitones and lack of harmonic progression gives the overwhelming impression of tension. This theme appears to signify that something is wrong whenever it appears throughout the trilogy. Sometimes it is underlining what we see in the visuals, letting us know that something bad is happening, as in its appearance as Riggs is preparing to attempt to disarm the huge bomb at the beginning of *Lethal Weapon 3*. Sometimes it appears to prepare us for the climax to a scene, letting us know that something bad is about to happen, as in the opening scene of *Lethal Weapon* where it prepares us for Amanda's jump. And sometimes it tells us that something is wrong that we do not yet know about, that something bad will happen later, such as its appearance when Pieter hears Riggs' name for the first time in *Lethal Weapon 2* - it later transpires that Pieter killed Riggs' wife. Without the musical intimation we would not

realise that this scene is significant, and so it raises expectations which will later be fulfilled.

The theme usually appears at moments of tension, but it does sometimes appear in action sequences. Here though it is normally transferred to the brass section, giving it a heavier sound instead of the light tense strings, or to the electric guitar if Riggs is the focus of the action; and/or the rhythm is altered to make it sound faster, syncopated, to fit the pace of the action scene.

figure 2: evil

The motif shown in figure 3 ("tension") also signifies tension, but appears several times during action sequences.

figure 3: tension motif

It is a jumpily rhythmic motif with the high note appearing on the second quaver and so off the beat, the 7th interval emphasising the lack of established key in the harmonic support, and the repeated intervallic pattern at odds with the rhythmic pattern. Its jumpy rhythm makes it easily available for pacy action music as well as tense moments.

The motif in figure 4 ("Riggs action") is again associated with Riggs as it always appears on the electric guitar. It is a funky repeated guitar riff and appears only occasionally, when Riggs is going into action, emphasising his light-hearted approach to the job.

figure 4: Riggs action

Figures 5 ("quick action") and 6 ("brass action") show the proper action motifs in these scores, always appearing during chase or fight sequences. Figure 5 is the action version of the tension motif in figure 3 - the two share exactly the same notes - and is very fast and syncopated. Its drive derives from the fast rush of the first three notes and because it moves upwards at speed. As with the "tension" motif it lacks an established key area, and its dissonance and syncopation means that it still sounds tense, but its speed and rising make it a moving tension, unlike the "evil" theme which is slow and falls.

figure 5: quick action

The "brass action" motif always appears in the brass and so has a very hefty sound. It is simply a dissonant chord repeated at less and less of a gap so that it feels as though it is speeding up and moving forward to a climax. The only exception to its brass orchestration is in *Lethal Weapon 3* when the

young police officer is shot and dies, which I will discuss in more detail in a moment.

figure 6: brass action

There is one final motif I wish to mention, which only appears in *Lethal Weapon 3*. This is the "comedy" motif (fig 7), and its appearance in the third film serves to emphasise its more comic nature than the first two in the series.

figure 7: comedy

The most important feature of these scores for my purposes is their treatment of the various acts of violence that take place throughout the films. The heavy, fast, syncopated music accompanying the action sequences drives the scene forward and generates excitement. The action motifs are accompanied by scurrying strings and plenty of percussion to create pace. By refusing to emphasise specific acts of violence, for example the deaths of un-named characters, it makes them unimportant and allows us not to judge the hero(ine)(es) harshly for their indiscriminate killing. The deaths or injuries that we are supposed to consider important will stand out from the musical background, either through a musical climax, the sudden stoppage of the musical movement (usually accompanied by a sound such as a

gunshot) or sometimes through the use of musical motifs with a special significance. In this way the music contributes heavily to our impression of the violence taking place on the screen.

One particular scene which contains these strategies is the subway fight scene late on in *Lethal Weapon 3*. In this scene Travis has kidnapped Captain Murphy and used him to get into the secure police depot where the confiscated ammunition is kept. Travis shoots at least one police guard and steals boxes of the ammunition. But Lorna realises that the computer records of the storehouse have been accessed, and the three head down to the subway system to catch the villains. On the way a young rookie cop demands to join them, and during the ensuing gun battle, he is shot and killed by Travis.

The music begins with light high strings (tension) as Lorna realises that the computer has been accessed from outside. As she tells Riggs and Murtaugh to prepare for action and they leave for the subway, picking up the rookie on the way, we hear the funky "Riggs action" motif, even though Lorna has initiated the action. The scene switches back to the gun-runners in the subway, and the music changes to deep, quick string runs with held high strings above, clear tension signifiers. As Travis intimates that he will kill Captain Murphy now he has outlived his usefulness we hear slow, brief clips of the "tense action" motif in low flute, accompanied by quick, disjointed string runs. The lack of movement and the motivic connection build the tension. We now cut back to our heroes entering the depot and finding the dead policeman, and a building high string note which then falls by a semitone, more classic tension-builders. The first breakage of the tension comes when Murtaugh bursts through the door into the subway accompanied by the "Riggs action" motif in the bass guitar. This becomes

tense held strings as they tell the subway workers to "split", and a low held note as they prepare for action.

At this point the gunfight begins, and the tension indicators give way to standard action scoring. The music bases itself on a motif associated with the villains (fig. 8).

figure 8: fight scene

This is in deep piano, and the music alternates between three-time and four-time each bar, the irregular rhythms animating the scene although the music is not particularly fast. The orchestra with heavy percussion play staccato chords in the three time bar at the end of each rendition of the motif. The brass adds strength to the bass piano line as the fight continues. There is a stinger, followed by repeated chords in high wind with brass backing, as Murphy electrocutes his captor. This is the first notable death, but we are not supposed to care about the victim, and the stinger helps render the shock value rather than an emotive effect. The music is briefly lost under the sound of gunfire, and then the "evil" theme makes an appearance in rhythmic high strings. We then cut to the rookie running to the shelter of a metal barrel, accompanied by the "brass action" motif and a climbing brass line underneath. Travis takes aim, and as the rookie is shot the music freezes to a held high brass note. This is the second notable death, but unlike the previous death it is emphasised by a frozen climax, making it stand out from the scene and instilling it with much more importance. As the rookie hits the floor (in slow-motion) the "brass action" motif plays again, but lower and

with more dissonance, and as Riggs kneels beside the dying boy it plays again but slowly, in low, dissonant minor strings. This shows how motifs can be used to call attention to certain aspects of violence. The music is infusing the "brass action" motif with signifiers of sadness, such as slowness, strings and minor dissonance, to emphasise the tragedy of the rookie's eagerness for action. The stoppage of rhythm throughout his death makes this occurrence stand out from the surrounding action in a way that the simple stinger on the previous death did not. The music then switches back to Riggs, playing his theme in electric guitar accompanied by minor low strings and a slow pulse. This lends weight to his sadness and bitterness at the unfair death, as he says "Happy birthday, kid". It also switches our identification back to Riggs, so that when he jumps back up and begins to shoot again we can forget about the dead boy, and the music returns to the alternating rhythmic pattern shown in figure 8 as the fight resumes. I would like also to note that when the fight is over and Riggs begins to chase the escaping villains, a faster and lighter beat takes over, mirroring the increase in speed and motion that the chase entails.

This, then, shows in practice many of the musical strategies I have outlined. From my discussion of this scene we can see the importance not only of the standard musical codes, but also of the thematic and motivic associations within the film score.

3.3: Music and the women

As was mentioned earlier, the place of the heroines in the narrative has changed dramatically throughout the series. The first *Lethal Weapon* film

charts the beginning of Riggs and Murtaugh's relationship, and so concentrates mainly on how their partnership develops. As such the association of thematic material and instruments with characters is restricted almost entirely to these two central protagonists. The villains do not have a motif or an instrument of their own, although when Riggs chases Joshua there is an interesting relationship between the "tension" motif (representing Joshua) and the "tense action" motif (representing Riggs) with the "tense action" motif winning out as Riggs closes on him. However, due to the emphasis on Riggs and Murtaugh in the film it is unsurprising that Rianne does not have an instrument or a motif either. Also her status as Murtaugh's daughter means that she is subordinated to his music. For example, the saxophone solo as she walks down the stairs in her new dress stresses Murtaugh's reaction to the realisation that Rianne is growing up.

Rika is in a different situation. As Tasker puts it, she functions to prove the hero's heterosexuality, and she fulfils her role as a heroine well by dying so that Riggs can avenge her along with his wife. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Rika is usually scored with Riggs' theme, placing the emphasis upon his feelings and emotional investment in any of their interactions. Curiously, Rika and Riggs' love scene is scored entirely with diegetic pop songs for musical accompaniment, perhaps further indicating her alienation from the musical world of this film. This is in contrast to the other characters in the movie, the musical characterisation being extended to include the villains (marimba for an obvious ethnic sound) and Leo Getz (muted trumpet for a standard comedy sound).

As I discussed earlier, Lorna Cole in *Lethal Weapon 3* is an entirely different type of character. Although she also fulfils the role of proving Riggs' heterosexuality, she is an active heroine, and even manages to survive despite sleeping with the hero. Although *Lethal Weapon 3* is noteworthy for

its parodic and tongue-in cheek approach, it is still an action movie rather than a comedy and still contains serious action sequences of which Lorna is very much a part. It is only to be expected that a character so different from the previous heroines will be scored differently.

In view of this it is disappointing that the music in *Lethal Weapon 3* continually undermines Lorna's importance. Leo still has his muted trumpet, Travis has a deep bass motif of his own, but Lorna - perhaps in a classic Freudian sense - does not have an instrument. Her more gentle moments with Riggs are scored by his theme, and in the guitar, his instrument. Although this also functions as a buddy theme, the fact that the guitar is Riggs' instrument negates any possible equality of importance. In fact the dog has more instrumental equality in its bonding with Riggs! Even action precipitated by Lorna gets the Riggs treatment: the "Riggs action" theme in electric guitar when Lorna first takes Riggs out to the warehouse, and again when they leave the police station for the storage depot, places the emphasis on Riggs even though Lorna initiates the action both times. This follows through in the action sequences. The possibility that Lorna's activity is a novelty, there to provide amusement in the film, becomes a certainty when the music is considered. Although involved to some extent in most of the action, she has two major action sequences, the first in the warehouse where she surprises everyone with her martial arts prowess, and the second in the garage where she beats up five opponents while Riggs looks on admiringly. In neither is Lorna accompanied by the action motifs. Although the music is fast paced, rhythmic and syncopated - all signifiers of action - she is denied the accompanying motifs, an omission which makes her contributions to the action lightweight and unimportant. In fact the scene in the warehouse is accompanied by exactly the same music heard earlier when Leo - an obvious comic character - was chasing Travis in the hockey stadium,

placing Lorna's fight on a par with Leo's comic chase. In the garage fight she is accompanied by the electric guitar, again placing the emphasis on Riggs. Tasker (1998: 83) also comments upon this scene, saying that Lorna is constructed as Riggs' performing dog! The music would seem to back up this reading, and her lack of autonomy as a character.

So Lorna is constantly undercut by the music, destroying her potential as a heroine equal to the men. Her lack of equality with the male heroes is apparent in the score, and further underlined in that she does not appear on the cover of the video or - pertinently - the soundtrack CD. My analysis of the score, and in particular the way it treats Lorna, shows that film music does work ideologically by sidelining the female character, and I hope to build upon this in my analyses to follow. I will try to show how the scores work to position their violent women, and how this fits in with wider filmic and social stereotypes about gender roles.

CHAPTER 4: The Story So Far

It would appear, then, that music can have a large effect on how we understand and react to a film, and can be employed as an effective tool in portraying transgressive, violent female characters. Building on the two previous chapters, I would now like to draw some general conclusions which will act as the basis for my analyses to follow.

4.1: Music and Violence

At the risk of simplifying an extremely complex area where there are no hard-and-fast rules, I would like to outline some standard musical portrayals of violence seen in contemporary Hollywood film. In this I am not making universalistic claims; the musical codes outlined here will change according to time and place, and many of the best film scores get their effect by doing the unexpected, which will in turn create new conventions. But my analyses are based on the common occurrence of the features outlined below. The most major distinction is whether or not the music places emphasis on the violent acts.

4.1.1: Emphasising

When music emphasises the violence it tends to do so in one of three ways:

1) **By building to a climax at the act and then fading away.** This helps render the force of the action, which as Chion (1994) tells us is one of the major functions of sound in film. This is partly because it extends the act itself (which is usually very short), making it seem longer and thereby giving

it time to register. It also surrounds it with a build-up and a tail-off, making it stand out from whatever else is happening. This emphasis is very often a sign that the violence is wrong or unacceptable, and is often combined with strategies to heighten tension, such as low ominous rumblings and/or high tense strings, plenty of dissonance and very little movement.

2) **Stinger.** Here the music gives us no warning of coming violence, but will play a "stinger" on the act itself, emphasising its suddenness. This is used to shock and scare the audience, and is a staple strategy of the horror genre.

3) **Comic scoring.** This most often takes the form of "mickey-mousing" the action, which makes it seem cartoon-ish rather than real. There are many examples in *Lethal Weapon 3*, including Rigg's aborted rescue of Rianne, which was mentioned earlier. In *Lethal Weapon 3* the standard comedy sounds are pizzicato strings, muted trumpet (related to Leo Getz) or very often a short saxophone wail - because Murtaugh has so often been the butt of the joke.

4.1.2: Not emphasising

Conversely, when the non-diegetic music does not place emphasis on the violence, its impact is usually lessened. This happens in many different types of scoring:

1) **Action scoring.** Action scenes rarely emphasise the violence which they contain, my analysis in the previous chapter detailing a prime example. Major features of action scoring are quick tempos, strong rhythms which can be irregular to heighten tension, short, fast motifs and punchy percussion. This pacy music generates excitement and movement, and the lack of emphasis on the actual violent acts lessens their impact and includes them in

an overall scheme of movement and action. In this way we can disavow the consequences of the often extreme violence that we see.

2) **Glorified violence.** Glorified violence is also rarely emphasised. The standard musical features here are strong, tonal, usually climbing themes in major keys, brass instrumentation with full orchestral accompaniment. Violence is contextualised in the story as part of an overall victory and justice, and often accompanies battle scenes. The scene from *The Untouchables* where our heroes ride to fight the gangster convoy at the border is a good example. In this way the music stresses the wider picture - justice and goodness triumphing - over the specifics of how they triumph.

3) **Tragic violence.** The other side to glorification is to play up the tragedy inherent in violence by accompanying it with slow, minor themes and perhaps dissonance, often in strings or solo instrumentation. Again the music is concentrating on the wider implications of the violence rather than its specifics. This strategy is evident during the battle of Agincourt in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*, or in Wallace's first battle scene in *Braveheart*. In the former the music is emphasising the general misery of war, while in the latter it places the scene within the on-going narrative. Wallace is fighting the English in revenge for the murder of his wife, and the music is expressing the tragedy of her death, rather than the excitement or justification of the battle. So in both these examples music is adding an extra dimension to what is happening on screen.

4) **Aestheticised violence.** This is Leitch's fifth strategy for disavowal, but I would argue that it often functions to make us uncomfortably aware of our more usual acceptance of violence on screen. *Apocalypse Now* and *A Clockwork Orange* are perhaps the most obvious examples, where the glorious music emphasises the balletic beauty of the violence rather than its impact. It is interesting that in these two famous

examples, the effect comes from source music which can be recognised extra-diegetically. This is perhaps a testament to the difficulty of aestheticising violence, as recognisable music probably helps create the required distance in order for us to assess what we see in aesthetic terms, rather than identifying with it.

5) **Anempathetic music.** As discussed in Chapter 2, this strategy is most common with diegetic music. When the music continues regardless of what is happening on the screen, it can express a total indifference. In most cases (for example, *Reservoir Dogs, Miller's Crossing, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*) this serves to make the violence even more disturbing.

6) **Silence.** Another less common strategy is a complete lack of underscore for violent acts. We are so used to the music indicating our expected reaction for us that no underscore at all can be very disturbing. An example of this is Clay's sudden and unaccompanied attack on Bridget at the beginning of *The Last Seduction*, which leaves us unsure how to react.

4.1.3: Other levels

In this way the very same action can be completely altered in impact and effect depending on its accompanying music. But there are also other levels to the creation of meaning by a musical score.

1) **The combination of musical sounds.** High held strings are not necessarily tense by themselves, but high held strings accompanied by low rumbles becomes more strongly coded as tense, and the addition of dissonance again reinforces the tension. In this way the musical sounds rely on each other to reinforce the effect.

2) **Themes and motifs.** These standard musical codes can be built upon and complicated by using themes, motifs or sounds that have taken on importance within the film, and so can contextualise an act of violence by

calling to mind other situations or characters. The appearance of the action motif when the rookie cop dies in *Lethal Weapon 3* is one example of this, as are the simple associations of instrument with character.

3) **The effect of the image.** The visuals are usually considered primary, and so sound is perceived to work on the image, but the image also works back on the sound. Music does not totally control the way we see an image. A beautiful pastoral scene accompanied by tense high strings and low dissonant rumbles will confuse us, unless the camera pans to reveal a dead body or some other reason for the music. While the music would gear us for this expectation, it will sound wrong if the expectation is not ultimately fulfilled. This demonstrates the strength of our understanding of musical codes, but also shows that the image must "fit" in order for the effect to be complete.

4.2: Types of Violence

The classification of violence does not solely depend on how it is presented, musically or otherwise. The violent act itself is strongly coded through several narrative factors.

1) **Power.** Power is vital to the audience's perception of violence. Violence from a weak position is more acceptable because the perpetrator has little recourse to other strategies. In this way, violence in defence against a powerful attacker is completely acceptable, whereas violence from a position of power is unacceptable. A common narrative strategy, then, is to place our hero or heroine in a weak position from which they must fight their way out. As discussed in chapter 1, this can actually be easier for a female character because powerlessness is the more usual state for a woman.

2) **Premeditation.** An unpremeditated act of violence is more acceptable than a planned one, because the planning implies a cold-blooded attitude. In this way Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* is vilified for her planned attack on the man who will inadvertently start a world war, despite her justifiable reasons. By contrast when Louise kills a would-be rapist in *Thelma and Louise*, even though the danger is past, the killing is unpremeditated and so more excusable than Sarah's action.

3) **The weapon and resulting damage.** While the way the violent act is presented can either emphasise or gloss over its effect, the weapon and our knowledge of the damage it would cause are still very important. Much of this centres around bodily penetration. Fist-fights are considered harmless because they involve attacking a body with another body - the same substance - and no penetration of the skin. Another important point here is that through the media's own unrealistic portrayal of fist-fights, where the fight can be extremely long without the opponents showing much damage at all, the belief that they cause little harm is reinforced. Fights with implements are less acceptable because of the greater potential for damage with, for example, an iron bar or a rock, than with simple fists. Knives and guns are the most serious weapons because of the relative certainty of serious damage, and because both puncture and penetrate the body. In this way both could be interpreted as a phallic symbol, and the violence a metaphor for rape (Clover, 1992).

But guns and knives are surrounded by very different social and filmic discourses. In Hollywood guns are a sign of power, "partly drawing from an American context in which the freedom to bear arms is constructed as a right of the citizen" (Tasker, 1993: 26). In this way they have positive implications as well as negative. Lenz (1993) discusses at length how gun manufacturers play on the concept of personal safety and self-defence in

order to increase sales. Women in particular are targeted because of their perceived weakness in a threatening society. Owning a gun, then, can be constructed as only sensible. Knives, however, come with no such positive implications. Creed's psychoanalytic argument equates knives with the castrating vagina dentata, giving them a far more threatening demeanour than guns (1993: 107). Clover, too, declares that while guns and knives are both phallic symbols, "all phallic symbols are not equal" (1992: 32). She argues that knives are worse because they are extensions of the body. This indicates another, very important, area to the classification of violence - the distance between victim and perpetrator.

4) **Distance.** This factor adds a further dimension to the differentiation between guns and knives. Guns are relatively antiseptic because the perpetrator can maintain a distance from the victim, and because the bodily penetration is mediated by the gun, the bullet and the amount of space between the two. There is also very little physical action on the part of the shooter. Knives are far harder to disavow or excuse because they involve bodily penetration from close up, relatively unmediated (just a knife) and with a great deal of physical action from the perpetrator. Because of this there is a relative closeness, even intimacy, between the attacker and the victim. Another point is that most people are familiar with the pain of a knife wound, having cut ourselves at one time or another, whereas relatively few people ever experience a gunshot wound. Again this increases the horror of knives because we know how it feels. This is exacerbated by the stronger caution used in showing knives than guns in the media, because knife violence is more easily imitated (Burnet, 1971: 17-18). Our everyday contact with knives makes them harder to disavow.

The differentiation between guns and knives is very important for my analyses. The action heroines almost entirely restrict themselves to guns. By

contrast the fatal femmes use invasive killing implements, often whatever is handy. This is a salient point because it contrasts to the 1940s *femmes fatales*, who generally restricted themselves to guns, and often got their male dupes to do their killing for them. Part of the transition to the new ultra-violent fatal femme, then, is their move towards a wider range of weapons, many of which are penetrative. This lack of distance, the penetration of the body, and the fatal femme's ability to see all sorts of everyday things in terms of their violent potential, demonstrates a cold-blooded and horrific attitude that we can hate her for. In this way Hollywood both reinforces and builds upon the distinction between weapons, because in using guns for heroes and knives for horrific effect they strengthen these associations for their audiences.

4.3: Gender stereotyping

As discussed in chapter 1, women need more complex strategies of disavowal for their violence than do men. This is because film representations of women are restricted, meaning that their violence needs to be fitted in to a recognisable stereotype. Tasker argues that:

> "the female action hero offers a fantasy image of (proletarian) physical strength showcased within narratives that repeatedly seek to explain her (and to explain her away). Female action heroes are constructed in narrative terms as macho/masculine, as mothers or as Others: sometimes even as all three at different points within the narrative." (1998: 69)

These three positions for violent women are prominent in my analyses, and although Tasker is specifically referring to action heroines, I will use these categories also in relation to the fatal femmes. I will also briefly look at two other recognisable female stereotypes: the Jezebel, and the (rape) victim.

4.3.1: Motherhood

I have already discussed how motherhood is seen to be a recuperative strategy for a transgressive female character, although the power of this recuperation is questionable. Many theorists argue that the transgressive woman is remembered for her strength, rather than her eventual containment. Kuhn, for example, argues that Classic Hollywood does try to recuperate woman by placing her in a normative female role, but that sometimes the films tensions are not properly closed (1982: 34). Stacey (1994) and Thumim (1992) both back this up with empirical evidence, finding that the female spectators they study admire the stronger female characters and that their containment is relatively unimportant. Even so, the strategy is vital because it allows the audience to read the film in accordance with dominant ideologies surrounding women. In the films that I study, motherhood often serves the double function of recuperating the woman and excusing her violence. Doherty (1996) points out that Ripley's motherhood in *Aliens* makes her violence culturally permissible, but also that the *Alien* trilogy is ambivalent towards its women in order to survive in Hollywood (196). For example, Ripley is killed off at the end of *Alien 3*. Since her article was written, however, *Alien 4* has managed to resurrect Ripley - a fascinating example of her refusal to be contained! However, the *Alien* series is now a cult, putting *Alien 4* on a different keel to *Aliens*, which was a major action movie and evidences various strategies for dealing with its violent heroine.

Making Ripley a mother was one of these strategies. This builds on a long- standing tradition whereby "[c]hildren are an obsession in American movies - sacrifice of and for children, the use of children as justification for all manner of sacrifice" (Haskell, 1987: 168). This is not solely a Hollywood phenomenon; Fischer (1989: 73) discusses Bergman's *Persona* which portrays

female derangement as tied to the refusal of motherhood, an unnatural position for a woman. So it is important to note that this myth of motherhood's supremacy is to be found in a wider cultural context.

Kaplan (1992) discusses the changing discourses surrounding motherhood in Western society this century. She argues that motherhood is now regarded as a woman's ultimate fulfilment, a comparatively new discourse dating from earlier this century. In the mid 1980s "films began to image satisfaction in mothering, and the choice of mothering over career..." (194). Further, Kaplan argues that films cannot produce representations of women that combine mothering, sex and career in the same character. "'Sex, Work and Motherhood' is obviously too threatening a combination on a series of levels" (183).

This sanctification of motherhood over career, then, demonstrates one of the main stereotypes of women in film. I will be examining how motherhood functions in the films I analyse, and how the music contributes to its portrayal.

4.3.2: Masculinity

The construction of active women as "masculine" is more problematic. Tasker's masculinised heroine is often taking over a role from an identified male figure, such as a father, and in this way she is constructed by men and the threat is lessened. But the idea that "she's really a man" often comes simply from the woman's active or violent manner, behaviours which are perceived to be masculine. As discussed in Chapter 1, this becomes a vicious circle in which women can never be seen as active or violent. In his discussion of action heroines Jeffrey Brown addresses this critical attitude where "..the image of heroines wielding guns and muscles can be conflated within the binary gender codes of the action cinema to

render these women as symbolically male" (1996: 53). Brown himself does not believe that this is the case, seeing a positive situation where:

"The development of the hardbody, hardware, hard-as-nails heroine who can take it, and give it, with the biggest and baddest men of the action cinema indicates a growing acceptance of nontraditional roles for women and an awareness of the arbitrariness of gender traits." (52)

While I am inclined to agree with Brown's belief that active women do not have to be seen as male, I think there are often strong attempts to code her as such for ideological purposes, allowing activity to remain connected to masculinity even if the active character is biologically female. So in my analyses I will be looking at whether or not there is a *conscious effort* to construct the female lead as masculine.

4.3.3: Other

Tasker's third given position for an active woman is that of "Other", which she uses within an action film context to describe the over-sexual, comic-book heroine such as Pamela Anderson in *Barb Wire*. These characters are basically male fantasy figures. In the films under analysis here the comic book heroine does not appear, so I will appropriate the term "Other" instead to refer to the lesbian. By making a woman a lesbian, the film turns her into a recognisable female stereotype who is already transgressive of dominant norms through her sexuality. In this way her violence is easily explainable as simply a by-product of her "deviant" sexuality.

It is interesting that both the action hero and the action heroine are subject to homosexual constructions, for different reasons. The hero evinces homosexuality because of the objectification of his body and the use of his physicality for spectacle. This role of the body as object of the cinematic gaze is the traditional female position. Dyer (1982) argues that in order to countermand this, images of men tend to place them in an active role so that

the passivity inherent in being the object of the gaze is denied. The homosexual implications also arise from the unadulterated machismo of these movies, which places the emphasis on male relationships and male closeness, almost entirely obliterating female relationships. In this context, a female foil is often necessary to prove the hero's heterosexual desire, diffusing the threat of homosexuality.

The action heroine, on the other hand, faces the spectre of lesbianism because she is "masculinised". She is hard, not soft, and can act for herself. She faces the accusation of lesbianism thereby, because the restricted stereotypes in which female characters are placed in Hollywood movies do not allow for a strong woman who is not explained in some way. If she cannot be clearly fitted into another stereotypical role, she can be interpreted as lesbian by default. As Tasker explains (1998: 152), the signifiers of female strength and of lesbianism are not clearly differentiated. The equation of the violent woman with lesbianism can also be seen clearly in the "fatal femme" movies and erotic thriller genre. Here the fatal femmes' transgression of 'normal' sexuality is bound up with their criminality, adding to the threat they present to patriarchal society. This is explicit in *Basic Instinct*, and implicit in films like *Single White Female* or *Black Widow* where the plot revolves around two women.

Another "Other" type category is the Jezebel, the heartless, manipulative woman who uses her sexuality to control helpless men. But it is vital to note that although she is a recognisable stereotype, there is no clear explanation for her behaviour. In this she moves a step away from the previous three categories, fulfilling a stereotypical - perhaps misogynist - role which is female, but not "feminine". The bitch goddesses fit into this category, following on from the femme fatale of early noir; but the new ultra-

violence of the bitch goddesses makes the lack of an explanation for their behaviour all the more noticeable.

4.3.4: Victim

A final standard stereotype that I will discuss is that of the woman as victim. This is extremely common, but is relevant here because in giving a heroine the status of victim, the film is allowing her violence to be seen in a positive light. This is important for the good women of the Mad, Bad Women films, but in particular for my analysis of *Thelma and Louise*.

4.4: Musical gender stereotypes

These factors, then, will be addressed in my analyses to follow. My aim is to map these portrayals of women through the use of the music, and to prove thereby that music has a strong ideological capability in cinematic representation. Music's ideological capacity both within and without film is often ignored. Susan McClary's discussion of music's gendered nature is one of the few studies that attributes it such a function (1991). She outlines standard musical features that are taken to represent masculinity and femininity: masculine music is tonal, major and strong, where as feminine music is dissonant, chromatic, minor and weak. She also notes a strong correlation between the erotic and femininity in classical music, stating that "the erotic continues so often to be framed as a manifestation of feminine evil while masculine high culture is regarded as transcendent" (68). Drawing on Elaine Showalter's discussion of discourses surrounding madness (1987) she discusses how madness came to be regarded in the nineteenth century as peculiarly female, often a sign of excessive female

sexuality (81). This can be seen in several of the fatal femme movies that I discuss, where the violent, transgressive woman is usually extremely sexual. In her discussion of opera heroines, McClary discusses how these mad women basically represent male fantasies of transgression, which are nothing to do with real women but are often taken to reveal the essence of womanhood. The connection with 1980s backlash cinema is all too obvious. But McClary raises a fascinating question about the power and appeal of these characters:

> "But I also want to consider what may at first appear to be a strange co-incidence: namely, that the excessive ornamentation and chromaticism that mark the madwoman's deviance have long been privileged components in Western music - the components that appear most successfully to escape formal and diatonic conventions. When these same strategies appear in instrumental music they are regarded as indications not of psychopathology but of genius." (82)

In this way the mad woman is attractive and memorable in the music; she is simultaneously powerful and victimised. Again parallels can be drawn with the films I am studying. Despite efforts to contain her, the violent woman is appealing in her strength, and for this she is remembered. But for my purposes recuperation strategies are not important according to how effective they are, but rather because of the need for their existence in the first place. The way in which films try to contain or excuse their female characters' violence speaks volumes about social attitudes towards both women and violence. My demonstration of how the music contributes to these strategies will prove its ideological function, and its importance in the way that a film text generates meaning.

SECTION 2: ANALYSES

CHAPTER 5: Action Heroines

5.1: Introduction

There is a fascinating dichotomy in 1980s action cinema, which is that despite the emphasis on the macho hero described earlier, the 80s also witnessed the rise of the action heroine. The first and most famous of the modern action heroines is Sigourney Weaver's Ripley, in the *Alien* trilogy. The first *Alien* movie was released in 1979, but is more of a horror than an action movie, so it was not until 1986 with the big-budget sequel, *Aliens*, that Ripley became an action heroine. Tasker details how the iconography surrounding Ripley both within and without the film situates her firmly within the action genre. For example, the big guns and the muscle shirt are clear signifiers of an action hero. In appropriating this iconography Ripley has been seen as transgressing filmic gender boundaries (see Brown, 1996: Tasker, 1993). This appropriation of iconography is even more explicit in *Terminator 2*, with Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor taking on not only the clothes and firepower of the action hero, but also the literal hard body. Again Hamilton was appearing in a sequel to her original role in the 1984 production of *The Terminator*, both directed by the man who also directed *Aliens*, James Cameron. Much of the publicity, and indeed the criticism, of the film concentrated on Hamilton's heavy training regime, and her unusually muscular body is showcased in the film text. This left her even more open than Ripley to the standard charge of being figuratively male.

The third action heroine that I will discuss - Charly Baltimore from the 1996 film *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, can also be seen to transgress the gender boundaries of Hollywood film. My interest in all three movies, then, lies in their attempts to reduce the impact of these transgressions, presenting us with an unusual heroine, but simultaneously undermining her.

5.2: *ALIENS*: "Get away from her, you Bitch!"

I am beginning with a discussion of *Aliens* for two reasons: firstly because it was the first of the real action heroine movies; and secondly because it is perhaps the most problematic of the films that I discuss in terms of its gender coding. *Aliens* was the blockbuster sequel to Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi/horror film *Alien*, and any discussion of this first film in the series must comment on the concept of femininity and the metaphors of rape and childbirth that inform the film's imagery. Barbara Creed's 1993 discussion, for example, states that the film's horror lies in its invocation of the abject archaic mother, through the visual representations of the ship - the Nostromo - and the implicit presence of an alien mother laying all the eggs from which the first stage aliens hatch. One of these creatures orally rapes Kane, a male member of Ripley's crew, and implants an embryo into his stomach. Kane seems to recover, but then the impossibly phallic-looking alien bursts out of his stomach, killing him in the process. Kane, in fact, is the only member of the crew of the Nostromo to go through this process, and so Taubin (1993) argues that the possibility of a man being raped and giving birth, along with the presence of a female hero, destabilises sexual and gender differences.

In the 1986 sequel, *Aliens* (dir. James Cameron, m. James Horner), Ripley, the only survivor of the Nostromo, is found drifting in her shuttle 57 years after the previous events took place. By this time the planet where her crew found the alien spaceship has been colonised, and it is not until contact is lost with the colonists that the Company take Ripley's story of vicious aliens seriously. Their representative, Burke, prevails upon her to return with a squad of marines to try and discover what has happened. The party arrive to find all the colonists dead except for one little girl, Newt, and almost the entire squad of marines is wiped out in the first confrontation with the aliens. Ripley commandeers their vehicle and drives to the rescue, saving Hicks (Michael Biehn), Vasquez (Jeannette Goldstein), and Hudson, the only survivors of the squad besides their incompetent lieutenant and the android, Bishop. Ripley assumes command and the beleaguered humans battle it out against the aliens, numbers steadily diminishing, until Bishop can commandeer an escape ship. Newt is captured by the aliens and Ripley rescues her, destroying the entire nest in the process and incurring the wrath of the queen alien. Ripley, Newt and the badly injured Hicks escape with Bishop on the ship, but the alien queen has hitched a ride and once again Ripley is left to fight it out with the alien, blowing it out of the airlock.

Taubin (1993) discusses the way in which *Alien* destabilises sexual and gender difference, with men and women alike considered as host bodies, able to give birth and to be raped. But *Aliens*, the big budget action sequel, *reinscribes* these differences. The only 'birth' sequence features a woman; we see the queen in the act of laying her eggs; the first stage aliens only attack Ripley and Newt, not the men in the party; and most important of all, Ripley and the alien queen finally confront each other as a good mother against a bad mother, with the child Newt as a prize.

There are many aspects of *Aliens* which demonstrate an attempt to reconstruct Ripley as a 'normal' woman with acceptable female values. For example, she has a nominal love interest in Hicks, although their obvious attraction is never consummated (except perhaps in the suggestive sequence where Ripley learns to handle Hick's big gun). Perhaps action heroines, like action heroes, cannot be in control of an adult sexuality. Or perhaps this is an example of Kaplan's argument that sex, work and motherhood cannot be combined in the same female character. For Ripley is very definitely constructed as a mother figure for Newt and is certainly paralleled with the Alien queen, most noticeably in the nest where they face off, hiding their children behind them.

But I would like to begin my discussion of *Aliens* by looking at the other female characters in the film. There are three female marines in the squad; the pilot, the medical officer, and the incredibly butch soldier Vasquez. Vasquez in particular is constructed as unquestionably masculine. She begins exercising her impressive musculature the moment she wakes up from hypersleep, she outcracks her fellow squaddies, she is "too bad" and "kicks ass", and fights right to the bitter end, taking as many of the aliens as possible with her in her hero's death. In this way Vasquez seems to function as a direct contrast to Ripley, who thereby has her femininity reinforced against Vasquez's macho alternative. Berenstein (1996) argues that men in horror films are feminised through their helplessness in the face of the threat, and so the female characters become even more helpless in order to give the men extra space to remain masculine. This, she posits, is the reason for the excessive female screaming in horror movies. *Aliens* shifts the boundaries of gender characterisation the opposite way, giving the tough and active Ripley extra space to be feminine. The medical officer also serves this function, again joining in with the masculine camaraderie of the squaddies and

showing a total lack of interest in Newt as anything other than a medical problem. By contrast Ripley takes a maternal interest in Newt, protecting her from the lieutenant's interrogation and providing sustenance in the form of hot chocolate.

But while we can see the female characters functioning in this way to help reinscribe gender boundaries, they are also problematising these boundaries by their very presence. Vasquez is the only woman who is consciously constructed as excessively masculine, and even here we can see some difficulties. Vasquez's most famous scene in critical terms is that where she is asked by a male colleague if she has ever been mistaken for a man, and she replies "No. Have you?" This is seen to construct her as more masculine than her male colleague. But at the same time, it works to emphasise that she is *not* a man. She may be macho, but we still recognise her as a woman who can perform just as well as a man. The other female marines along with Ripley and Newt are also tough, self-possessed women just as capable as the men of keeping their head in a crisis. Newt in fact lives for many weeks as the sole survivor of the colony, outwitting the aliens. Vasquez may die, but she fights to the end and never loses her head, unlike her male counterpart Hudson who relapses into hysterics at every opportunity. The pilot is killed by her alien passenger, not screaming and incapacitated by fear, but reaching for her pistol. In short, the women are as able as their male counterparts, and not prone to the hysterics so often demonstrated by the typical damsel in distress. Ripley herself not only avoids panic but takes control, the only person in the squad who is capable of beating the aliens, saving Hicks and Newt along the way. While Vasquez seems to epitomise the idea of an active woman being symbolically male, her very excessiveness allows the other women in the film to exist outside of that stereotype.

In this way *Aliens* stands out simply for its number of capable female characters, but in the end it bows to convention for its main character, Ripley. As the heroine she has to retain a wide audience sympathy, and so is provided with qualifiers so that she can fit in with dominant constructs of femininity. While Vasquez and the medical officer work to make her feminine by comparison, annulling the "macho" aspects of her character, Newt and Hicks give her acceptable heterosexual female interests, romance and motherhood. Hicks functions to undermine the implications of lesbianism - or "Otherness" - and Newt functions to make her a mother, committing violent acts in order to save her child.

The implications of homosexuality in the action genre were discussed in chapter 4. Although action hero(in)es rarely control a sexual relationship, they often have a nominal love interest in order to prove their heterosexuality. Here Hicks serves this function for Ripley. Interestingly, Hicks himself is set apart from the other marines. He does not join in with the early scene of male bonding at the dinner table; he is sexually interested in Ripley but respects her all along, listening to her report of her encounter with the alien when the rest of the marine corps are unimpressed. He is also kind to Newt, the first to recognise that the unknown threat they have encountered is in fact a little girl and stopping the fire, and later lifting her up to see the blueprints so that she can participate; and most noticeable of all he is the first to endorse Ripley's control of the situation, echoing her exact words as he authorises action against the alien, recognising her superior judgement. Hicks, despite his macho position, is a new man. But he also emerges as the strongest man among the survivors, next to the incompetent Gorman and the hysterical Hudson, and is the only one to survive. Ripley and Newt, the least masculine of the women in the film, are the only women to survive. There are two important qualifiers that must be added to this

statement. Firstly, Ripley is still much tougher than the average film heroine, and as such she does not conform to the patriarchal representation of the passive woman. Secondly, the other female characters - Vasquez in particular - are not necessarily unsympathetic, but their deaths do not cause the same consternation as Ripley's would, for she is the heroine of the film. It does not seem, then, that today's film audience finds the concept of the tough woman unacceptable, otherwise Ripley would not be popular whatever the qualifiers were. But the important point here is that as the heroine of the movie, it was deemed necessary to 'feminise' Ripley to confirm this popularity and believability.

This in itself is a problematic feminist point, however, as Ripley's very believability, the realistic nature of her character, perhaps makes her a better character in feminist terms. Were Vasquez the heroine, for example, the film would imply that only an excessively macho or "male-identified" woman could have the strength to survive against the odds. Quoting from *Time* magazine, Clover raises the argument that Ripley's maternal impulses actually give her more resonance as a character than in her previous film appearance, in *Alien*. From this perspective Ripley could be seen as the normal woman's champion.

The problem, then, is not that the character is qualified by being made maternal and caring, but that her violent activity specifically becomes qualified by these feminine traits. In order to deal with her transgression of gender roles, the film locks her back into this stereotypical feminine role, contextualising her violence by making her fight for her child. In this way Newt functions to place Ripley firmly into the realm of acceptably violent female characters - as a protective mother. As Kaplan shows, this is a standard representation for women - the mother who will go through any hardship in order to save her child. In the words of Constance Penley:

"[w]hat we get finally is a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers, and they will *always* be women" (1991: 73). Bearing this conservatism in mind, it will be interesting to see whether the score undermines Ripley's activity in the same way as Lorna Cole was undermined in *Lethal Weapon 3*.

The music

The most noticeable thing about the score to *Aliens* is its spooky, tense feel when compared with the *Lethal Weapon* scores. There is no lighter-hearted funkiness, no joke music, precious little softer intimate music. The whole score is packed with dissonance, ambient synthesiser effects and difficult cross-rhythms. This gives the film an entirely different feel to that created by the scores in the *Lethal Weapon* series; the tension and pessimism is unrelentless.

The musical codes for action movies were laid out in chapters 3 and 4. From this we can tell that the standard tension sounds are long dissonant notes, stasis, jumpy rhythms and semitone intervals. By contrast action sequences have a faster tempo, are more rhythmically orientated, employ plenty of brass and percussion, and have a fuller orchestral texture.

In *Aliens* the most important tension motif is that shown in fig. 1.

figure 1: tension motif

It is a simple three-note motif comprised of a long note followed by a semitone rise, and then a tone fall, making the third pitch a semitone below the first. There is therefore no obvious key base, leaving the notes

suspended in a dissonant relationship. This motif appears many times throughout the film, mainly at moments of tense preparation such as when the marines are searching the complex or tracking the colonists. It is almost always played by strings with only an echoey wind sound for accompaniment. It does appear twice as part of an action sequence, once briefly as Ripley drives away from her rescue of the marines, and several times loudly as they escape through the air ducts when the aliens attack in force for the second time. On both occasions the motif is played by deep, heavy brass and accompanied by fast percussion, creating an action sound. While its sound can be altered in this way, the motif will still evoke its tense associations in its later appearances, one notable example being the aforementioned scene of escaping through the air ducts. This is an action scene, but also incredibly tense.

The main action motifs are detailed in fig. 2. "Action A" and "action B" are fast, repetitive motifs with a strong note base and accompanied by plenty of percussion, notably a snare.

figure 2: Action A   Action B

It is usual for action sequences to be scored with strongly rhythmic music which generates excitement and keeps the scene moving. Although syncopation and irregular rhythms are standard features of action music, they support rather than undermine the basic emphasis on rhythm, needing a strong beat so that the music can deviate without threatening its clarity. But in this film there is a noticeable lack of rhythmic clarity, even the continual appearance of cross-rhythms. An obvious example is a motif taken

from the *Alien* score, which is employed several times in this film but with the two instruments oscillating in different patterns (fig. 3).

figure 3: unclear rhythms
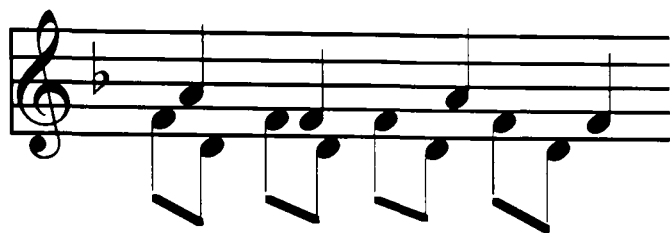
While this lack of clarity is a notable feature of many of the motifs in this score, the action sequences are usually accompanied by steady percussion and so have a strong sense of rhythm. This enables the action motifs to deviate without destroying the overall pulse. But they are oddly static in themselves. The action motifs in *Lethal Weapon* contained limited movement; the "tense action" motif moved upwards although eventually returning to its original note, and the "brass action" motif continually reduced the space between its notes, so creating the impression of movement. But here, the action motifs remain mainly on one note, with only a fall of one tone which immediately returns to the base note. So although the action music has a fast, clear beat, the motifs themselves sound static, perhaps echoing the fact that there is nowhere for the screen characters to go.

The key to Ripley's representation is the snare drum. The snare accompanies the marines from the moment they begin to prepare their weapons for the landing, Vasquez and Drake enjoying the feel of the guns in a slow, almost balletic, sequence. Most of the preparation for the landing is accompanied by this military snare, an endorsement of the military power in the movie. The search sequences, however, are uniformly accompanied by synthesised atmospheric effects - the sound of the wind, or echoey plucks. The first attack by the aliens is accompanied by a fast beat and deep tense motif, but does not break into a full action sound until Ripley drives to the

rescue. At this point a fast snare rhythm, pulsing fast strings and plenty of percussion all enter to support "action B" and its dissonant crotchet extensions. The movement continues all through Ripley's rescue, rushing strings and dissonance making it sound tense. This key scene in the movie, then, demonstrates that the film will be based entirely around Ripley, the only successful executor of action. The marines were fighting but it was not until Ripley took an active part that the music introduced its action element. Unlike the score to *Lethal Weapon*, this score is endorsing Ripley as the action heroine, the protagonist and the one who counts.

The other side to this, however, is that the score is so very dark and pessimistic. Ripley may be central, but she never gets to joke with her violence in the way that Riggs does. The music is never light-hearted about her action, portraying her as a desperate woman fighting for her life and her child, and not enjoying the fight as perhaps Vasquez does. The only musical moments which alter from this tense, murky, desperate music are when Ripley, Newt, Bishop and Hicks fly off into the night sky having blown up the installation, and when Ripley puts Newt to bed at the very end of the film. Each time the music is an indicator that they believe the fight is over and the day won. Each cue is peaceful, slow and rhythmically uncomplicated, but also sound slightly strained, denying any full resolution of the tension that the movie has created. The film ends as it began with Ripley in suspended animation, albeit accompanied by Newt, and the end credit music is the same as the opening credits, making the film seem cyclical. The credit music is very unusual for an action movie, being very slow and quiet, spare in texture and very dissonant (fig. 4). This film does not end with a flourish, affirming the ultimate restoration of harmony. Rather it remains dissonant, exchanging the fast, tense desperation of the movie for a suspended uneasiness.

figure 4: credits theme

McClary (1991) indicates that chromaticism and weakness are feminine musical sounds, so perhaps this musical ending is emphasising Ripley's femininity, and that patriarchy has not taken control. Moreover, like Ripley in her frozen sleep, the unresolved dissonance of the music tells us that although the action is over the threat itself is not resolved. While the music upholds Ripley as the protagonist of the film, it does not allow her to succeed in her attempt to overcome the threat once and for all.

5.3: *TERMINATOR 2*: "You don't know what it's like to create a life"

Sarah Connor represents a very unusual figure in Hollywood film representations of women. Here the argument that violent women are constructed as men seems to reach its conscious peak. As mentioned, much of the hype surrounding the film release centred on Linda Hamilton's preparation for the role. She worked with a personal trainer for several months, building up her body to the finely tuned musculature that we can see in *Terminator 2*. Whereas Ripley transformed her body into a powerful weapon metaphorically, assuming the mechanical exoskeleton featured in her final fight with the alien queen, Sarah Connor does it literally, her shoulders wide and muscled, her lower body thick and straight, not curved. Even her hair, though long, is now straight and relegated to a pony-tail, no

longer the flouncey curls of the first *Terminator* movie. Her appropriation of the clothing, weaponry and even the muscles of the action hero is a fully conscious attempt to construct her iconographically as a man.

Terminator 2, then, takes a step backwards from *Aliens*. Here unadulterated female violence is only believable if a conscious effort is made to make the female character masculine. Femininity and violence do not make an acceptable mix. But again this could be seen as progressive, as Brown argues, because it divorces gender from biological sex and emphasises its performative aspects. Women can perform masculinity in the same way as men.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991, dir. James Cameron, m. Brad Fiedel) is the big-budget sequel to the independent 1984 production *The Terminator*, also directed by James Cameron. The premise of *The Terminator* is that a nuclear war will take place in 1997, and machines will take over the world. The human resistance will be led by the heroic John Connor, and so the machines send the T800 terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) back through time to kill Connor's mother and prevent him from ever being born. Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) is chosen by the humans to follow him back through time in order to protect Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton). The majority of the film is spent on the two humans running from the pursuing T800 which kills everyone in its path. Finally Reese is killed but Sarah survives, crushing the terminator in an industrial press. *The Terminator* was extremely successful, and created a new genre of film - the cyborg movie.

Terminator 2 takes over the story some years later. In the interim Sarah has transformed herself into a warrior and trained her son for his future as a resistance leader, but has now been confined to a mental asylum and the rebellious John (Edward Furlong) is living with foster parents. Again a terminator, the T1000 (Robert Patrick), is sent back through time,

this time to strike at the young John. This terminator is even more unstoppable than the last, made of liquid metal and able to metamorphose into the shape of anything it touches. But the future John has reprogrammed a T800 replica (Schwarzennegger) and sends it back to protect his younger self. John insists on rescuing Sarah from the asylum but she is angry with him, telling him he should be more careful of himself. Sarah learns from the T800 that Skynet, the computer that will start the nuclear war and thereafter control the machines, is being built by a man called Dyson at Cyberdene corporations. She goes to kill him, but at the last minute realises that what she is doing is wrong and is reunited with John. Once the three have explained the situation to Dyson he agrees to help them destroy the lab and all his work. They successfully blow up the entire lab, Dyson dying in the process, but the T1000 finds them and chases them into a furnace. After a drawn-out fight, The T800 finally manages to destroy the T1000 with a rocket launcher.

On the surface, then, it would appear that the film transgresses the gender boundaries of Hollywood film. Sarah is tough, masculine, interested in saving her son only because he will become the leader of the resistance in the future and therefore saving the world. Arnold Schwarzenegger, by contrast, is no longer the all-powerful, terrifying threat that he presented in the first movie. Here his violence is acceptable in that it is being employed for the good of humanity as a whole, despite not being so good for the individual humans that meet him. Leitch (1994) discusses this movie as an example of his third disavowal strategy, showing how the violence is neutralised in effect because it does not hurt anyone. It is even played for comedy. We know that Schwarzenegger is a killing machine, and we laugh while John tries to explain to him why he cannot kill people, and chuckle as he shoots out a guard's legs and quips, "He'll live". The neutralisation of the

very violent nature that terrified us in the first movie is one of the most startling elements of this film. Not only is Schwarzenegger's killing power neutralised, he becomes a nurturing figure to John Connor. Even his personal rhythmic motif - four quaver beats followed by four quaver rests in the first movie - is transformed into a heartbeat sound. He is now a killing machine, but with a heart.

The gender transgression, however, is not so consistent as it first appears. In the first place, Sarah is condemned for her seeming rejection of her son after he has gone through so much to save her. She loses our sympathy because she is such a bad mother. In order to regain audience sympathy she must realise the error of her ways and make up for it by caring for John throughout the rest of the film. Again the motherhood angle seeks, if not to hide the fact that Sarah is trying to save the world, then to give her violence a more acceptable face because she is also attempting to save her son. Of course it is important to note that Sarah never actually kills anyone throughout the film; most of her attacks are upon the T1000, which are neutralised, as Leitch says, because she can do no harm. She also attacks the psychiatrist and two of the guards in the mental asylum while she is trying to escape, but this too is justified firstly through the psychiatrist's smug and high-handed treatment of her, and then through the mild sexual assault of the guard, who licks her face while she lies bound on the bed. Her other violent attack is of course on Dyson, a failed attempt to kill him which I will discuss in a moment.

It is important, then, to note that the killing of innocent bystanders is confined solely to the T1000. Despite being a terminator, the T800 does not kill anyone throughout the course of the film. But it is he who commits all the violent acts for the good of their cause, inflicting injuries on innocent

bystanders. Despite her appropriation of the action hero iconography, Sarah cannot undertake the same role.

The *Terminator 2* score is very much about sound rather than musical form and structure. Much of the score depends on clever synthesiser sounds to create certain effects. Most important among these are the metallic sound which characterises the T800 and the fluid dissonant sound that accompanies the T1000. The T800's appearances on screen are almost always accompanied by clanking metallic beats, underlining the fact that he is a machine despite all the scripts attempts to humanise him. This was also a feature of the score for the first *Terminator* movie. By contrast, the T1000 has a dissonant downward-sliding fuzzy sound, which can give us an early clue to his far more fluid structure. The T1000 is liquid metal and can change shape to take on the form of anything it has touched, and the sliding sound of his accompanying motif characterises this fluidity. It is also a very dissonant and threatening sound, constructing the T1000 as actually evil, unlike the T800 whose accompanying metallic clangs have always reinforced his nature as a machine. In the first movie, despite his relentless pursuit and terrifying final appearance when the outer layer of living tissue had been removed, he was always just doing a task he had been programmed to do. The T1000 by contrast seems to enjoy its job, smoothly purring to Sarah "I know this hurts" while twisting the blade through her shoulder, and even wagging his finger at her in a smug victorious gesture after she has run out of bullets. The T1000 then is actually more evil, although not necessarily more terrifying. In this movie, therefore, both the terminators have appropriated human characteristics.

The mechanical sound which underlines the T800's mechanical nature functions to excuse his violence. The extreme violence perpetrated on

innocent by-standers is acceptable because the T800 has no conscious will to harm, and the metallic clangs remind us that he is simply a machine. By contrast, the T1000's violence is always accompanied by his evil sound. This musical double standard fits happily into the pattern of disavowal entrenched in Hollywood movies. The T800's attack on the police surrounding Cyberdene goes even further towards excusing his violence. Here the music is the same as that accompanying the opening scene of John Connor in the future, leading his people in the fight for freedom (figure 1). The repetition of the music means that we will see the T800 in the same light; he is protecting the future of humanity through his violent action here, and as such it is understandable and even heroic.

figure 1: freedom fighter

The sound of this synthesiser melody at this point also helps to humanise the T800. It is a clear keyboard sound which is normally reserved for the humans in the film - the synthesiser sound that usually accompanies the T800 is more obviously altered. The pure sound of the "human" synthesiser here and again during his 'death' scene, gives him a human quality. But his fight against the police is still accompanied by his metallic "machine" beat, so the music simultaneously humanises him for heroic purposes, and mechanises him to disavow his violence. This metallic sound is almost totally lost in his final confrontation with the T1000 in the furnace. Again this serves to humanise him by taking away his machine quality. This is very important, as violence against the T1000 is justifiable and in need of

no qualification, unlike violence against innocent humans. When faced with the even more violent T1000, the T800 benefits from being portrayed in a more human light.

What then of Sarah's action? In the early part of the film Sarah is shown to be unemotional, ready to attack without compunction, determined to save the world no matter what the cost to individuals, and only interested in protecting her son for his future role. She is tough, remorseless and prepared to kill. In short, she is a terminator herself. This loss of her caring, 'feminine' nature is demonstrated many times throughout the early scenes, John telling his friend that throughout his childhood his mother would "shack up with anyone she could learn from," coolly using men for her own ends. Her body looks more male than female - "the boy's hips, no ass, the bosom so small it doesn't require a bra" (Julie Baumgold, quoted in Brown 1996). She slugs out of the bottle that the T800 has refused, implying that she is more a 'man' than he is. And most importantly of all, she shows no maternal affection for her son. This culminates in her dream sequence where, in her Doc Martens and paramilitary clothes, she is isolated behind a fence, gazing in to the playground where the original version of herself with curly hair and a wide smile is playing affectionately with her toddler son. Sarah is cut off from herself and in a frenzy of frustration bangs the fence, trying to break through to save herself and her son from the imminent holocaust. It is upon waking from this dream that she leaves to confront Dyson, a salient point because this scene witnesses her salvation and return to herself in the shape of her mothering instinct.

Musically speaking, the Dyson scene is very significant. It is the culmination of the early inferences that Sarah has been transformed into a terminator. Here we see her try to act upon this nature, to coolly execute the man that she now knows to be responsible for building Skynet and therefore

for starting the nuclear war. Her plan is simply to kill him and so stop this happening. Her characterisation as a terminator is underlined in the music, where for the first time she is accompanied by the same metallic clangs that characterise the T800's status as a machine. Sarah herself is a killing machine in this sequence. However, her attempt to kill Dyson is obviously portrayed as a mistake. We see Dyson as a normal man, working at home in a picture of happy domesticity presented by his wife and child. In showing us this side of Dyson the film is indicating that Sarah's decision to kill him is wrong, and the musical accompaniment to her scene of attack underlines this indication. Along with the metallic sound, Sarah's attempt to kill Dyson is accompanied by a strained, dissonant and slow repetitive motif in high synthesised strings (fig. 2), an obvious indicator of tension rather than action.

figure 2: Sarah the terminator

Sarah's salvation, however, comes as she points the gun at a helpless Dyson on the floor next to his terrified wife and child. She cannot go through with the cold-blooded killing of a family man, whatever the threat to the world, and with this realisation we hear the pure keyboard sound that characterises humanity, and the metallic beat fades away. At this point John arrives with the T800, and Sarah hugs him and tells him she loves him. In finally giving John the affection he has been waiting for, Sarah is reinforcing the intimation that she could not kill Dyson because of the young boy cowering next to him. Her maternal instinct saved her from killing an innocent man. This is made more blatant by her sudden vituperation of men

as Dyson pleads that he had no idea of the consequences of his work. "Men like you built the H bomb," she tells him. "You don't know what it's like to really create something, to create a life, to feel it growing inside you." The obvious message is that men destroy the world and women as the compassionate mothers nurture and protect. This savage re-marking of the gender boundaries achieves the desired effect. From this point on we can give Sarah Connor our wholehearted support. In this way Sarah Connor, like Ripley, is locked back into a stereotypical female role in order to explain her violence. But vitally, her earlier behaviour is actually marked as wrong and evil, and motherhood places her back on the right path. This is completely unlike Ripley, and because of this Sarah Connor actually represents a step backwards from the action heroine of six years earlier.

In terms of her appropriation of masculine iconography, Sarah is several steps ahead of Ripley. But as with *Aliens*, the gender boundaries in this film are shifted along several steps to create extra space for femininity. While Sarah is consciously constructed as masculine in a way that Ripley is not, she is of course standing next to Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose excessive and iconic masculinity is never threatened. Hamilton may have built up an impressively muscular body, but Schwarzenegger is bigger and stronger. Sarah wears Doc Martens and paramilitary clothes, but the T800 wears even more classically masculine clothes in his all-black biker outfit and huge motorcycle. Sarah uses a rifle and finally a shotgun, but the T800 outdoes her with a rocket launcher. While Vasquez may have functioned to out-masculinise Ripley in *Aliens*, Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2* can do it all himself.

The accompanying music to the action sequences bears out this relationship. As has been mentioned Sarah's violence is never fatal, and after her salvation by motherhood it is restricted solely to the unstoppable T1000.

She is accompanied by fast beats and rhythmic motifs, but it is noticeable that when the T800 steps in to the breach the music becomes heavier and more intense. This is partly, though not solely, due to the mechanical beats that accompany him. But both of Sarah's major action sequences demonstrate this lack of strength. Her attack on Dyson is accompanied only by the strained motif and then by the slow mechanical beat, no speed or rhythm at all. Her second major action sequence is that of the helicopter chase, where she is shooting at the T1000 in the helicopter from the back of a truck driven by the T800. Although the syncopated rhythm is heavy in the brass, it is also quite slow and simple. The music is made up simply of unrelated notes, often with dissonant intervals such as the augmented fourth and the major seventh, climbing overall but moving slowly and steadily. By contrast the following chase where the T800 crashes the truck and Sarah is incapacitated having been shot painfully in the leg (obviously this only incapacitates heroes, as all the police shot by the T800 could move around quite freely!) is accompanied by a much faster and fuller beat in heavy drums. Sarah's action just does not have the same power behind it - musically or narratively - as that performed by the perfect specimen of manhood enacted by the T800. This is finally and forcefully demonstrated in the eventual destruction of the T1000. Although Sarah dispatched the terminator capably and without help in the first movie, and he is tottering on the very brink of destruction here, she is unable to 'kill' him in the end because she quite literally runs out of fire power. Despite her transformation, all her masculinisation and preparation for this showdown, it falls to the T800 to save her and her son, miraculously coming back from the dead to do so.

As with *Aliens*, then, the blockbuster sequel to an unusual and progressive low-budget movie has to take a step back from its precursor, in

order to fit in with the dominant discourses surrounding gender roles in wider society. In *The Terminator* Sarah survived where the main male character was killed, and dispatched the terminator by using the technology surrounding her. In *Terminator 2*, despite all her obvious power, she cannot do it again. Despite these qualifications, though, the image of Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* has become immortalised and iconicised in a way that could never have happened with the earlier Sarah, showing again that the problem lies not with the concept of the active woman, but with the need to excuse and explain her activity.

5.4: *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*: "Let My Kid Go!"

One of the most recent movies focused around an action heroine was the 1996 production of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (dir. Renny Harlin, m. Alan Silvestri). This film starred Geena Davis in the leading role, an actress already established in independent female roles, having starred in such films as *A League of their Own* and *Thelma and Louise*. The plot of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* centres on Samantha Caine, a primary school teacher in a small town who suffers from retrograde amnesia. After being attacked by an unknown assailant for unknown reasons, she decides she must track down her past with the help of seedy private detective Mitch (Samuel L. Jackson). It turns out that she is Charly Baltimore, a trained government assassin who had supposedly been killed eight years previously by Timothy (Craig Bierko) and his associate Douglas, her previous targets. It turns out that Timothy and Douglas are now working for the traitorous Perkins, Charly's old boss, who has hired them to fake a terrorist bomb attack in order to

prevent his defence budget from being cut. When Charly resurfaces and kills Douglas, Timothy kidnaps her daughter, Caitlin, in order to force Charly to give herself up. Charly and Mitch are caught trying to rescue Caitlin, but escape, only for Caitlin to inadvertently hide herself in the very truck carrying the bomb. Charly then hijacks the truck in an attempt to foil the plan and save her daughter, finally fighting it out with Timothy and killing him. The crisis over, she returns to her life as a primary school teacher and mother.

On the face of it Charly Baltimore is an exceptional action heroine, and certainly she is the protagonist, her male foil being there mainly for comic value. But there is more to this film than meets the eye. Charly herself interpolates many of the qualifiers we have already seen, and her status as the major protagonist of the plot instead of her male foil rests on the fact that Mitch is black. In this he is fulfilling a role beloved of many action movies - including *Lethal Weapon* - that of the black sidekick. As such he is already coded as a subordinate character in the general iconography of the action movie[1]. This makes Charly's unusual toughness less disruptive than if she was paired with a white male foil.

The major focus of interest in the movie is the two very different characters played by Geena Davis. The personality split witnessed in *Terminator 2* is made explicit here, the film setting up Samantha and Charly as two entirely different characters. Samantha Caine is a conventional woman leading an ordinary life with an unexceptional fiance and the obligatory cute kid with a lisp. Charly Baltimore is anything but conventional. But despite the fact that Charly is strong and heroic, the ostensible heroine of the movie, Samantha is the source of our sympathy.

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1 There are some black action heroes, most notably Wesley Snipes and Will Smith. Danny Glover received some critical attention for his starring role in *Predator 2*, but in fact he was only about fifteenth choice for the role, getting the starring role almost by default.

The threat that Samantha's previous self poses to her current happy life means that when Charly reappears, she may hold our interest but not our sympathy. Mitch acts as our voice in the film when he tells her that he "kinda liked that schoolteacher".

There are three stages to the Charly character. At the beginning of the film Charly is represented unequivocally as a threat to Samantha. Our sympathies lie entirely with Samantha as she is confused and terrified by dark and violent memories that she doesn't understand. This is most clear in the two sequences where she confronts an actual image of herself. In the first she dreams that she is standing on a cliff during a lightning storm (the scene of her fall which led to her amnesia and the belief that she was dead) while in a full length mirror her old self taunts her. "I'm coming back," she purrs. "You know that, don't you?" The fear and confusion on Samantha's face as opposed to the sneer on Charly's makes our intended sympathies clear. The score for this scene consists only of dissonant webs and sliding notes, indicators of an eerie threat. The second scene is even more frightening. Samantha has discovered a gun and a knife hidden in the false bottom of her old suitcase, and looks at her reflection in the mirror holding the knife. She turns away, but when she turns back Charly is sneering out at her, still holding the knife, which she violently slashes at Samantha's throat. Again the score contains the same dissonant effects. This same sound was also used to underscore Timothy's first appearance, in which he is threatening a prisoner and finally stabs him viciously in the stomach. As discussed in chapter 4, knives have far worse connotations than guns, and so the use of the knife along with the threatening sounds make Charly as much of a threat to Samantha as Timothy is.

The other important sound in this first part of the film is the music that accompanies Samantha's first awakening after her car accident, and her unpacking the suitcase. In these scenes she is not faced with an image of herself, but her old self appears inside her, visible by her actions. In the first scene she hits a moose with her car. She is thrown clear but her passenger is trapped in the car and dies. She comes round, her face a mass of blood, and calmly walks through the snow to break the neck of the injured moose while her car burns above her. The accompanying motifs are shown in figure 1.

figure 1: buried impulses

The music moves slowly and is mainly minor, but the held leading note and the stress on the minor sixth against the tonic base create dissonance. Although the motif does create a feeling that something is wrong it is not in the same order as the simple dissonant webs of the mirror scenes. There Samantha is facing herself - literally - in confusion and fear, trapped and unable to do anything. In this scene she is acting on a buried impulse of which she is not yet fully aware, but she is at least acting, her old self is working through her. The motion of the rhythm and melody demonstrates this difference, although the slowness and dissonance still create the tense feeling vital to this scene. These motifs are used again together in the same way as Samantha is unpacking her suitcase. Here the inference that she is acting on impulses from her old self is even more explicit, as she is being led by the knowledge that there is something to find even if she does not know what.

There are two major action scenes in this first part of the movie. The first is the original fight in Samantha's house that sets her off on her quest for the truth. At this stage we do not understand the motivation for the attack by this crazed convict, but we later find out that when Charly fell over the cliff to her "death" she was actually escaping from this man, whom she stabbed in the eye in order to break free. At one point during the fight he snarls, "I want my eye back, bitch!" giving us an early clue to Samantha's violent past. Samantha manages to throw her daughter to safety, and after the attacker has knocked her fiancé unconscious she is left to fight him off herself. The fight is scored with a fast, light bongo beat and occasional very heavy rock guitar chords associated with the attacker. The violent acts themselves, such as the shooting or his hitting Samantha with the jug, are not generally emphasised, a telltale mark of action scoring which is a major contributor to the disavowal of the violence. Consequently we believe that Samantha could take the sort of physical punishment she is being subjected to and still eventually defeat her attacker with one blow from a lemon meringue pie. Domesticity wins again! As Samantha sees the pie quiet minor strings enter, leading up to her smashing it - along with its glass dish - into her attacker's face. At this point the threat of Charly resurfaces. Samantha/Charly stands over him as he lies stunnedon the floor, and hammers a single efficient punch to his head, knocking him unconscious. The change in scoring is dramatic, with the previous action music stopping at the pie, and the quiet echo web entering afterwards. At the knock-out punch there is a dissonant slide down, informing us quite unequivocally that this is a BAD thing even though this man has just tried to kill her. To accompany this we see her fiancé's shocked start, and to really hammer home the point Charly unnecessarily smashes his head on the floor one more time, licking the pie off her fingers afterwards as she looks calmly straight at

her fiancé. The final head smash is accompanied by an echo of the rock guitar heard earlier, placing Charly on a par with the would-be killer. This scene contributes to the vituperation building up against Charly, the violence erupting from Samantha accompanied by the evil sounds of her flashbacks, and clearly marked as wrong.

The other action scene in this first part of the film is Timothy's attempt to kill Samantha and Mitch in the railway station, where they are supposed to meet Charly's former mentor, Waldman. I will discuss this scene in detail later on.

The next section of the film covers Charly's return. It begins as Samantha is being tortured by Timothy and Douglas who want to know why she has resurfaced. During the torture she suddenly remembers everything and manages to escape, kill Douglas, free Mitch, realise that Perkins wants her dead and make plans to skip the country. In this section Samantha is gone, and now Charly represents a threat not to Samantha but to her daughter, Caitlin. Charly has no interest in her daughter, and this makes her even more unlikeable.

But in terms of identification with the characters this creates a difficulty, because now that Charly is back we lose Samantha, the main focus of our sympathy. We are told that she was a cover invented by Charly while she was undertaking an assignment, and when she became amnesiac she became confused and believed her own cover. Now we are faced with Charly, who has an indisputable right to Samantha's body because it was originally hers, and we can no longer side with Samantha because she is gone. Charly is therefore set up as a threat to Caitlin's happiness so that we can maintain our judgement against her. In this section of the film, then, Mitch is acting for the audience, saying what we want to say. He rejects

Charly's sexual advances, telling her that she is only trying to bury Samantha, but that he liked her. He also says disgustedly, "Call your fucking kid. It's two days to Christmas, and she might be under the mistaken impression that mommy gives a fuck." This is a clear sign for us to agree with his disapprobation and judge Charly harshly because of her lack of care for her daughter.

We are, however, in a dilemma, because despite our wish to uphold our earlier judgement of Charly, we are now left with her as an indisputable fact. She is the real Samantha, and as the heroine of the film she needs our sympathy. So throughout this section of the film we are also encouraged to see Charly's point of view, and to provide excuses for her. She throws back at Mitch, "I didn't ask for the kid. Samantha had the kid, not me. Nobody asked me!" Despite our disapproval of her lack of interest in her daughter we can therefore have a little sympathy for her situation. Because of her amnesia she is now in the unenviable position of being mother to a child that she did not want. Mitch is again crucial in this section of the film, because he can apply some pop psychology and give us other reasons to like Charly after all. He tells her that her personality as Samantha Caine had to come from somewhere, and Charly really wants to be like her. He says, "I think you forgot to hate yourself for a while," giving us the impression that Charly is really a mixed up, unhappy woman who would rather be an obscure and unexceptional mother and teacher than a violent assassin. This is the film's way of getting us to accept our new heroine, and is perhaps the crucial indicator of Hollywood's continuing difficulty with violent female characters.

The third and final section of the movie begins as Charly learns that Timothy has kidnapped Caitlin, realises that she does care about her after all, and is prepared to die in order to save her. Our redeemed heroine regains

our sympathy, and from here on all her violence is committed with the intention of saving her child, no longer as part of a disinterested job. This makes it acceptable in a way that the early Charly, surrounded by her dissonant sound webs and lightning streaks, could never have achieved. We can also see how the change of weaponry contributes to our change of attitude towards Charly. In her early appearances with the knife or the hypodermic needle which she uses to stab out the eye of her would-be killer, she is extremely threatening and the violence is brutal. But once we are encouraged to identify with her she drops these weapons, and uses only guns and her fists. In the final fight scene with Timothy it is he who has the knife. We are even encouraged to see this as a phallic signifier by Charly's comment, "Oh honey. Only four inches?" This fits in with a seemingly conscious attempt to construct Charly as phallic in the film; she says "suck my dick", and when she gets her memory back she transforms from Samantha into Charly by taking Waldman's gun from his underpants. But if we do see the knife as phallic here, this only emphasises that Charly is yet another female character locked back into her powerless position in the patriarchal order by her motherhood, symbolised by her loss of the knife.

The music

The mood of the film is, as is usual, expressed in the opening title music. The title theme (fig. 2) is minor and yearning.

figure 2: title theme

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Although the accompaniment gives it a quick tempo the theme itself is slow and harmonically static, supported by only the tonic chord and not modulating. The first part of the theme bases itself around the supertonic, and even the eventual fall does not resolve satisfactorily, falling to the dominant rather than the tonic although the dominant is at least part of the tonic triad. So although the theme is not dissonant and based securely around the notes of the tonic scale, it is still uneasy because of this lack of musical resolution.

This seems to provide a good synopsis of the mood of the film. The violence is rarely lauded; as in *Aliens* it is violence born of desperation. The closest thing to comic relief is the scene where Charly fights and defeats the head hunters in the alley, in an expression of utter disgust that Mitch should think she would need saving. This scene is pointedly not scored, closing with a soul song as Charly walks off. Generally speaking the violence in the film is accompanied by minor harmonies and rhythmically difficult motifs, again as in *Aliens*. This in itself is not enough to make it unlike standard action music, after all many of the cues in *Lethal Weapon* are also rhythmically jumpy and often, if not usually, have a minor base. But there are other indicators, which become apparent in a close analysis of the scene in the train station where Samantha and Mitch are supposed to meet Waldman.

The action begins as Samantha sees that their would-be assassin is carrying a gun and grabs the gun hidden in Mitch's pocket, to shoot him. As she shoots there is a heavily orchestral minor held chord, which then goes into a light fast beat with continued long minor notes. As they run for the stairs in a hail of bullets we hear the motif shown in figure 3, a climbing, minor, slow motif in strings with full orchestral backing.

figure 3: escaping

There are punchy brass chords as they run up the stairs, followed just by a deep echo web as Mitch discusses strategy. This builds as a grenade rolls towards them, and as they run down the corridor minor chords build to the explosion. Their fall from the window is accompanied by a hefty brass sound with minor orchestral backing, stopping as they crash through the ice into the river. What is notable about the music to this scene is that although there is for the most part a fast light beat, the melodic accompaniment is not like normal action music. I have previously demonstrated the prominence of rhythm and movement that is typical of action scoring; but here the accompanying melodic line is slow and so actually arrests the motion. After Mitch and Samantha escape from the hall the melodic line stops. There is a fast drum beat, but as with Sarah Connor it is light and so does not have the animative power that tends to be expected of action music. Some syncopation as they run up the stairs provides a rhythmic feel, but generally the music is slow and so contributes to create tension through building and rising, rather than creating motion.

Furthermore, much of the action music in later scenes is also characterised by this lack of rhythmic certainty. Although the music later on is faster, it does not tend to provide the expected impetus of action music. Perhaps the cue most concerned with rhythm is that accompanying the scene where Charly is trying to escape from the deep freeze in which she and

Caitlin have been locked. Here there is a continuing pizzicato on the crotchet beat, while bowed strings play a jumpy motif (fig. 4).

figure 4: escape from the freezer

Again, though, the beat is quite light. But the most telling musical moments in the latter part of the film are the themes shown in figures 5 and 6. The first plays while Charly fights the guards after escaping from the deep freeze, again while she drives the truck containing the bomb away from a populated area, and finally when Mitch rescues Charly and Caitlin from certain death seconds before the bomb goes off. As such it is perhaps the most important action theme, but it is rhythmically very unusual. It has a fast beat but it is a triplet theme, and the low notes which alternate with the higher theme on varying beats make the rhythm even more broken and difficult to ascertain.

figure 5: action?

The use of triplets to create rhythmic uncertainty also features very heavily in *Point of No Return* (discussed later) and here has the same effect of making the rhythm difficult to ascertain. The *Aliens* score also contained unclear rhythms in order to problematise the movement of the action sequences. This, then, is becoming a standard feature of the films I am studying.

The second theme also accompanies much of the later action although to rather different ends.

figure 6: sombre action
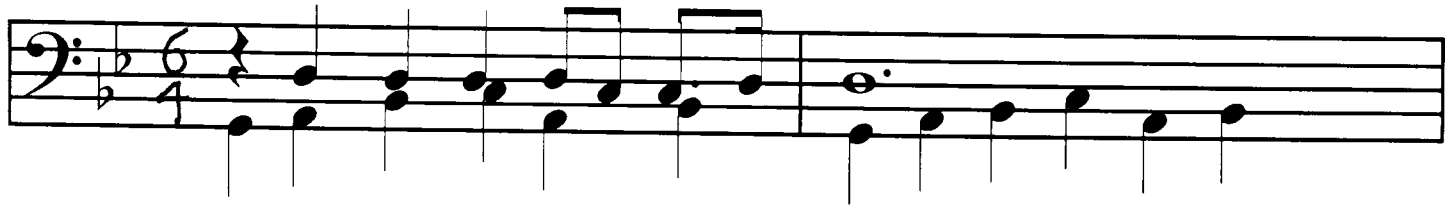
It appears as Caitlin runs to hide in the lorry and the lorry leaves, accompanies part of the final fight between Timothy and Charly, and plays as Charly staggers back to the truck to save Caitlin and again when the shot switches to the bomb still hidden in the truck. It is a slow, almost martial theme with heavy brass and full orchestra. The repeated bass line prevents any harmonic development. Generally this is a sombre and serious motif which gives weight to the importance of what we are seeing but does not generate motion or excitement.

Generally speaking, then, the most noticeable point about this score to a big-budget Hollywood action movie is how much the music contributes to problematise or even slow down the action. Like *Aliens* it seems to place more emphasis on the reasons behind the violence, the feelings of desperation experienced by the characters. Unlike *Aliens*, however, there are moments of musical rest, which are invariably connected to Caitlin. The "family" theme (fig. 6) is a slow yearning minor melody which is usually played firstly by a solo flute, and then taken over by lush strings.

figure 7: family

Unlike the other main themes and motifs it has harmonic movement, briefly moving through the relative major in the first phrase and then modulating into the relative major in the second. Unlike the title theme it is based entirely on the tonic of the scale. Its peaceful resolution and harmonic status make it the most noticeable moment of musical resolution in the non-diegetic score. It first appears as Samantha says good-bye to Caitlin at the beginning of the film, when she is leaving to search into her past. Its next appearance is towards the end of the second section of the film, the Charly section. Here it consolidates all the hints we have had towards sympathy for Charly, when it appears as she looks through the telescopic sight in her rifle and sees Caitlin, the daughter she has tried to forget, dressed as an angel for the nativity play. Through the music we are reminded of the earlier bond between Samantha and Caitlin, and like the rest of the music in the film it gives us an insight into Samantha/Charly's feelings, letting us know that she too remembers her bond with her daughter and cannot reject her after all. This is the turning point of the film, and despite the threatening image of the rifle pointed at her daughter in a direct homage to Charly's rejection of motherhood, the music lets us know that Samantha has finally won the struggle. The "family" theme makes another appearance as Samantha tells Caitlin to run and hide while she fights the guard during their escape, again indicating that her daughter is the most important thing in her mind despite the danger to herself. It is heard next as Caitlin forces her back from the edge of unconsciousness, having refused to leave her to certain death by the truck. This time it is consolidating the bond between mother and daughter from Caitlin's point of view. It makes its final appearance at the end of the film as Samantha drives through the idealistic glow of the sunset, bound for home and happy domesticity. Again it refers to the bond between mother and daughter, but also here its musical resolution connotes a happy ending.

As the only properly resolved piece of music in the film, its direct connection to the mother/daughter bond implies that this is Samantha's true vocation; she belongs in the role of mother. This impossibly idealistic portrayal of motherhood repeats the pattern that we have already seen in *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*. On the one hand motherhood is shown to be the ideal vocation for an otherwise active woman. On the other, the desire to protect her child is the most perfect of all excuses for female violence.

5.5: Conclusion.

Although this emphasis on the salvation of motherhood is too powerfully marked to be ignored, it must not be forgotten that the men are also to an extent portrayed in terms of their relationship with their "children" - literal or metaphorical. Hicks is kind to Newt, saving her from the gunfire when the marines first catch her, and lifting her up to the table so that she can join in with the planning. Sarah eulogises the T800 in her discussion of his fatherly qualities - that he would always be there for John, have time for him, never shout at him, and would die to protect him. "Of all the would-be fathers that came and went over the years, this machine was the only one who measured up." Mitch makes an attempt to save Caitlin that almost costs him his life, and Timothy - her natural father - is vilified because he leaves her to die even after knowing that she is his daughter.

But the crucial difference is that these men are not defined in terms of their fatherhood. Hicks would still be heroic without his kindness to Newt, and it is noticeable that he goes to Ripley's aid during the attack planned by Burke, leaving Hudson to save Newt. He is also conveniently injured,

leaving the task of saving Newt from the alien queen to Ripley. In terms of parental status, Hicks is a nonentity.

The T800 is a far more obvious guardian of John, but again this does not define his character. His parental quality is based entirely on the fact that he does not feel emotion, and this means that he could never give John the emotional support of a parent. As he himself says "I know now why you cry. But it is something I can never do." Timothy is constructed as particularly dastardly for his treatment of Caitlin, but would still be evil even without that twist. In short, none of the men are defined through their relation to the children.

In contrast, the women's relationship with their children is their defining quality and the basis for the action in each movie. Although Ripley is fighting to save herself and the other survivors, it is Newt who is her first concern and who most of her action is directed to save. Both Sarah and Charly are seen as ambiguous characters until their eventual transformation into caring mothers, and from then on their violence is directed solely towards saving their children, whereas their previous violence is unjustified and therefore wrong; witness Sarah's attack on Dyson or Samantha's first fight in her home.

In terms of masculinity there is a considerable difference between the women. Ripley is never constructed as masculine, in fact quite the opposite. She is the most feminine woman in the film. In contrast both Sarah and Charly are given masculine qualities, Sarah very obviously through the alteration of her body and Charly more subtly. As Samantha she wears flowery, "frumpy" dresses and knitted jumpers. Her hair is long and curls softly. Her speech is refined as Mitch points out parodically in his impression of her: "Oh phooey, I just burned the darn muffins". When she transforms into Charly she begins to wear trousers, cuts her hair short and

somehow straightens it, starts to swear, walks with a heavy graceless tread, and even says "suck my dick". In short this film, like *Terminator 2*, constructs its violent heroine as masculine. In view of this it is interesting that Ripley, the only one of the three who is consistently constructed as feminine, is also the only one who is a sympathetic character and a good mother throughout. In *Aliens* her good mothering qualities are emphasised in her conflict with the alien queen, who characterises the bad, destructive mother. In the other two films discussed the good mother and the bad mother are synthesised into one character, with both Sarah and Charly eventually being redeemed by motherhood. It is only as a mother that the violence of these women can be justified, unlike their male counterparts.

To conclude, then, the women in these movies have a distinct relationship to violence which is informed by the music. Both *Aliens* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* employ scores full of dissonance, rhythmic uncertainty and problematic relation to the action. These scores are more concerned with their feelings, and never approach the violence in a light-hearted manner. *Terminator 2* is in a slightly different position as Schwarzenegger is the real focus of the movie, as can be seen in the imagery surrounding it. The score here is rhythmically simpler and more concerned with the spectacle of the action and the excitement. But Sarah's action is considerably less scored for excitement than the T800's, and in fact the one scene which lauds the violence in the film is that where the T800 is paralleled with John Connor, set up as the hero and saviour of the world. The differing treatment of men and women in the action movie score yields a fascinating insight into the representation of women in Hollywood film.

CHAPTER 6: Fatal Femmes 1: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to know

6.1: Introduction

The second major area of film in which violent women are coming to the fore is in the rise of what Pidduck (1995) dubs "the Fatal Femme cycle". She describes the fatal femme as "a 1990's incarnation of the femme fatale of classic noir. Sharing her predecessor's smart mouth and sexual savvy, the fatal femme ups the ante of earlier, more muted cinematic codes of sexuality and graphic violence" (65). Jermyn reinforces this point by arguing that:

"a substantive new generic development, in the form of the female
'psychopath', has recently taken place in Hollywood's contemporary
psychological thrillers. She represents an excess that has rarely been seen
before, a woman whose violence, cunning and monstrosity are almost
unparalleled in the women who form her cinematic predecessors." (1996:
251)

So for both Pidduck and Jermyn the new fatal femme is marked by her extreme violence. Both mention several well-known examples of the title, including the three films which I will look at here: *Fatal Attraction, The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,* and *Single White Female.* They also link the new psychopathic woman in cinema to her social context. Jermyn says, for example, that "the female psychopath ... both reaches an unsurpassed level of violence and deception *and* enters scenarios which explore women's changing roles and 'new' freedoms in a supposedly post-feminist age" (252). This, then, raises the question of how these women are situated within standard discourses of femininity. Unlike the action heroines they are not "macho", in that they are not appropriating a generic role which is already

clearly signified as male; but motherhood and Otherness both feature strongly within this cycle of films, showing that even without the obviously macho role, violent women still need to be explained within a standard "feminine" framework. The non-macho status of the fatal femmes is directly linked to the strong presence of masquerade in these films. The fatal femmes hide their violent natures behind a mask of femininity, adding an extra level to the gender coding in these texts.

The fatal femme movies isolated by Pidduck and Jermyn begin in 1988 with Lyne's *Fatal Attraction*, and include films from *Basic Instinct* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. However both theorists overlook a considerable distinction between two broad groups of fatal femme films, which can be drawn along the lines of Creed's "castrated" and "castrating" women (1993). Creed marks films such as *Fatal Attraction* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* as examples where "the woman is transformed into a psychotic monster because she has been symbolically castrated, that is, she feels she has been robbed unjustly of her rightful destiny ... family, husband, lover, child" (122). This, she argues, is a conventional view of female monstrosity which links it to a lack of sexual and emotional fulfilment. However, films like *Basic Instinct* represent a different type of woman - the castratrice.

> "Whereas the castrated female monster is inevitably punished for her transgressions, the castrating woman - usually a symbolic figure - is rarely punished. She assumes two forms: the castrating female psychotic ... and the woman who seeks revenge on men who have raped or abused her in some way." (122-3)

I am inclined to agree with Creed's distinction between these two types of fatal femme, although sceptical of her reasoning. From a psychoanalytical point of view the child represents a mother's connection to the symbolic order, and so without this connection she can be seen as symbolically castrated. But from a more cultural point of view motherhood

can be seen to lock the woman into a patriarchal system of power relations, otherwise known as the family. So in this context the childless woman is actually liberated. My grounds for the distinction between the two groups would be the reasoning presented to explain their violence. The fatal femmes I will look at in this section, whom I dub the "mad, bad women", are all violent because they are mad, and mad because of some (usually specifically female) circumstance of their lives which the film presents for our sympathy. All three fatal femmes are evil, but this is related to their loneliness and lack of a domestic family situation. Because of this, we can pity them as well as despise them, and their violent natures are explained away in a condemnation of female independence.

By contrast the villainesses of *Basic Instinct*, *Malice* and *The Last Seduction*, which I will look at in the next section, are in a different situation. While the mad, bad women are obviously and unproblematically "mad", with their violence resulting from their madness, we never really understand the reason for the violence of this other category of women, whom I shall dub the "bitch goddesses". The only possible reason we could have for labelling them "mad" is *because* they are violent. The madness label results from the violence, not the violence from the madness. In all other aspects of their behaviour they seem perfectly sane. In this context, Creed's stipulation that they are more sympathetic figures is surprising. I will argue that the Mad Bad Women films do give us some space to feel sympathy for their fatal femmes, but that the bitch goddesses remain opaque as characters. While we may enjoy their power and strength we never identify or sympathise with them, and my analysis of the music will back up this conclusion.

A final point which I would like to make is that there is a considerable difference in the narrative form of each category. The Mad Bad Women films seem to be specifically about threats to the domestic environment,

usually from an alien presence within the domestic space (whether literally, like Peyton Flanders, or metaphorically, like Alex Forrest). They tend to set woman against woman, with the man and the family as the prize. As Tasker says, "The *femme fatale* is almost by definition opposed to other female characters" (1998: 139). Taking a psychoanalytical line, Jermyn argues that the bad woman in these films represents the abject of the good woman, the desire to step outside of the patriarchal symbolic system which oppresses her. The film then becomes a ritual in which the good woman must fight to regain her place in the symbolic and banish her abject desires by destroying their incarnation. In this the films present the domestic as a prize which the good woman must fight for, reinforcing patriarchal ideology of the woman's role. Discussing *Fatal Attraction*, Grist argues that "the opposition of good woman and femme fatale works to naturalise a misogynist denial of 'transgressive' female (sexual) independence before a championing of woman's 'traditional' subordinate domesticity" (1992: 276). It would seem, then, that these fatal femmes explore 'women's changing roles' only to undermine them.

The Bitch Goddess films, however, do not centre around this threat to the domestic from an alien influence. In each film the fatal femme is herself ensconced in some domestic situation which she controls or destroys. Because of this lack of female competition, the focus falls instead on the relationship between the bitch goddess and her male pawns. Here the bitch goddess returns to the 1940s concept of the femme fatale, who is marked by her sexual power over men, her ambiguity and opacity, and is usually surrounded by an investigative story which seeks to unravel her mystery. The Bitch Goddess films, then, fit best into the crime/thriller genre. The Mad Bad Women films on the other hand are more horror-oriented, their narratives revolving around the terrorism and eventual destruction of what

appears to be an unstoppable threat. It is also worth noting that there are films of this type which set man against man with the woman as the prize, such as *Pacific Heights* or *Unlawful Entry*. These films can therefore be seen as a cycle in their own right, dubbed the "Yuppie Horror Film" by Grant (1996), where it is the home and the lifestyle of the upwardly mobile family that comes under attack. The domestic emphasis in the Mad Bad Women films, then, indicates that motherhood will play a strong part in these narratives.

6.2: *FATAL ATTRACTION*

The 1988 production of *Fatal Attraction* (dir. Adrian Lyne, m. Maurice Jarre), is the movie which began the fatal femme cycle. It was a huge box office success and sparked much critical attention, mainly because of its creation and then destruction of a persuasive feminist argument through the character of Alex Forrest. The story is that of Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas), a lawyer from New York, married to Beth (Ann Archer) and with a six year old daughter, Ellen. He meets Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) and spends the weekend with her on a no-strings-attached basis while Beth is house-hunting in the country. At the end of the weekend Alex asks to see him again. When Dan refuses she slashes her wrists and he has to save her. She then begins to plague him with calls and visits to his office, and then to his home. When he meets her to tell her to stop she tells him she is pregnant. Dan refuses to have any connection with the child. From here on, Alex's harassment of the Gallaghers becomes worse and worse. They move to the country but Alex follows Dan home and continues harassing him. After she kills Ellen's pet rabbit Dan finally confesses to Beth and she throws him out. Then Alex collects Ellen from school and takes her to the fair, and a panic-

stricken Beth crashes the car while searching for her. Dan comes to the hospital and the two are re-united. Finally Alex breaks into the house and tries to kill Beth, and after a fight with first Beth and then Dan, Beth finally shoots and kills her.

The most interesting thing about this film is that in the beginning it sets up Alex as a woman with whom we can sympathise. Although she originally tells Dan that she is happy to have a no-strings one night stand, at the end of the weekend she changes her mind. She says to him simply, "I had a wonderful time last night, I'd like to see you again. Is that so terrible?" and when he rejects her advances, saying that he thought they both understood the situation and that they would have a good time, she counters with "No you didn't; you thought *you'd* have a good time." At this point, we can sympathise with her point of view. We can even be pleased when she begins to harass him, telling him that she's "not going to be ignored", because he is not going to get away with either his use of Alex or his easy betrayal of his wife.

Dan himself is not a sympathetic character. As Creed says, "the strongest argument for siding with Alex is that the alternative is pretty distasteful. If we don't side with her, we are left with Dan who is basically dishonest, weak and uninteresting" (1988: 43). His poor treatment of the two women is never qualified or excused; he is not, for example, shown to be struggling with his desire for Alex while she seduces him. He is willing to be seduced, in fact he makes the first move by asking her for a drink. He also never shows guilt or remorse for what he has done, only fear that it will cause him the loss of his family. All in all he is not a likeable hero.

This unusual characterisation for the hero of a film is exacerbated by the fact that throughout the film Alex is in control, and it is she that initiates the action while Dan only reacts. This is an oddly passive position for a

man, which was to become a feature of the fatal femme cycle. However, our sympathies change during the course of the film. This is notably not because Dan becomes more likeable, but because Alex becomes less so. Creed has equated our loss of sympathy for her with her appearance of desperation, stating that "she comes to represent that aspect of woman which is held up to extreme ridicule in our society, a woman who can't get a man" (1988: 43). It does seem that our alienation from Alex dates from before we begin to see her as "mad". We begin to pity her when we see her suicidal loneliness, and also when Dan rejects her invitation to the opera. In particular we pity her as she sits alone in her flat, switching her light on and off, while Dan and Beth enjoy themselves with friends. But because the plot of the film revolves around Dan, we do not identify with Alex as our hurt heroine. There is no attempt to round out her character or to help us understand her thoughts, which would be necessary for the audience to identify with her. Rather, Beth and Dan's relationship is the central concern, and Alex begins to be cast as the bad woman. From this point on her growing psychosis and increasingly virulent attacks on the family, including the innocent Beth and Ellen, destroy all identification with her position, until we are finally glad to see her killed. *Fatal Attraction* thereby earned its nomination as a prime example of 1980s backlash cinema (Faludi 1992).

In an unusual move, Jermyn (1996) focuses on the good women in this cycle of films. She sees the narratives as a ritual in which the bad woman represents the abject desires of the good, who must destroy her in order to regain her place in the symbolic order. To support this argument, she states that all these films implicitly and probably unconsciously criticise the domestic state. In *Fatal Attraction* we can see that the family situation is not ideal. The opening scene shows an untidy flat, Dan cut off from his family by his headphones, and the six year old daughter muttering "shit shit shit".

Jermyn goes on to argue that this lack of domestic bliss adds a great deal of resonance to Alex's question to Dan: "If your life's so perfect, what are you doing here?" This criticism of family life backs up Jermyn's assertion that the good woman is secretly and unconsciously trying to escape from domestic slavery, and that the bad woman represents this abject impulse. So it is vital that the good woman and not the husband finally destroys the bad woman, banishing the abject and actively choosing domesticity.

The music.

The first obvious point of interest about the music in this film is that there is none over the opening credits. This is quite unusual, but the reason becomes clear when the opening scene is considered. The film opens with a wide pan over the city at sunset, with faint city noise accompanying. It pans to the window of the Gallagher's apartment, and then cuts inside to the scene aforementioned, with Dan sitting in his underpants listening to music and Beth trying to get ready for their evening out. Despite Jermyn's assertion that Beth is the ideal wife and mother, her life revolving around her family, this is not apparent in the opening scene. The flat is untidy, with underwear hanging in the bathroom, and both parents are inattentive to Ellen which results in her repeating swearwords and answering the door by herself at the tender age of six. The lack of idyllic opening music in this film endorses the feeling that this is *not* paradise, that unusually the family is not being presented as the ultimate ideal. The full meaning of the lack of music here becomes clear later, with the introduction of the main theme (fig. 1) at a scene which mirrors the opening, Beth again getting ready for an evening with friends. This time Dan is not sitting isolated by his headphones and ignorant of his family, but is watching Beth lovingly and telling her how beautiful she is, and here at last is the idealistic harmonious music that we

would normally expect to accompany our first view of the happy family home.

Figure 1: ideal domestic

But it does not appear until *after* Dan's affair with Alex and the beginning of her harassment campaign. Our understanding of this scene is therefore informed by our knowledge of Dan's guilt and his uneasiness about Alex. In this context, the music can be seen as a clear reflection of Dan's feelings. Now that he is faced with a threat to his family life he suddenly realises how precious it is. Beth is accompanied by beautiful music, signalling not that she herself has suddenly become more attractive, but that Dan's perception of her and the domestic situation has changed. In retrospect, the lack of music in the opening scene only serves to demonstrate his lack of interest in his family at that time, the reality of family life unclouded by typical Hollywood idealisation. It is only when Dan can perceive a threat to his comfortable if unfulfilling existence that family life attracts his idealisation and he builds it up into a picture of bliss and harmony, something that we have already seen it is not. The soft focus and flattering lighting of Beth in this scene contributes to the effect. In this way the music is unusually introspective on the main character's thought, and serves as a critique not just on the picture of domesticity presented in the film, but also on Dan and his lack of perspicacity. The unexpectedly jarring diminished dischord which the theme includes (under the A-flat in the melody), emphasised by its unusual harmonic progression from the diminished supertonic to the tonic, serves as a reminder that there is

something wrong with this picture. I would even go so far as to say that it symbolises Alex, the interruption to the family harmony. The fact that it remains in the theme all through the film, including the final credits, can be seen to suggest that although she is now dead Alex-the-abject can never be totally destroyed, a contention that Jermyn also puts forward.

At this point, then, it would appear that the musical score is a reflection of Dan's feelings, supporting Creed's argument that the film is clearly presented from his point of view. This association with a character's perspective is quite common in narrative music, which is supposed to add an "emotional truth" to what we see, expressing the emotions of a character. What is unusual here is that the contrast of the music to earlier silence shows a bias in the musical perspective. While Dan's feelings may be sincere, the soundtrack is telling us that they are also likely to be transitory.

The connection of the music to the characters becomes even more complex throughout the film. At the beginning Alex and Dan's meetings are not underscored. This is quite significant in that Alex too is being presented realistically, rather than being idealised as the stereotypical irresistible sex object, so the film is providing no excuses for Dan's behaviour. But the diegetic music tells us something about Alex. The light piano music in the background during their dinner date paints her firstly as classy and secondly as the romantic interest. The fast ethnic music in the nightclub that they go to outlines her wildness, adding to the satanic fires and butcher's shops that surround her apartment. Conlon (1989) sees Alex's wildness as an integral part of the film, which for him is a narrative about the repression of passion, and he too argues that the music signifies her wild nature. Most importantly, though, Alex is identified with Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*, which centres around a tragic figure destined for unrequited love and suicide. Alex tells Dan that she loves this opera, and it plays in her

apartment as she cooks dinner for him. Of course Alex herself tries to commit suicide early on in the film when Dan first tells her he does not want to see her again, and our sympathies are still with her when he rejects her desperate attempt to get him back with tickets to see *Madame Butterfly*. Finally we see her all alone, switching the light on and off to the strains of the opera, intercut with scenes of Dan, Beth and their friends enjoying themselves at the bowling alley. So our perceptions of Alex in this first part of the film are informed by our knowledge - imparted through Dan in case the audience is not familiar with the story - that Butterfly was a tragic, lonely figure. In this way Alex is informed by the beauty and power, and simultaneous status as victim, that McClary (1991) outlines in the presentation of opera madwomen. The non-diegetic music up to this point has been very sparse, only appearing when Alex cuts her wrists. This is our first view of her madness and the music is fuzzy, frantic and dissonant to portray this along with Dan's panic. But we do not yet know that her violence will become outwardly directed and so her suicide attempt marks her as a tragic figure, rather than evil or even mad.

So the early part of the film has been almost totally without non-diegetic music, perhaps reflecting Dan's lack of emotion. He seems dissatisfied with his domestic life and has an affair with Alex without appearing to feel any remorse or concern. His one moment of real feeling is his panic as he tries to stop Alex's wrists bleeding, demonstrated through the panic-stricken music. From the final appearance of *Madame Butterfly*, however, the non-diegetic music begins to take over, starting with the aforementioned scene of Dan watching Beth putting on her make-up. Here the main theme is played on the piano with synthesised accompaniment, so that it is clear and lyrical. It appears again as Beth kisses Ellen goodnight after the rabbit incident; once again with an unstable harmonic

accompaniment as Dan calls Alex after telling Beth about their affair; and finally in the recorder with an unstable rhythm as Dan hugs Ellen goodnight having returned to the family. Each time it demonstrates the idealism of the family which is now under threat. Its clarity and lyricism at each rendition contrasts sharply with the music that accompanies Alex.

In the second part of the film Alex is uncompromisingly treated as a threat by the music. Like the T1000 in *Terminator 2*, she is accompanied by low threatening notes, held dissonant sound webs, and a fuzzy synthesiser sound. This synthesiser sound is a clear sign of her evil madness, contrasted with the simple clarity of the family music. When Alex is the focus of a scene the music is uniformly dissonant, with strange intervallic patterns and usually no clear rhythm. There are several motifs that commonly appear in relation to her, such as the examples shown in figure 2. The predominance of semitones and difficulty in ascertaining their root make these motifs very tense. We are now seeing Alex through Dan's musical perception of her, just as we are seeing his family through his musical perception.

figure 2: Alex

In this, Dan's perspective is confirmed by the music, which gives us less and less room to identify with Alex. Only once does the non-diegetic score express Alex's point of view. Dan drives back to his country house, listening to a an abusive and threatening tape that Alex has made for him. The music is dissonant, falling slowly and in unusual intervallic relations, a sound which has come to signify the threat of Alex. Unbeknownst to Dan

Alex is following him home, and when he gets out of his car and goes inside we are left watching Alex, who runs across the lawn to look through the window. She watches as Dan gives Ellen the rabbit as a present, and the non-diegetic music plays a dissonant corrupted rendition of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" leading up to her vomiting violently. This music is demonstrating her revulsion at the cosy domestic scene of which she is no part. This is the only moment in the film where the non-diegetic music foregrounds Alex's point of view, and after this it changes allegiance once again. When it appears at the discovery of the dead rabbit, and again during Beth's panic-stricken search for Ellen while Alex entertains her at the fairground, it is obviously taking Beth's point of view because Dan is not involved in these scenes. This happens again in the final confrontation between the two women, with Dan downstairs unaware of what is happening and the switches of shot to him unscored. The music, therefore, begins to align itself with Beth's point of view. This transference of control from Dan to Beth is significant because it is at this point that Beth begins to take action. She throws Dan out after hearing of the affair, searches for Ellen by herself and fights Alex in the bathroom until Dan appears, enabling her to fetch the gun and shoot Alex herself. It is particularly salient that there is no music at the shooting. Beth's lack of emotion when she kills Alex, as compared to Dan's increasingly frustrated failure to remove Alex from the picture, shows that Beth has become the stronger character. We can also see that when Beth takes control of the music, the idealism of the domestic theme begins to reflect her feelings too. Dan is not present when she kisses Ellen goodnight after the rabbit affair, so the appearance of the theme here signifies Beth's first moment of control over the music. In her first perception of the threat to her family, she idealises it in the same way that Dan does.

It is interesting and significant that the music always takes a character's point of view. Kuhn's discussion of the difference between *histoire* and *discours* is relevant here (1982: 49-53). She argues that film presents itself as *histoire*, as objective truth, rather than as *discours* which clearly expresses an opinion.

> "To the extent that it has no identifiable source of address, cinema hides the marks of its enunciation. Culturally speaking, of course, all enunciations originate from somewhere: the point is that histoire operates to give the impression that they do not." (1982: 50)

Film music normally takes the role of *histoire* in that it claims to present the truth, but in this film it can be clearly seen as *discours* in its changing associations with different characters. This allows us to see the dynamics of control between the three adults. At first Alex is in control of the music, but only through diegetic music. Although she controls at this point it is only by proxy. Her emotions never get equal treatment to those of Dan and Beth. As we begin to be alienated from Alex, Dan takes control of the music. We identify with him and his emotion, although it can be recognised that his idealism of the family is false. Finally Beth can take control of the score as she becomes activated as a protagonist and no longer just the passive wife. Most interesting of all, Dan and Beth seem to share control at the end. From the moment that Dan moves back in, the music belongs equally to them both. The rendition of the domestic theme as Dan tells Ellen he is back for good reflects both adults' wishes for domestic unity, although its rhythmic uncertainty demonstrates their knowledge that Alex still threatens their security. The music during the final confrontation scene switches seamlessly from Beth to Dan as Dan barges into the bathroom and takes over the fight against Alex, and the final rendition of the main theme over the closing image of the family photo again expresses their equal desire for domesticity.

One last point, in view of Jermyn's assertion that the abject is never totally banished, is that this final rendition of the main theme not only still contains the dissonant diminished chord that symbolises Alex's rupture of the family harmony, but is played in the fuzzy synthesiser sound which has become associated with Alex's madness and threat. Although the film has ended and Alex is dead, the musical image of her is perpetuated in the instrumentation.

In conclusion, then, we can see that the fatal femme's point of view as compared to the family's is sidelined in the score. In fact there is only one occasion when Alex's point of view is presented by the non-diegetic music: the scene where she watches the cosy family tableau through the window. This scene, therefore, is the most significant insight we have into Alex's character; for a brief moment the music portrays her feelings and shows why she is acting the way she is. Through the warped rendition of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" we see that Alex is jealous, and desperate to attain the domesticity that she can see through the window. But her desire for domesticity is not underscored by the clear domestic theme, excluding her from the family. Instead she relies on a well known nursery rhyme tune to portray her desire for a child, something that the audience will recognise immediately but which will continue to exclude her from the family scene, just as she is physically outside, looking in. This sole insight into Alex's mind underlines the film's explanation for Alex's violent behaviour: she is a frustrated mother who is mad because she has no child. As with the action heroines, the violence of the female character is explained by her mothering instinct. The difference is that while the action heroines were being violent in order to defend their children, Alex is being violent in order to gain a family, and she is wrong because she is committing the unpardonable error

of driving a wedge between a real mother and her child, first by kidnapping Ellen and then by trying to kill Beth. So motherhood is again the rationale, although this time not an excuse, for female violence.

6.3: *THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE*

In some ways, this film is the most straightforward of the Mad Bad Women narratives. While *Fatal Attraction* sets the two female characters against each other it does so through Dan. In *Cradle* Claire herself is central to the film, not her husband, so the relationship between the two women comes to the fore. More importantly the film crystallises the deification of motherhood to the extent that the Mother becomes a symbolic category, and real people lose their importance. The Mother in this film is defined by her control of the domestic space, and so the space of the house itself becomes vital. In this way, the film makes any transgression of the traditional female roles impossible, because by transgressing these roles the good woman loses her status as the Mother.

The Hand that Rocks the Cradle is the story of Claire Bartell, a happily married mother of one who at the opening of the story is pregnant with her second child. She is sexually assaulted by her gynaecologist, Victor Mott, and when she complains to the medical board he commits suicide. Upon learning that his estate is frozen and that she will lose the house, his pregnant widow miscarries and undergoes an emergency hysterectomy. Six months later Claire advertises for a nanny for her new-born son and her daughter Emma, so that she can put more time into working on her new

greenhouse. Mrs Mott, calling herself Peyton Flanders, applies for and gets the job. She moves in and begins to drive wedges between Claire and her daughter and husband, Michael. When the mentally disabled handyman Solomon sees her breastfeeding baby Joey she frames him for sexual abuse of Emma and Claire sacks him. Claire's best friend Marlene discovers who Peyton is and Peyton kills her by use of a booby trap that she has set for Claire in the greenhouse. Claire then retraces Marlene's investigation, finds out who Peyton is and orders her to leave. Peyton breaks back into the house, attacks Michael and Claire and attempts to kidnap the children. She finds Solomon in the attic helping the two children escape, and in a final fight with Claire she is pushed out of the window to her death on the white picket fence below.

In removing the man from the centre of the narrative, *Cradle* moves a step forward from *Fatal Attraction* in its emphasis on motherhood. It is the loss of her child rather than of her husband which sets Peyton off on her vengeful rampage against the family. Although she does try to seduce Michael in order to replace Claire in the family unit, her real objective is the children, made clear by her calm statement: "I'll just get my baby and be on my way" when Claire and Michael finally unite against her and ask her to leave. Most noticeable of all, the final united family picture replaces Michael with Solomon, the asexual handyman. At this point Michael is lying in the basement with his legs broken and we see no reunion of the family itself. In this, the film is clearing the stage for an unambiguous narrative revolving around the two women and their fight for the children.

Rather than focusing on the children themselves, however, the struggle between the two women is displaced onto the space of the house, the signifier of the domestic. It is through the control of the space that the

women are defined as part of the family unit. Right from the beginning we see the predominance of space in the film. The opening credit sequence is composed almost solely of shots of the empty house, accompanied by the soft, warm main theme of the musical score (fig. 1). The space itself is being idealised in this sequence, and the total absence of the family from these shots demonstrates the importance of the space - as the symbol of the Domestic - over the people in this film.

figure 1: domestic theme

So the main theme of the score relates to the house, rather than the family, and from now on I shall refer to it as the domestic theme. The only signs of life in the credit sequence are the intercuts to a person on a bike, whom we finally discover is Solomon. It is also important to note that the domestic theme plays in its entire full rendition only twice in the film, once at the opening credits and once at the end, and Solomon is present on both occasions. In this he has a special importance to the domestic which I will detail later.

The emphasis on space is demonstrated again as the narrative opens, with the Bartells hiring Solomon to build a fence around their property, "mostly to keep people out". The Bartells are trying to mark off their domestic space and make their property into a safe haven. The resultant white picket fence is a cliché of the idealised American home. Solomon himself, however, has a problematic relationship to this space. Although it is he who marks it off, in a sense he who creates it, he does not have the same access to it that the family does. When we first see him it is as a stranger

entering the garden without invitation, and causing Claire to scream when she sees him looking through the window at her. He is introduced as a possible threat, then, and this convention continues throughout the film. Although he becomes accepted as a friend he remains located outside the house. This is made most clear in the one scene where we actually see him come into the kitchen, and he announces his approach loudly: "I'm coming up to the back door, I'm getting close to the back door, I am now entering the back door." Although this is a joke about Claire's earlier panic when she saw him for the first time in the garden, it also clearly demonstrates his lack of inclusion in the family space. He can enter it, but only with warning. We see also in this scene that he is not a part of the family by Claire's refusal to let him hold the baby. For most of the film he remains outside the house, his job trimming and repairing the outside of the home to keep it functional for those who occupy it. But this very job demonstrates Solomon's real relation to the domestic realm, as he turns out to be not a threat, but in fact the Guardian of the Domestic. This is the significance of his presence at the two renditions of the domestic theme, alone among the characters. He tends to the domestic space, and watches over the family. It is he who realises Peyton's evil nature when he sees her breastfeeding the baby through the window. Even when the Bartells dismiss him he makes it his mission to watch over them, following them on his bike. Finally we see him in the attic, trying to save the children. His relegation to the no-man's-land of the garden, then, is Claire's first major mistake, for it is essentially her fright which keeps him at bay.

Solomon's ability to enter the attic when he cannot enter the house is a sign of a more sophisticated spatial politics going on in the film, rather than just the dichotomy of inside/outside. The house itself can be divided into three main spaces: the basement, the home itself, and the attic. The nursery

is the focal point of the home in this story about motherhood, and it is from here that control over the domestic realm is exercised. The garden too is a political space - a no-mans-land between the house and the outside world, which is controlled by Solomon and offers a haven for the children once the inside of the house becomes a threat. Finally there is the greenhouse in the garden, which is Claire's space and the symbol of her desire to step outside of her domestic role as housewife and mother, located firmly within the confines of the house. Here we see the gender politics of the film come into play, for it is Claire's very desire to take on an activity outside her domestic confines that puts the family in jeopardy. Even such an innocuous and nurturing pastime as building a greenhouse and tending to plants is too radical a step for a woman to make in this film. In hiring Peyton as a nanny (and by implication, by taking on an activity outside the home), Claire is putting her family into severe danger, particularly as she has relegated Solomon - the guardian of the domestic - to the outside. Claire, then, is doubly to blame for the misfortunes that befall the family from this point on.

The film's spatial politics really begin with Peyton's entry to the house. She is assigned the basement as her living quarters. This is important extra-diegetically, as the basement is a cliché in cinematic horror, often the place where the monster lurks. But it is also important within the diegesis because the basement is clearly defined as a non-domestic space. It is predominantly white, sparsely furnished and undecorated as opposed to the cosy glowing comfort of the home. But as the film progresses, Peyton gradually invades the domestic space. We see her at home with the family in the living room, in the kitchen cooking the family meal, and in Claire and Michael's bedroom, a clear infiltration into their privacy, signified most clearly by her borrowing Claire's bracelet without asking. Most importantly, though, she becomes supreme in the nursery - the focal point of this film -

redecorating it and marking it off as her own, the border running around the room a clear sign of a boundary. It is from here that her power radiates; as Marlene warns Claire, "the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world," or at least the world of this film. As Peyton becomes increasingly comfortable in the house, and as a result of the wedges she drives between Claire and her family, Claire becomes increasingly alienated, culminating in the scene where she comes downstairs and sees her family with Peyton playing a game in the lounge. She remains on the stairs, isolated and unable to enter. Her alienation from the house is most striking when she sits in the nursery crying after accusing Michael of having an affair with Marlene, something that Peyton has made her believe. She is sitting in the nursery, the central space of the house and the focal point of Peyton's control. She is in silhouette by the window, rocking herself alone, and the baby is there but asleep, not requiring her presence. Her alienation from her surroundings emphasises Peyton's complete control of the domestic realm at this point.

Claire's subconscious realisation that Peyton has usurped her position becomes apparent in this scene. When she and Michael make their peace she asks him if they can go away for a while, the whole family without Peyton. This shows not only her awakening realisation that Peyton is the source of the domestic difficulties, but also her need to get out of the domestic space in which she has become an outsider. On overhearing this on the baby monitor, Peyton rigs a booby-trap in the greenhouse in an attempt to kill Claire. As explained earlier the greenhouse is the site of Claire's transgression of the symbolic - her attempt to do something outside of the home. However, it is Marlene - the film's most undomesticated female character - who dies in her place. The death of this strong and assertive woman along with the destruction of Claire's transgressive space symbolises

the death of Claire's ambition for an outside life. From this point on in the film she becomes active, fighting to regain her place in the family. She retraces Marlene's investigation, going to Victor Mott's house and discovering Peyton's identity the moment she sees the nursery, which is decorated in exactly the same way that Peyton has decorated their own. The importance of the nursery is again underlined here, as it is her realisation that the nursery has been marked off as Peyton's space that so horrifies Claire. Peyton is supreme in the Domestic realm by controlling the nursery, the space most closely associated with the Mother.

The music

My analysis of *Fatal Attraction* showed how the music implicitly criticised the domestic situation. In *Cradle*, by contrast, the home is idealised by the domestic theme. This is a peaceful, almost pastoral theme with its woodwind and strings instrumentation, in a secure four-time with a melody moving smoothly in steps. As demonstrated earlier, the film opens by tying this gentle theme to the house itself. What becomes absolutely crucial to my reading of the film is that the theme itself is a slower, softer version of "Poor Wand'ring One", a song taken from the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*, which becomes associated with Peyton throughout the film. It would appear that the Bartells are rather keen on Gilbert and Sullivan as several operetta songs can be heard playing in the background in the house, or even being sung by Michael and Emma. "Poor Wand'ring One" itself is first heard playing diegetically as Claire gets ready for dinner with Michael. This scene marks Peyton's first move to take over the domestic space as she is in Claire and Michael's bedroom, and commits her first act of sabotage by spilling perfume on Claire's dress. Later we hear it on Peyton's clock radio as she gets up in the middle of the night to

breastfeed the baby, and Peyton even hums it herself as she empties Claire's inhalers in another attempt to kill her. At the end it signifies Peyton, telling us that she is in the house when it plays on her clock radio in the basement and Michael goes down to investigate.

"Poor Wand'ring One" is an interesting choice of song to serve this function as it comes from a comic operetta, and has a light and dance-like 3/4 rhythm. There is nothing in the musical structure of the song which could be seen to signify evil or tension according to standard film-musical codes. But it is not uncommon now for films to use banal music to underscore horror, because as noted earlier, it can express a cruel indifference to what is happening on the screen - the torture scene from *Reservoir Dogs* being a prime example. So perhaps it is the very perverse jollity of the song when coupled with Peyton's insane rage which gives it its power.

There are two particular points of interest about the song being used in this specific context. Firstly the words are rather provocative. The female singer, Mabel, is offering her heart to Frederic the wayward pirate as a way for him to find peace of mind and return to the right path. In a way this reflects on Peyton, who is the 'poor wandering one' searching for peace of mind in this story, but seeking it through revenge and the destruction of the woman she blames for the death of her unborn child. The perversion of the original meaning of the song, which is after all a comic love song, makes its appearance in this context all the more twisted. The other point worth mentioning is the song's three-time rhythm. A temporal base of three is less easily broken down than a temporal base of four, which characterises the domestic theme. In this way the lilt of the song is less stable than the gentle progression of the main theme, again perhaps reflecting on Peyton's character.

The use of the same thematic material for the fatal femme as for the home that she is threatening is an unusual step. Unlike Alex in *Fatal Attraction*, who is always excluded from the family by the music, Peyton is given a musical connection with the home right from the start. Peyton's connection to the domestic is further emphasised in her scenes with baby Joey. When she meets him for the first time we hear the accompanying motif to the domestic theme (fig. 2), and we hear this again the first time she breastfeeds him, peculiarly emphasised by the tense music moments before when she looked as though she might do him harm.

figure 2: domestic theme accompaniment

This seems to indicate that her actions towards the baby are quite acceptable. The second time we see her breastfeeding him, we hear the domestic theme itself. When she is with the baby, then, Peyton is unproblematically included in the domestic space. There is no dissonance or tension, nothing to indicate that what she is doing is wrong; just an image of a woman with a child, accompanied by music that has taken on domestic associations in the context of the film. This clearly shows that in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* motherhood is a category which can be inhabited by Peyton just as easily as the baby's biological mother.

This meaning is further emphasised by Claire's lack of association with the domestic theme. We hear it only once in association with her during the narrative, in a minor distorted version as she sits crying in the nursery. Here it emphasises her isolation from the domestic and motherhood, rather than her connection with it. The film and its music,

then, clearly blame Claire for her decision to take on an activity outside the home, and shows that this is incompatible with her role as a mother; that the person who fills her space can also take her place. Motherhood is a symbolic role in this film which is only applicable inside the domestic realm. Once Claire tries to leave this realm, her role is taken away from her.

The music, then, underlines Peyton's control of the house, but at the end of the film Claire fights to wrest this away from her. The spatial politics of the final battle are fascinating. Peyton enters the house from the basement, where the monster lurks, attacking Michael on the stairs and knocking him down to the non-domestic space of the basement. She and Claire then fight it out in the kitchen (the woman's traditional realm) and Peyton overpowers her. She then goes upstairs to the nursery to get the baby, only to find that in perhaps the most important spatial move of the film Emma has taken the baby out of the nursery and hidden him. With her site of control of the Domestic removed, Peyton ranges through the house, looking for the children and destroying the house as she goes, alienating herself from the domestic site. She finally reaches the attic and finds Solomon helping Emma and the baby out of the window, to the outside where he controls and where the children can be safe. Claire arrives, and the two women face each other on equal terms in this disused and therefore neutral part of the house. The result is that Claire pushes Peyton out of the window, expelling the threat from the house, where she dies impaled on the white picket fence below, the rather too obvious sign of an ideal home. Claire, having fought the threat and succeeded, can now retake her place as the mother. This resolution to normality is accompanied by the return of the domestic theme as Claire finally invites Solomon to hold the baby and accompany them into the home. Her mistake in excluding him from the house which he has watched over throughout the film is now remedied. The

theme builds to its full version as the shot changes to the exterior of the house. Again, finally, it is the domestic space that is being celebrated, not the people within it. This is particularly clear as Michael is not included in the tableaux at the end, as he is lying in the basement with his legs broken. The non-sexual Solomon in his place avoids any distraction from the crowning importance of the mother-child bond at this moment. The mother is back where she belongs and the domestic harmony is renewed.

A final point I would like to make is that, while Peyton is definitely a villain and we are supposed to support Claire, the music does give us an opportunity to sympathise with Peyton. The first time we see her is in the lawyer's office after the death of her husband, where she is being told that she must leave her house. Here she is an object of sympathy despite her ice-cold appearance. As she leaves the lawyer's office we hear a minor theme with slowly falling strings (fig. 3), a clear indicator of sadness.

figure 3: sadness
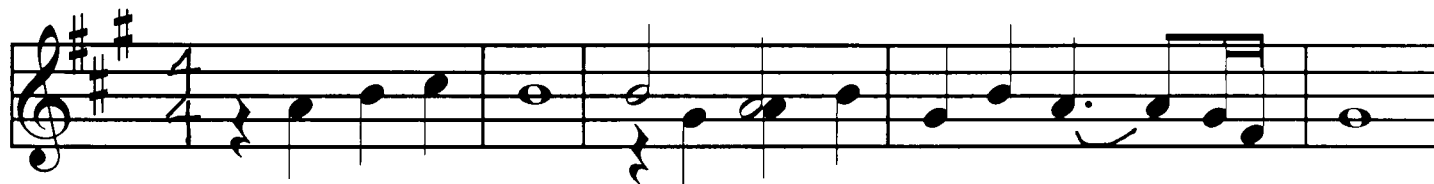
We are supposed to sympathise with Peyton, who is after all blameless at this point. But the sadness seems to revolve around her dislocation from her own domestic space, and the nursery which she will later remodel in the Bartell's home. It is only after hearing that she will lose the house that Peyton miscarries, and we are certainly never given the opportunity to see her grieving for her husband, throwing the emphasis onto the home as the most significant loss. This, then, is yet another example of the importance of space in the film. This minor theme reappears as Peyton

lies in hospital after her miscarriage and emergency hysterectomy. We are told that "she's so depressed she can hardly speak", and again the music encourages our sympathy. We hear the theme one more time as Peyton and Claire first meet, when Peyton stops the school bus so that Claire can hand a cardigan to her daughter. Here it reminds us of Peyton's situation in the face of the woman who indirectly caused it all. At this point we do not know why Peyton is there and so do not yet understand the threat she will present to the Bartells. After this scene it does not appear again. So this theme is the main musical focus of sympathy for Peyton; once she begins her campaign against the Bartells our sympathy is lost. This identification with Peyton is, then, just another opportunity for the glorification of motherhood; as with Alex, the only musical insight into Peyton's character is that underlining her desire for motherhood and domesticity. Peyton is an object of sympathy *because she has lost a child* and is now barren, and becomes a villain because of the loss of her reproductive capacity, which in this film is the most unbearable fate of all.

6.4: *SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*

The third film I am going to examine in this section is *Single White Female* (1992, dir. Barbet Schroeder, m. Howard Shore). This film is based on a book entitled "Single White Female Seeks Same" by Jon Lutz, and perhaps this is why it differs in some ways from the other fatal femme films in this section. However, it is clearly a Mad Bad Woman film in that it explains the violence of the fatal femme through madness, sets a woman against a woman, and threatens the home through an alien presence.

The plot centres on Allie (Bridget Fonda) who is an up-and-coming software designer. At the opening of the film she is with her fiancé Sam (Steven Weber), but she accidentally learns that he has been unfaithful to her with his ex-wife and ends the relationship. Hedra (Jennifer Jason Leigh) answers her advertisement for a roommate and moves in. At first they get on well but then Hedy starts to copy Allie's dress sense and interfere in her life. Allie and Sam get back together and they begin to look for a flat of their own, and Hedy starts to try and seduce Sam. Her suspicions aroused, Allie searches Hedy's room and tails her to a night-club, to discover that Hedy has lied to her about her name and her family, and is now calling herself "Allie" and dressing exactly like herself. Allie confides in her upstairs neighbour Graham but Hedy overhears and tries to kill him. Then she goes to Sam's hotel, pretending at first to be Allie, and when Sam threatens to tell Allie she kills him. When Allie finds out Hedy kidnaps her, kills her boss, Mitch, and eventually decides to kill Allie. The two finally fight it out and Allie stabs Hedy to death.

In this film, the distinction between the good woman and the bad is not so clearly marked. In contrast to the saintly wives and mothers of the first two films, Allie is very often shown to be a rather nasty piece of work. We know that she has been in New York long enough to meet and get engaged to Sam, but she only has one other friend, Graham. Her split with her former partner was "not friendly" although we never find out what actually happened, and we know that she walked off with both the software and a rent-controlled apartment, leaving the question of what her partner got out of the deal. Her treatment of Hedy is often quite poor. She assures Hedy at the interview that she won't get back together with Sam and force Hedy to move out again after she has gone to all the trouble of moving in, but then she does just that. She is quick to blame Hedy for letting Sam in to

the flat and again when their dog, Buddy, falls to his death from the window. She is progressively colder to her as time goes on. And most importantly it is she who is shown to initiate the invasion of privacy that motivates the plot, by snooping around Hedy's room and trying on perfume and jewellery. All in all, she herself could be dubbed "the roommate from Hell".

Again in contrast to the straightforward bad women of the previous two films, Hedy actually garners our sympathy. Allie is of course our main point of identification, as she is the central character of the film. She also gains our sympathy from the start when she learns about Sam's infidelity. But we get to identify with Hedy too. There are several scenes in which we see Hedy alone as an unhappy figure, and feel sympathy for her. This is unlike *Fatal Attraction*, where we almost always see Alex through the eyes of another character, and *Cradle*, where only the beginning of the film shows us a Peyton we can identify with. In *Single White Female* we see from the start that Hedy is awkward and desperately unsure of herself, and she begins to copy Allie because of her lack of confidence. We see that she is lonely, and that Allie uses her for friendship only until she has Sam again. Although she kills two people and tries to kill both Graham and Allie the killings are shown to be unpremeditated, unlike the plotting villainesses of the first two films. Hedy is obviously mad, a madness explained by the loss of her twin sister at the age of nine which we are told she has never forgiven herself for. But there seems to be an element of blame attached to Allie, because Hedy's increasing desperation to be popular grows with Allie's increasing nastiness towards her, and it is this that leads to her imitating Allie. This film is very unusual then, in that our sympathies are somewhat divided.

This lack of differentiation between the two women as opposed to the clear dichotomy between good and bad woman in the previous two films, is

part of a larger narrative strategy. Schroeder called the film a "symphony of mirrors", and through the use of mirrors and the similarity in appearance between the two women we begin to realise that they are in some ways alike. Although Allie appears to be successful and confident she is "afraid of being alone", the state that has caused Hedy's psychosis. Allie's lack of confidence is apparent when she becomes jealous of Sam and Hedy, although perhaps with reason given his past. So our divided sympathies reflect the comparative closeness of the two characters.

This film also differs from the previous Mad Bad Women narratives in that the threat in this film is not to a family and Hedy is not a frustrated mother. In a pre-adolescent version of the Mad Bad Woman movie, Hedy wants a sister. Although she breaks up what has the potential to be a family in killing Sam, the effect is not the same. We know that Sam has cheated on Allie before and are therefore left in doubt as to whether or not their marriage would be a success. There are also no children, bypassing the regularly occurring motherhood theme. The major threat in this film is to Allie herself, and as I have said, she is not the most likeable of heroines. This leaves the meanings of the film very open to interpretation.

The music

The main theme, which recurs several times throughout the film, is heard first at the opening sequence where two little girls make each other up in front of the mirror. We will later realise that this is a young version of Hedy and her twin sister, who died at the age of nine. The main theme is major but consists simply of a repeated phrase which falls lower and lower until finding a point of repose and cadence (fig 1). So unlike the scores for *Fatal Attraction* and *Cradle*, the main theme here is not melodically dynamic material which idealises the domestic situation. Instead it is a rather static

piece of music which seems to fall aimlessly until eventually reaching a cadence.

figure 1: twinning theme

This is representative of much of the score. The main theme represents the twinning, which as we have already seen is an important aspect of the movie, and throughout the film it relates to Hedy's desire for a sister. Unlike the previous two films, then, the musical score here gives a continuing insight into Hedy's feelings and gives us space to sympathise with her. This is particularly noticeable in that the theme is not threatening or dark, but major and falls to a resolution. However it is accompanied by high, squeaky, dissonant notes which reflect Hedy's madness. This is an early clue to a certain ambiguity that the music will exhibit towards Hedy.

As with *Cradle*, *Single White Female* excludes the man from the central relationship. Although Sam does play an instrumental part in the narrative, it is the relationship between Allie and Hedy that is really important. The music underlines this in that Sam is very often excluded from musical accompaniment. At the opening when Allie finds out about his infidelity there is no music at all even though this is obviously an emotional moment. The music does not enter until Allie is writing out her advert for a Single White Female to share her flat. This makes it apparent that it is the roommate who matters. The film can be musically divided into two halves. In the first half the music is light and mellow, melodic major themes played by flutes or oboes with string accompaniment. The only point of tension is

high, squeaky and slightly dissonant falling semitones as Allie first writes

the advertisement, an early hint that this could be a mistake. At first,

however, all seems well. Light and harmonic themes, such as that shown in

figure 2, accompany Allie interviewing potential flatmates, and also play

throughout Hedy settling in and the montages of the two bonding. The

peaceful melodic music makes these scenes seem idyllic.

figure 2: all is well

When Graham asks Allie prophetically if she's "ready to kill her yet?"

Allie says that "its fun having a girlfriend again", and the music backs this

up. So the first half of the film is marked by its peaceful melodies, and the

section ends as Allie and Hedy fall asleep watching an old film where a

woman parts from her lover, saying that it has been "a wonderful few weeks,

while you loved me". This rather obvious device marks the end of the

halcyon days of Allie and Hedy's relationship. Noticeably, none of the

peaceful music commutes into the second half of the film. The twinning

theme makes some more appearances, but as I have already stated it is not a

melodically dynamic theme. The second half of the film is marked by

remarkably static music, sound webs and held notes, often very dissonant

and usually at extremes of pitch. All contribute to an increasingly tense

atmosphere. The only music that seems to move at all is during the scene

where Allie is following Hedy to a night-club, and even here the melodic line

seems aimless, although the rhythmic quavers are creating movement.

The violent scenes are also scored in an unusually static manner.

Although both Hedy's and Sam's deaths are scored with heavy, falling,

dissonant chords which underline the horror of the scene - a fairly standard musical code - much of the actual action is strangely scored. Fight scenes tend to be accompanied by rhythmic dissonant movement, such as during the fight between Alex and Dan in her flat in *Fatal Attraction*. But in this film only Hedy's fight with Mitch has any rhythmic movement, scored by fast strings which still seem aimless in a reflection of panic. The fight between Allie and Hedy, however, is scored by dissonant little-moving chords, feeling very static. The music seems determined not to release the tension that the second half of the film has created in its unrelenting static dissonance. When Allie finally kills Hedy the actual stab itself is unaccompanied by music, with the result that it is totally unexpected; even now the music is refusing to give us the satisfaction required in this most momentous of actions. The heavy chords enter immediately afterwards as Allie stabs Hedy again and she dies, mirroring her death with Sam's. Finally as Allie looks at Hedy and shuts her eyes the music falls to a peaceful major conclusion, indicating that peace has returned.

Things of course will never be the same. Sam is dead and Allie has to create a new life for herself. The previous two films allowed the ending to return to something of the same state that existed before the threat of the fatal femme emerged, but in this film everything is changed. It is interesting in this context that this is the only film that finishes with a pop song. Although this is almost certainly a commercial marketing strategy it adds a new dimension to the film's ending, a complete rupture with what has gone before. The words of the song echo this rupture - "the state of independence shall be".

The only theme that runs throughout the film, then, is the twinning theme. This is the theme that opens the film over shots of the two girls playing with cosmetics in the mirror. It represents Hedy's point of view -

her desperate longing for a sister and her belief that Allie can fill that role. It appears at key points in the film to indicate the sisterhood between Allie and Hedy, for example when Allie tells Hedy she can move in and their relationship is begun. It also appears when Hedy watches Sam and Allie kiss through the window. This is very significant because it is placing the emphasis on Hedy as Allie's partner and not Sam. Sam is simply a narrative device to move the plot, not a character with whom we can sympathise. The theme plays again when we see Hedy in the hairdressers, having had her hair cut exactly like Allie's, and here it indicates their physical twinning. At this point the device of the mirror, which has appeared periodically throughout the film, changes. Up to now we have seen Allie and Hedy often standing side by side looking into the mirror, paralleling their relationship with that of the young twins at the beginning of the film. The music has also done this at key points through the use of the twinning theme. Here the change in Hedy coupled with the music throws the emphasis onto Hedy as the synthesis of the two characters. From now on we no longer see Allie in the mirror with Hedy, she is no longer necessary. When we look at Hedy in the mirror we can see both of them. The final appearance of the twinning theme comes after Allie has kissed Hedy, persuading her not to kill her, and Hedy cries on Allie's lap. Here it is implying Allie's eventual acceptance of their sisterhood. But we know that this is a desperate attempt on Allie's part to stay alive, so its appearance here strongly demonstrates that the theme reflects Hedy's perception of their relationship, and places the emphasis on her desperate need for a sister rather than on Allie's fear.

So on several occasions the music gives us the opportunity to sympathise with Hedy. But oddly the score also attempts to undermine this sympathy, making the film's approach to Hedy rather schizophrenic. For example, when Allie comes into the flat after her night with Sam there are

deep, menacing rumbles in the score. We can hear the threat in the music but it has no focus until she goes into her room and is scared by Hedy, who suddenly says in a menacing hiss, "where the hell have you been?" After the peaceful music which accompanied Hedy's move into the apartment, the music now begins to set up this same apartment as a site of threat to Allie, and from here onwards becomes static and dissonant. But the most blatant example of the music undermining Hedy as a point of identification actually appears in the first half of the film, before the halcyon days are over. This is in the key scene where Allie goes into Hedy's room to drop off a lampshade, and then starts to look through her things and try on her perfume and earrings. Although this is obviously unacceptable behaviour, the music is light and continues the peaceful sound of the major themes which characterise this half of the film. But when Hedy moves into frame behind her there is a sudden deep dissonant rumble, which builds to Allie seeing her. The visual iconography of this scene - the threat moving into shot behind a blissfully unaware heroine - coupled with this scoring sets up Hedy as the threat, despite the fact that Allie is the one contravening the rules, even beginning the invasion of privacy which she later finds so unacceptable from Hedy. Again Allie's culpability in the situation is hinted. But the music uncompromisingly picks out Hedy as the threat to Allie's happiness.

The music, then, portrays Hedy as evil while simultaneously giving us space to sympathise with her. This unusual approach to the mad, bad woman is related to the film's concentration on sisterhood. This is reflected in the music as the twinning theme is the only one that continues throughout the film. Tasker (1998) tells us that the femme fatale is by definition opposed to other women, so the stress on sisterhood here is extremely unusual. However, this film fulfils its position in the fatal femme cycle by its absolute

denouncement of sisterhood. Tasker also asserts that strong women in narratives of female friendship tend to become coded as lesbian (1998: 152). Jermyn (1996) declares that in *Single White Female*, Hedy represents the abject of lesbian desire and Allie must destroy her in order to confirm her own heterosexuality. The director has denied any lesbian overtones were intended (Jermyn 1996: 265), and it is apparent from the film that Hedy desires a twin. But Holmlund states that it is the same thing, arguing that "lesbians are mirrors (to each other), mothers (of each other), and men (for each other)" (1994: 36-7). The idea that lesbians are mirrors of each other can be seen most clearly in *Basic Instinct* (to be discussed later), which Hart sees as acceding "to the historical myth of the lesbian as narcissistic" (1994: 129). Hedy, then, fits into Tasker's third category of violent women; the "Other". Alex and Peyton are violent because they are frustrated mothers; Hedy is violent because she is a lesbian.

So this film, like so many others, attacks the idea that women can have close platonic friendships. But *Single White Female* goes much further. Despite the fact that Sam has cheated on Allie, she is punished for not forgiving him by the arrival of Hedy in his place. Although the man in her life is unfaithful, the alternative - a woman - is demonstrated to be much worse. In the end even Mitch, who has sexually assaulted Allie, is presented as a favourable alternative to Hedy, in that he attempts to save Allie and is killed. Mitch's transformation into a hero, and the disappointment we are supposed to feel when Hedy kills him, is an even more direct negation of feminism than that seen in *Fatal Attraction*. In this context the feminist message delivered by Hedy to a confused Allie after Mitch's assault - "No Allie, don't turn this around. You're the victim" - is made into a mockery. So if the Mad Bad Women films concentrate on locking the good woman back into her position within the patriarchal system, *Single White Female* seems to

demonstrate this even more fully than the previous two films. At the end Sam is dead and Allie is on her own, independent, but her loyalties are shown even now to remain with him.

6.5: Conclusion: Masquerade

The concept of "masquerade" refers to women who put on a performance of femininity in order to hide their masculine nature (Riviere, 1929). The mad, bad women in these films can all be seen to masquerade as feminine, and this mask of femininity contrasts with their true selves and in particular with their "masculine" violence. This is particularly clear in Peyton's case, where she consciously performs the role of loving nanny in order to hide her vengeful motives. Peyton uses costume as her major tool in this performance, changing from her power-dressed appearance at the beginning of the film to a pastel cardigan-wearing angelic look. This use of costume can also be seen in the other two films. Alex is angelic in white, signifying purity, and Hedy obsessively copies Allie in clothes and appearance. After Allie discovers that Hedy has lied about her identity she follows her to a nightclub, only to discover that now Hedy is masquerading as Allie herself, dressing like her and using her name. Whereas Peyton's masquerade is a conscious disguise of her real motives, Hedy's is a crazy attempt to gain the popularity that she desires, by disguising herself as the type of woman she would like to be.

This emphasis on masquerade could be seen to problematise gender boundaries in these films, by demonstrating the arbitrary nature of femininity. We can clearly see that the supposed femininity of the fatal femmes is false, and is used to hide a threatening reality. But the good

women in these films negate this conclusion, by standing as the picture of "true" femininity. Their ultimate survival and their fight to regain the domestic - in essence, to epitomise the feminine ideal - negates the force of the fatal femme's masquerade. While the fatal femmes also desire the domestic, and can even fit comfortably into the domestic environment, they fail because they are not truly feminine, like the good women. It is also important to note that the contrast between the fatal femme's feminine mask and her true violent nature emphasises again that violence is not a natural feminine trait. These women are masculinised by default because they do not live up to the femininity that they consciously display, and this masculinity is tied to their violence.

CHAPTER 7: Fatal Femmes 2: "Violence and the Bitch Goddess"[1]

7.1: Introduction

The first category of Fatal Femme films, then, revolves around the home and the family, emphasising the importance of the domestic and destroying the women who transgress the traditional, passive female role. In these films the true nature of femininity as maternal and caring is confirmed and the patriarchal system is finally upheld. However, the second category of Fatal Femme films is rather different. The domestic relations that are so central for the mad, bad women are sidelined, and the relationship between the fatal femme and the main male character comes back to the fore, the struggle between women becoming a sideline issue or even non-existent. These fatal femmes are modelled on the femme fatale of 1940s noir. Unlike the passionately crazy mad bad women, the bitch goddesses are cool and collected, using their sexuality and "femininity" to attract and control the helpless male dupes who are obsessed with them. The difference, as Pidduck (1995) points out, is that these fatal femmes are a lot more violent and ready to do their killing themselves.

Of the three films I am going to look at here, *Malice* remains the closest to the Mad Bad Women pattern because it concentrates on domesticity (albeit from a different perspective), and its fatal femme is eventually defeated. *Basic Instinct* also includes some elements of the Mad Bad Women films, such as the idea of the two women set against each other, although its conclusion is quite different. *The Last Seduction*, however, takes

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[1] Stephen Farber, 1974.

the Bitch Goddess narrative to the extreme in its portrayal of possibly the nastiest film villainess ever to grace the screen. It is my contention that the bitch goddesses are more opaque in their motivations than the mad, bad women, and their violent natures are never really explained. But while the first two films in this section do still hint at explanations, and mothering or Otherness still hold a place in these narratives, *The Last Seduction* does away with explanations all together and in this sense its heroine is the most transgressive of all the female characters I have examined.

As with the mad, bad women, masquerade is an important element of the female characterisation here. But while masquerade was employed to a serious end in the Mad Bad Women films, the bitch goddesses enjoy the exercise of their power through taking on a mask of frailty. They are defined by their manipulative natures and enjoy "screwing with people's heads". With no good female foil to portray a real 'femininity', the masquerade in these films is even more threatening.

7.2: *MALICE*

Malice (1993, dir. Harold Becker, m. Jerry Goldsmith) is set in a small college town, where a serial rapist is attacking the female students in the care of the associate Dean, Andy (Bill Pullman). The second girl to be attacked is rushed to hospital and the new resident surgeon, Jed (Alec Baldwin) saves her life. Jed is an old school acquaintance of Andy's, and Andy invites him to move into the old house where he lives with his wife Tracy (Nicole Kidman). Another of Andy's students is attacked and killed by the rapist, and the policewoman in charge of the investigation, Dana (Bebe Neuwirth) asks Andy for a sperm sample to exclude him from the suspects. Soon after

this Tracy collapses due to an ovarian cyst and Jed performs emergency surgery, asking Andy's permission to remove both ovaries and informing him that Tracy had been pregnant but the foetus had aborted during surgery. After the operation it is discovered that the second ovary was healthy, and a bitter Tracy leaves Andy and sues the hospital, winning twenty million dollars. Andy then finds out that he is sterile from the sperm sample he gave to the police, and learns that Tracy and Jed have been lovers all along and had set up the whole situation for the money. He tracks Tracy down and tells her that the son of their next door neighbour has seen Jed giving Tracy injections of a drug that causes ovarian cysts. He demands half the money in order to keep quiet. Tracy tells Jed to kill the boy, and when he refuses she kills him. She then goes to kill the boy herself, but Andy is waiting for her with Dana, and Tracy is arrested.

Of the three films I am going to look at in this section, *Malice* remains the closest to the formula seen in the Mad Bad Women films. It centres on the domestic realm as the others do, with the young happy couple and their dreams of filling the house with children. At the start it appears that the film will be another in the "Yuppie Horror" cycle, where the home will be threatened by an outside force, in this case Jed. However, this emphasis on the domestic picture turns out to be false. Tracy, we learn, had no intention of having children; in fact she got pregnant simply in order to double the money in her settlement with the hospital. Her willingness to have her ovaries removed has many implications, only one of which is the revelation that the idyllic domestic picture is false. In an interesting move, Andy tells Dana that the second and a half when he knew that Tracy was pregnant was the happiest moment of his life, before he discovered the foetus had aborted during surgery. So it would appear that in this film it is the *man* for whom the domestic has the most importance, rather than the woman.

In this way, *Malice* reverses the typical Hollywood gender roles. Leitch argues that Andy is constructed as feminine in this film, being passive while Tracy is active, and being the only man attacked by the serial rapist. It is certainly true that Andy exhibits some of the major features of the good women in the previous section. It is he rather than his wife that demurs at renting out the third floor of the house, because he "doesn't want a stranger in the house". He is scared by Jed's sudden appearance in the front doorway early on in the film, reminiscent of Claire's fright when she first sees Solomon in *Cradle*, or Allie's start at the sudden appearance of Hedy in *Single White Female*. Tracy too is startled by Jed a little later on, when he appears behind her in the bathroom. Jed is set up as the major threat to the household through these two scenes, but we will later come to realise that Tracy is the mastermind behind the plan, and that Jed is dominated by her. When he eventually decides not to go along with her wishes, refusing to kill the child and slapping her in an attempt to regain dominance, she coolly shoots him. Jed's passivity and his protection of the child which is normally the female role, could be seen to mark him out as feminised in the context of Hollywood film. By contrast Tracy becomes less feminine throughout the film. This is emphatically not because she is consciously "masculinised" in the way that the action heroines were, but because we realise that her earlier femininity was just a masquerade to help her fulfil her diabolical plot. By the end of the film she is killing people, completely destroying her original passive image. This, then, demonstrates what Leitch means in his description of the gender roles in this film; the men are passive and the woman active, allowing a gender-role reversal. Even Dana, the police woman, is deep-voiced and power-dressed, able to demand a sperm sample from Andy and so effectively in sexual control.

We could, then, see the film as a fight between a "good woman" (Andy) and a "fatal femme" (Tracy) with Jed as the prize. This reading is supported by Andy's relationship with Jed. We are told that Andy wants to "relive high school and be friends with the quarterback this time", and Andy only finally breaks down when he realises that Jed has been in on the plot. But this role-reversal does not continue throughout the film. Although Andy may be seen as passive at the beginning of the film, he later becomes active. All the good women have followed this pattern of becoming active in order to save their family, but Andy does it in order to get his revenge. He has no family to save, and we see his lack of interest in this mission by his indifference to Tracy when she tries to seduce him near the end of the film. Andy, then, is demonstrating that a bad woman should not try to get the better of a man. He needs no excuse to try and bring Tracy to justice, unlike the good women who are motivated by their desire to save their families, particularly their children. Here we can see the crucial function played by the rapist in the narrative. Andy moves from passive to active when he discovers the identity of the rapist and fights him, badly beating him. Not only is this demonstrating that he is becoming active, it is making a point about the gender roles of the film. Andy is becoming the guardian of womankind, beating up the rapist that has threatened them. He is transformed into the patriarchal champion who protects women. The patriarchal system is ultimately victorious in this film, with Tracy being taken off to jail. In the previous three films the bad woman has been destroyed by the good. Here the same thing happens, but the good woman has been transformed into a man, and the patriarchal justice system takes over the punishment of the fatal femme. The end result is the same, however, with the traditional gender roles firmly re-established. It is important to be aware that Andy needs to transform clearly into a male

character in order to retain our sympathy as the hero of this film. Had he remained weak we would have been less inclined to identify with him. In beating the rapist he reaffirms his masculinity, and he becomes active in tracking Tracy down and getting revenge. In this we can see that while an active woman is threatening to dominant gender roles, a passive man is even worse.

The music

Like *Cradle* or *Fatal Attraction*, then, this film concentrates on the home. But in *Malice* the domestic scene is a sham. This brings to mind the music from *Fatal Attraction*, which as we have seen only idealises the domestic scene after we have seen its lack of perfection. *Malice*, however, opens with an almost too lyrical theme (fig. 1), a swaying three-time melody sung by a chorus with soft orchestral accompaniment.

figure 1: ideal life

Coupled with the scene of a quiet college town and a girl happily riding a bike, this opening is the expression of a perfect small town lifestyle. We will discover immediately, however, that the town is being terrorised by a serial rapist, exposing the dark and ugly reality beneath its peaceful, sunlit surface. This prepares us for the central plot, a gradual destruction of the idyllic picture of Andy and Tracy's life. Although Andy believes that they are happy together, Tracy has created a veneer of perfection in order to give strength to the claim that she hopes to make against the hospital. We are told that she has "volunteered five days a week in the children's ward", "and

baked cookies for the staff". As the lawyer tells the hospital, Tracy and Andy's life is a Norman Rockwell painting. We will discover however that this is all surface veneer, created by the calculating and diabolical Tracy in order to maximise the hospital payout when Jed destroys the picture. Their life together, then, is literally too good to be true. In this sense the overkill on the opening theme can be seen to reflect the picture of life in this town that the film presents. It is too lyrical, too happy, too peaceful. The three-time rhythm, as has been mentioned before, is an uncertain rhythmic base, and so although lyrical it is also slightly insecure. The unexpected dissonance as the cyclist rides into the shadow of the bridge and the high, jarring, dissonant plinks with which the tune finishes act to disrupt the seeming perfection of the music. This intimation that all is not what it seems is backed up promptly by the film, as the girl on the bike is attacked almost immediately the credits have ended. To see the perfection of Andy and Tracy's life disrupted, however, we have to wait considerably longer.

The "perfect" theme is the most important aspect of the score in terms of what it tells us about the characters. It appears several times played diegetically by Andy and Tracy's young next door neighbour - the same boy that Tracy tries to kill at the end of the film. It first appears in the film itself near the beginning, as Tracy and Andy begin to make love. Here its presence does two things. It alerts Andy to the presence of the child at the window, and he is distracted because he thinks the boy is watching them. Tracy, however, is unworried. This is consequential because Andy's concern over the invasion of privacy seems a more feminine role - think of Claire in *Cradle*. In this way the scene is further consolidating Andy's traditionally feminine position at the beginning of this film. The other salient point is that the theme is played very badly and disjointedly on a small electric keyboard. This is in sharp contrast to the overblown excesses of the opening credits. It

is already signalling here that the ideal home is not so ideal, the theme doing what the music in *Fatal Attraction* did but in a different way, undermining the status of the relationship through presence, not absence. The theme appears again as Andy is searching for Tracy, having tracked her to an address which we will discover is Jed's house. Andy peers through the window of the house and spots Tracy's doll, which he has already mistakenly identified in her mother's flat. As we see the doll which used to stand in their hallway we hear the "perfect" theme briefly, the slight echoey distance of the music demonstrating that the doll has reminded Andy of his previous happy life. The theme appears twice more in the film, both times played by the boy. The first is as Andy picks up a discarded syringe from the bedroom floor, which he will discover Tracy had used to inject herself with a drug that causes ovarian cysts. Here it reminds us of the boy's propensity to sit at the window, which is important because Andy will use this information in his plot to fool Tracy. It appears again as Tracy approaches the boy's house and goes up to his room to try and kill him. Its diegetic appearances, so badly and disjointedly played, are reminders of the broken state of the central relationship of the film, the exposure of the ugliness beneath the veneer of beauty. The full theme in its choral and orchestral rendition closes the film over the end credits, but by now we are wise to the violence and fraud hidden under the superficial perfection of the town, and the music seems tainted.

The other main thematic material in *Malice* is the "tension" motif (fig. 2) and its variations. The main point of interest about this motif lies in the differences between its variations. Although its main character seems to be the 5-note short rendition shown in figure 2, it appears sometimes in a 6/8 version, sometimes as an extended 5/8 theme, and sometimes alternating between two rhythms.

figure 2: tension

At scenes of action it appears with an irregular rhythm, such as its percussive 5/8 during Andy's fight with the rapist, or its alternation between 5/8 and 7/8 as Andy drives through the rain on his mission to find Tracy's doctor. At moments of repose it appears in a 6/8 form. But none of these moments are actually relaxed, for example its appearance as Jed smokes after operating on Tracy. At this point we believe him to be uneasy about having removed her second ovary without proper analysis, but with hindsight he is worrying about the aborted foetus. The 6/8 rendition also appears as Andy goes home after discovering Tracy and Jed's affair, as Tracy tries to get Jed to agree to killing the boy, and as Tracy is taken away at the end of the film. In all of these places there is tension, if not actual action. The theme and its association to the unhappy action of the film adds tension to these scenes. Its 6/8 rhythm may be less jarring than the 5/8 or 7/8 rhythms of the action, but it is cyclical and so not as secure as it could be. Its appearance at the end of the film demonstrates that although the film is over and justice is served, our hero Andy is not at repose. He has, after all, lost his family. In this the film's tension is never really dissipated.

So if *Malice* follows the Mad Bad Women formula to at least some extent, its lack of explanation for Tracy's violence is unusual. We are told that her father was a conman and we can see her mother is a drunk, and we know that her father robbed her when she was a child; all of which signals that Tracy's childhood was not exactly ideal. But this is not really thrust

forward for attention, and moreover, it does not site Tracy within a recognisable stereotype of violent womanhood - macho, mother or other. Unlike the Mad Bad Women films, which allowed us an insight into the minds of the fatal femmes, here we never get Tracy's side of the story. She never indulges in an explanation for the way she is.

However, the myth of motherhood as the centre of female life still appears in the film, although with a very different meaning; Tracy is especially diabolical because she is prepared to have her ovaries removed for money. We have seen Andy and Jed discussing whether or not they would give one finger for a million dollars, and after deliberation they both say no. By contrast Tracy is not only prepared to give up part of her own body for money, an inhuman act in itself, but she is prepared to lose her ovaries, her capacity to be a mother. This is the major signifier of her femininity, and in the coded world of Hollywood film it is the loss of her capacity to reproduce which makes her unfeminine. Adrienne Rich demonstrates the widespread societal acceptance of this connection between femininity and the womb, epitomised by the following quote: "[w]ith sterilization the woman voluntarily surrenders a portion of her femininity" (Rich, 1976: 263). Tracy's demonstrative lack of interest in children marks her out as an abnormal woman in this context. Realising that in Western society barrenness would gain her far more sympathy than the mere loss of a limb, she has acted all along as though she loved children, volunteering to work in the children's ward. But for Tracy her capacity to reproduce is a ticket to money; she firstly tried to get pregnant to force a rich man to marry her, and when that did not work she engineered a plan to have her ovaries removed for the insurance money. So Tracy is using the widespread belief in the predominance of motherhood - a belief that we have seen strongly upheld in the Mad Bad Women films - in order to make money; she is using the repressive ideals of

a patriarchal society for her own ends. If she had only succeeded this would have been a fascinating narrative twist. But instead the film condemns her as heartless and evil, by contrasting her willingness to lose part of her body with Andy and Jed, and then by having her kill Jed and attempt to kill the boy. Furthermore her plan fails. Tracy is evil, and evil cannot triumph.

Significantly, there is a further dimension to Tracy's planned abortion. Tracy saw her pregnancy as part of her plan to defraud the hospital, but Andy's feelings about the pregnancy show that he considered the foetus his child. In this way Andy's revenge on Tracy can be seen as justified for her murder of his baby, mirrored in her capture as she attempts to kill another child. Killing her own child marks her out as the most monstrous of all the fatal femmes to date, and the accompanying condemnation of abortion, seen in a feminist light as the woman's right to choose, can be seen as further reinforcing the film's patriarchal stance.

So in this way motherhood does enter the narrative of the film. But unlike in the previous films studied, it is not being used to explain Tracy's violence. Instead it sets her apart as even more monstrous because she has no maternal feeling; it is used to condemn her rather than excuse her. Motherhood also has another, more obvious, presence in the film through the character of Tracy's mother, played by Anne Bancroft. She appears only once in the film, when Andy goes to see her having only just found out she is still alive, and she immediately guesses Tracy's plan. It is therefore Tracy's mother who ultimately causes her downfall by making Andy see what is really happening. In this way she is marked out as a bad mother and a threat to her daughter. Although I contend that Tracy's violence is not really explained by her childhood, this is the closest the film comes to an explanation of her violence. We are told that Tracy idolised her father and

that he was a conman, suggesting that Tracy is a chip off the old block. But throughout Andy's conversation with Tracy's mother we can see the strong likenesses between her and Tracy. Her immediate understanding of the plot shows that they think in the same way, and it is through her that we begin to see the plot as a con job, a game that Tracy is playing. She tells Andy to "get into the game" and go for the money himself, and when he deduces that Tracy had a doctor as a partner she affirms his guess by saying "welcome to the game". Tracy's mother, too, is diabolical because she sees things in the same way as Tracy. She has the same ornaments as Tracy (the doll), and she uses phrases that we have heard Tracy use, most obviously: "Once money's involved you take me seriously, right?" This phrase not only demonstrates their shared love of games - Tracy's mother is trying to get Andy to bet on a card trick that she is performing - but shows us that Tracy has learned a lot from her estranged mother. Perhaps her plot can even be seen as an attempt not to end up like her mother; she will get rich and be unable to repeat the cycle with her own children because she will be barren.

So although motherhood is not central to this film, it is still held up as a possible culprit behind the violence; not as a motivation for Tracy's actions, but as a possible reason for the way she is. Tracy's lack of mothering instinct is also her ultimate condemnation. Despite the differences with the Mad Bad Women films, *Malice* ultimately supports the patriarchal ideal through the activation and eventual triumph of the good husband. But in portraying a woman who is not maternal, and using the dominant ideology about motherhood against the social system, the film moves away from the Mad Bad Women formula.

7.3 *BASIC INSTINCT*

The 1992 production of *Basic Instinct* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, m. Jerry Goldsmith) achieved stunning levels of notoriety. A hugely expensive production with an enormous box office success, it largely spawned the generic label "erotic thriller" which refers to big-budget productions such as *Final Analysis* and *Body of Evidence,* as well as the many lower-budget films such as *Night Rhythms, Carnal Crimes* etc. The label has also been applied to the other two films discussed in this section, although as Leitch (1994) points out *Malice* hardly counts as an erotic thriller. Rather, the term has become an industry label which is being used as a marketing device after the success of *Basic Instinct. Basic Instinct's* notoriety derived from its explicit sex scenes, and the film provoked a storm of criticism for its perceived negative portrayal of lesbians (for a discussion of this, see Holmlund, 1994).

Basic Instinct opens with a murder scene, a woman murdering her lover with an ice pick at the moment of climax. Detective Nick Curran (Michael Douglas) and his partner Gus are set to work on the case, and their first suspect is the dead man's girlfriend, the fabulously rich novelist Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone), mainly because one of her professors at college had also been killed with an ice pick. Catherine's alibi is that the killing has been carried out in exactly the way she had described a killing in a book she wrote, and that someone is trying to frame her for the murder. Nick becomes obsessed with Catherine, making her female live-in lover, Roxy, jealous. Catherine begins to write a book about a detective based on Nick, where he falls for the wrong woman and she kills him. She finds out personal things about him that he only told to the police psychologist, Nick's former girlfriend, Beth (Jeanne Tripplehorn). Nick believes that Neilsen, an

Internal Affairs detective, has sold Catherine his file and has a fight with him. That night Neilsen is found dead, and Nick is suspended from the force. Nick then discovers that Catherine and Beth had been lovers at college, and that Beth's husband had been shot dead in mysterious circumstances, and begins to believe that Beth is the killer. Despite all Beth's warnings he becomes more and more involved with Catherine. Roxy tries to kill him by running him over in Catherine's car, but crashes and dies herself. Catherine finishes her book and tells Nick the relationship is over, turning from him to her new female lover, Hazel. Then at a supposed meeting with an informant, Gus is stabbed to death and Nick shoots Beth, believing her to be the culprit. A police search of Beth's apartment reveals the gun used to shoot Neilsen and many photos of Catherine. The case is closed, and Nick goes home to find Catherine waiting for him, wanting to get back together. The film ends with a shot of an ice-pick under the bed where Nick and Catherine are making love.

It is clear from this synopsis that the film remains ambiguous about the identity of the killer throughout. It seems likely that either Catherine or Beth is responsible for the opening murder of Johnny Boz and the killings of Neilsen and Gus, but the film never reveals the answer to the puzzle. The murders of the college professor and Beth's husband are also never explained, and even Catherine's parents' death has a question mark over it. The possibility that Beth was having a lesbian affair at the time of her husband's death is not confirmed or denied, and we never discover how Catherine got hold of Nick's personal information, leading Hart (1994) to consider the possibility that Beth herself is Catherine's informant and that the two were working together. She says:

"Is Catherine the victim of a crazed stalker, or is she a diabolical killer who has banked on her book as the perfect alibi? Is Beth the rejected lover bent on revenge? From this point on, the film never lets us stop guessing. Nor does it satisfactorily *resolve* these questions. For, despite the final shot of the ice pick under Catherine's bed, it is possible that now Catherine is the (potential) "copycat" killer." (130)

To support this argument, Hart points out firstly that the steel ice pick under the bed is a different brand from the cheap wooden picks used for the murders, and secondly that it would be well-nigh impossible for Catherine to do all the things necessary to set up Beth for the crimes in the available time. While this is certainly true, it does not take account of the fact that the film is totally based on Catherine's uncanny omnipotence and control. The visual iconography and the musical score work together to emphasise her power. In this Catherine is a throwback to the powerful femme fatale of film noir, but in an updated version of the old story she controls the women as well as the men.

All four of the women in this film are lesbian killers, and their identity as such is entirely dependent upon Catherine. As with *Single White Female* their killer instinct is tied up with their lesbian desire, and so the film connects their violence to their "Otherness". Tasker states that crime genres often conflate "the transgression of conventional norms or behaviour with criminality" (1998: 92), and here the connection is with the women's 'transgressive' sexuality. Also as in *Single White Female* there is a stress on the likenesses between the women, again acceding "to the historical myth of the lesbian as narcissistic" (Hart, 1994: 129). Hart argues that Roxy and Hazel function to prove that Catherine is truly a lesbian because her real love is reserved for women, but they also resemble her physically. The fourth major female character, Beth, breaks the icy blonde pattern with her dark hair. She seems to represent a step back towards the Mad Bad Women films

in that she acts as a good foil to Catherine's fatal femme. Although the central relationship is that of Nick and Catherine, Beth is not a sideline character as is Dana in *Malice.* In her obvious opposition to Catherine and her dedication to Nick, we could perhaps expect Beth finally to win Nick back in the manner of most good women.

However, Beth is rather more than she seems at first sight. She too becomes a murder suspect in Nick's investigation, her possible guilt confirmed the moment we see an old photo of her with blonde hair, mirroring Catherine and within this context becoming marked out as a lesbian killer. In this way Catherine's dominance is underlined, as we begin to see that "like the other female characters, Beth has a contingent identity, not only structurally centred on Catherine, but, within the diegesis, dependent on Catherine's capacity to narrate" (Wood, 1993: 49). It is salient that Catherine and Beth's different versions of the story of their relationship turn upon which of them copied the other. This would also reveal the true killer, as the copycat is instantly marked out as the guilty (narcissistic lesbian) party. Here, then, they are fighting for control of the female identity that all the women are based on. But Beth is fighting a losing battle, for Catherine is indisputably in control. She is narrating the story, symbolised in that she is writing the book. At the end of the film Beth stands accused of the killings and dies herself, showing that Catherine retained control. But there is no closure on Beth; even if we accept that Catherine framed her for the murders under investigation, the death of her husband remains unexplained, leaving open the possibility that Beth is also a killer. This possibility makes Beth truly diabolical because she has been the only convincingly female, nurturing character. Her guilt, then, would mean that she has been successfully masquerading all along, making her very manipulative.

Nick is also dependent on Catherine for his identity. Tasker states that "[t]he dissolution of the identity of the investigating officer is a cliché of the crime/thriller genre..." (1998: 106), but in *Basic Instinct* Nick never appears to have an identity. He is an extremely reactive character, quoting not only Catherine but also his partner Gus, seemingly unable to think for himself. So Nick is an easy target for Catherine's control, but he is not a double of her as the women are. In this the women form an unwilling clique from which Nick is excluded, and his exclusion means that he can never know the truth because he will never know who to believe. Hart argues that the film's ambiguity about the identity of the killer is a misogynist strategy which allows the blame to be put on all the women equally: "the *women* did it, which is to say, The Woman did it" (1994: 130). But in fact the identity of the killer becomes unimportant, because as we have seen the women are all contingent upon the same identity. Even if we did know who the actual killer was, all four women would still be guilty. Furthermore the lack of eventual "truth" in the narrative, the lack of solutions to the many mysteries, is a symptom of the female control over the narrative. We can never know the truth because the "rational" (male) truth-finder never discovers it, and the people that control the events, the women, are not to be trusted. In this the film not only draws on a misogynist stereotype of womanhood - the duplicitous and untrustworthy femme fatale - but it extends this stereotype to cover *all* women. It is only in connecting their depravity to their lesbianism that the film makes its stance towards women acceptable. The "Other" label here functions not only to explain the female violence, but to hide the film's misogyny by displacing it with homophobia.

As mentioned earlier, the film was beset with accusations of homophobia when it was released, which from my reading appear to be justified. Hart, however, attempts an oppositional reading, claiming that the

lesbian relationships in *Basic Instinct* are much purer and more affectionate than the heterosexual relationships. She particularly comments on Catherine's affectionate submissiveness with Hazel, and her unhappiness over Roxy's death as contrasted to her lack of concern over Johnny Boz's murder. This is a very compelling reading of the film when the heterosexual relationships are taken into account. Nick is physically and verbally abusive towards Beth, who remains faithful to him throughout his shocking treatment of her, even apologising for her one moment of furious reaction. Nick's relationship with Catherine, too, is based on lust rather than any perceivable affection. So the film could be seen to express an unusual support for the lesbian women, rather than condemning them for their "Otherness". This conclusion is given weight by the comparative attractiveness of Catherine as a character over Beth, and the fact that Catherine succeeds where Beth fails. This is an unusual conclusion for a Hollywood film, but as previously mentioned, the film is ambiguous enough to allow many alternative readings. Even so, it is to be expected that the music will try to lessen this ambiguity by supporting a dominant ideological reading of the film.

The music

It is noticeable that amongst this web of ambiguity, the music seems to provide the clearest path to truth. Jerry Goldsmith dubbed his score for *Basic Instinct* "erotic and evil" (Schweiger, 1992), and these qualities are epitomised in Catherine's theme (fig. 1), which in turn encapsulates the mood of the score. This theme is slow, moves in semitones or huge drops and leaps, and oscillates between two unrelated keys, making it sound very tense. In her article "The Fallen Woman and the Virtuous Wife", Kalinak indicates clichés of scoring for these two stereotypes of women in classical

Hollywood cinema, and for the fallen woman two of the classic clichés she outlines are chromaticism and falling lines, both of which characterise this theme.
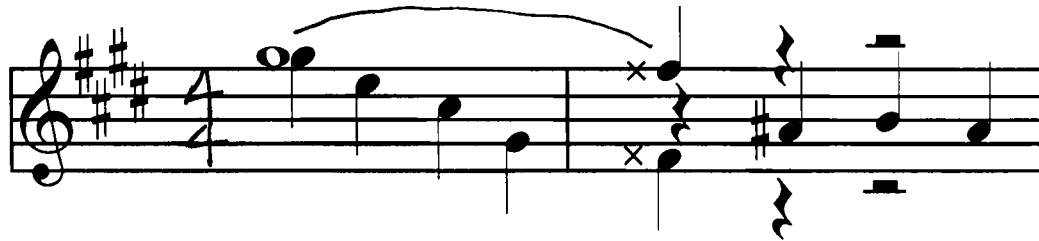
figure 1: Catherine

But the instrumentation - wind and full soft strings - and the simple, smooth and slow rhythmic line are out of step with this, giving the theme an almost romantic feel. In this way, the music is not just tense, but seductive. The theme in the film is centred on Catherine herself, and so its "erotic and evil" sound reflects her character. Just the tense sound by itself would not be enough to depict the attraction she has for Nick, who becomes obsessed with her, so the romantic instrumentation adds an extra dimension to her character. But its evil connotations mark out Catherine as the guilty party from the outset.

This theme and its related motif (also shown in fig. 1) always appear in reference to Catherine. She is the centre of this narrative, and even when she is not on screen the action revolves around her, the leading male character Nick being obsessed with her. If it appears while Catherine is absent from the screen it is indicating her, such as when Nick tells Gus that he'll play her games, or as he runs down the bank to the crashed car believing Catherine to be inside. The theme or motif appears on approximately thirty-five occasions throughout the film, its domination of the score mirroring Catherine's supremacy in the narrative, and over the

other characters[2]. Beth's struggle for power over Nick, then, is destined to fail because Beth does not have the musical autonomy that Catherine has.

Although Catherine's theme dominates there are certain other regular themes and motifs that appear.

figure 2: tension

The material shown in figure 2 appears many times throughout the film. Again it is slow and tense with an emphasis on semitones, the slow simmering tension of the score dominating as Catherine dominates the film. There is little space allowed in the score for the release of this tension, mirroring Nick's ineffectual attempts to regain a rational control. McClary's discussion of gendered musical codes is relevant here because the chromatic dissonance of the score in these terms signals a female control, as opposed to the strong tonal sound associated with the male. The only motif that does allow for some movement is the "detection" theme (fig. 3) which is strongly connected to Nick and his attempts to solve the case. Although it is the most consonant theme in the film, basing itself on a minor arpeggio, it frequently modulates into unrelated key areas, undermining its coherence. In this way it symbolises Nick's status as the representative of patriarchal rationality, but also indicates that his control is weak. His ultimate failure to solve the mystery is reflected by the slow and pompous cornet rendition of the theme as he drives home at the end of the film.

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2 Royal S. Brown discusses the monothematic score to *Laura*, saying that the constant presence of the theme works to fetishise Laura. A similar sort of effect happens in the *Basic Instinct* score, except that here Catherine seems fully conscious of her fetishisation, and uses it as a power.

figure 3: detection
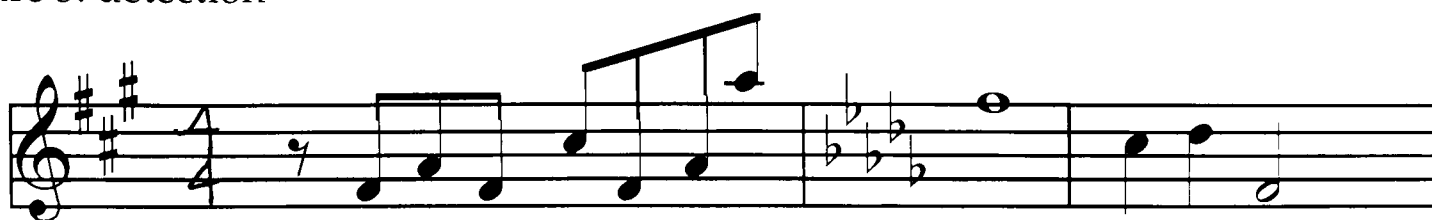
But the "detection" theme's most interesting appearance is during the car chase between Nick and Catherine, early on in the film. Here its arrangement is fast, percussive and rhythmically complicated, but the theme is played by legato violins and remains coherent and controlled. Visually speaking, too, there is more coherence in this first scene where the chase takes place along the same road, although the low angles and bumper viewpoints are quite disorienting. The relevance of this scoring becomes apparent when contrasted to the second car chase between Nick and Roxy, her attempt to kill him near the end of the film. This music is dissonant and panicky with no coherent theme, helping to emphasise the messy, haphazard nature of the chase. While this could be seen as reflecting Nick's control in the first chase as opposed to the second, it must be noted that he is *not* in control, as Catherine is leading and he is following. In this scene he is beginning to let Catherine manipulate him and is losing his grip on rationality. So the coherence in the first chase as opposed to the second actually expresses *Catherine's* power, in that the music indicates a supreme controlling force. The chase is a game, a manipulation and an exercise of power, not an attempt to kill. In the second chase, however, there is a real intent to kill and a mirroring lack of control in the music. This indicates not only the seriousness of what is happening, but significantly that Catherine is not involved. Throughout the film she has been totally aware of the implications of everything she does, and the music has always reflected her

calculated power. As a result, any music which accompanies Catherine's actions is slower, more controlled and more unified than music which accompanies the actions of the other characters. The lack of control in this scene just simply does not fit with her character or with her musical representation.

The dominance of the "unknown threat" motif (fig. 4) during the car chase with Roxy demonstrates this amply.

figure 4: unknown threat motif

This motif appears first as an underscore to the stabs of the opening murder scene, where we have no idea of the identity of the murderer. Whenever the motif appears throughout the film it indicates an unseen, non-specific threat. But Catherine is a known threat almost throughout, and so does not have to be accompanied by this motif. Its appearance during Roxy's car chase, then, indicates that it is not Catherine in the car, and the lack of control in the music emphasises this conclusion as well as informing us that this chase is not a game.

The "unknown threat" motif also comes to accompany Nick's rising awareness of Beth as a possible suspect, indicating Nick's lack of certainty about her without definitely pin-pointing her as evil. The motif appears as Nick confronts Beth with Catherine's story that Beth had a fixation on her in college. In return, Beth tells Nick that Catherine knows about Nick's relationship with her and is using her as a scapegoat. She guesses how Nick found out the story with startling accuracy: "Did she tell you casually? Make it seem irrelevant? Did she tell you in bed, Nick? That's what I'd do."

We realise along with Nick that both of these women are trained psychologists who can manipulate his thoughts, and are forcibly struck as Nick is by his lack of ability to withstand their manipulations. The use of the "unknown threat" motif at this point, then, is particularly significant as it is demonstrating that we cannot tell which of the two is lying. It appears again at Gus's murder scene where it builds on this lack of certainty; we do not know whether or not to believe Beth's story of her presence at the crime scene and we are scared along with Nick as he screams at her to take her hand out of her pocket. The motif appears for the last time at the end of the film as Catherine and Nick stare across the bed at each other. We have seen Catherine's hand slipping down below the bed, and the inference is that Nick is about to die via ice-pick and does not know it. Catherine is now an unknown threat to Nick who trusts her and believes her story, whereas throughout the film she has been a known danger to him, and always accompanied by her own "erotic and evil" theme.

The ending of the film cleverly makes even its final threat ambiguous. As Nick and Catherine make love the picture fades to black, and then fades back up to pan down from them and show the audience the ice-pick under the bed. In this way the film's final confirmation that Catherine is a threat is separated from the actual narrative. So even now we can see the threat as metaphorical rather than real, the ice-pick symbolically always just within Catherine's reach. It is also very significant that it is Nick's suggestion of having "rug-rats" that sets Catherine's hand sliding below the bed. Her lack of desire for children is perhaps another example of her "Otherness".

The final important point about the music is that, although we never know exactly how much Catherine is responsible for, the music seems to give us space to believe that she can be genuinely affected. This is most noticeable when Catherine is grieving over Roxy. The motif shown in figure

5 only makes three appearances in the film. It is slow and slightly pulsing, with falling semitones in low full strings.

figure 5: sadness?

Because of this, it seems to lie half way between indicating a genuine emotion, and fitting in with the standard tense orchestral music of the score. The motif appears first when Catherine is grieving for Roxy, again as she finishes the relationship with Nick and he broods on the pier, and finally as Catherine appears at his apartment crying and saying that she loses everybody she cares about. If, as Hart contends, Catherine is genuinely grieving for Roxy, then its reappearance as she cries in Nick's apartment would seem to indicate that she is also genuine in her concern over losing him, even perhaps that she has tried to protect him from her by finishing the relationship; and this reading is possibly supported by the sad quality of the music itself. Conversely, if we concentrate upon its tense aspects, we can see these mirrored scenes as just more examples of her manipulation; and here it is necessary to review Hart's declaration that Catherine's relationship with Roxy is pure and affectionate. For I contend that the film gives us space to see Roxy as just another of Catherine's dupes. During her grieving scene, Catherine tells Nick that she should have known what Roxy would try to do, but that she had never been jealous before. We only have Catherine's word for this, and in fact in the nightclub scene it is very apparent that Catherine is aware of Roxy's jealousy, as she holds her gaze while seducing Nick. She tells him that Roxy likes to watch her making love to men, but Roxy has told him that Catherine likes her to watch. Owing to the film's insistence on

Catherine's ability to control other people's behaviour, it seems very unlikely that she would not have been aware of Roxy's feelings and intended action. In this context we could believe that Catherine had told Roxy to kill Nick, a suggestion that she herself raises during the grieving scene, and perhaps she had also killed Johnny Boz. So Catherine's grief for Roxy could easily be false, and the ambiguous music allows this reading. Either way the musical twinning of Catherine's grief over Roxy with her concern over losing Nick underlines the film's homophobia. For either Catherine does not care about either of them, making the lesbian relationships just as threatening as the heterosexual relationships; or Catherine is genuine in her concern and affection for them both, meaning that she is finally saved from evil lesbianism by meeting the right man. The film's attempt to recuperate the fatal femme who has survived to the end of the film by indicating a genuine capacity for emotion on her part is not exactly unexpected for a Hollywood film. But the final scene where Catherine turns away from Nick and becomes a threat to him again (interestingly coupled with her rejection of motherhood as she tells him she hates "rug-rats") is an interesting and somewhat unusual conclusion.

7.4: *THE LAST SEDUCTION*

In my introduction I quoted from Citron's discussion of mainstream narrative film, which she argued was defined by its distribution and exhibition rather than its production history. In this way, *The Last Seduction* can be included as a mainstream narrative film although it was originally produced for and aired on the HBO cable channel. Receiving wide critical

acclaim, it achieved a cinematic release, although its television origins disqualified it from being nominated for an Academy Award. But as I have already intimated, its anti-heroine is the most unqualified in terms of female stereotypes of all the women that I have examined. *Basic Instinct* was unusual in that the fatal femme survived and successfully covered up her crime, but even then the film's ambiguity left room to believe that Catherine Tramell was not all bad. In *The Last Seduction*, however, Bridget Gregory is as uncomplicatedly evil as could be imagined, with no excuses or qualifiers.

It seems likely that the presence of such an unusual heroine results from the film's production history, being made for a cable channel noted for experimentation. So the most interesting thing about this film is that such a transgressive female character could make it into the mainstream at all, let alone achieve widespread critical acclaim and consideration for an Academy Award nomination.

The Last Seduction (1994, dir. John Dahl, m. Joseph Vitarelli) stars Linda Fiorentino as Bridget Gregory, a hard-hearted and ambitious New Yorker who is married to a struggling doctor, Clay (Bill Pullman). She masterminds a drugs deal which Clay carries out, but when he hits her she runs off with the money leaving him to deal with the loan shark who lent them the cash to buy the drugs. She hides out in a small town named Beston and there meets the local stud Mike (Peter Berg), who has just returned from Chicago to escape a disastrous and ill-planned marriage to the mysterious Trish. Mike falls in love with Bridget and becomes increasingly in need of commitment from her, but Bridget wants to go back to New York and spend the money, which she cannot do without first coming to an agreement with her husband. Clay sends detectives after her to find her, and she kills the first by engineering a car accident before he can force her to return to Clay.

She then plots to remove Clay from the picture. She asks Mike to join her in a plan to murder cheating husbands at the request of their wives, who will then pay them out of the insurance money. Mike refuses but Bridget manipulates him, first by making him believe she loves him, then by pretending she has performed the first hit herself and wants Mike to do the same in order to prove his commitment to her. When Mike still refuses she uses the threat of his wife moving to Beston to scare him into coming with her. She herself has been to see Trish unbeknownst to Mike. Mike agrees to come with her in order to escape Trish, and they drive to New York for him to perform his hit. But of course it is Clay that she has sent him to kill, and when Mike bungles the hit Clay realises what is going on and tells Mike that they are married. They confront Bridget together in the apartment. Undaunted, Bridget kills Clay and then tells Mike to rape her to lend credence to her story of an unknown attacker. Mike refuses but then Bridget taunts him into it with the shock revelation that Trish was a male transvestite. In a fury Mike rapes her, and Bridget successfully frames him for the murder of Clay, driving off into the sunset in a stretch limousine.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this film is its totally unemotional and amoral stance towards the events it depicts. In its review of *The Last Seduction* the Virgin film guide describes it as "cutting right to the cold heart of noir" and in many ways this film does seem to throw back to noir more than the others in this section. But there is a particularly significant difference; the fatal femme is also the main character of this film, and the story is hers. In noir the story was almost always dominated by the male protagonist, often in voice-over; but in this film, although we see all the characters separately as well as together, the narrative is dominated by Bridget and her plan to get the money for herself. In her capacity as main

protagonist Bridget is also our main point of identification, giving us a stake in hoping her plan will work. But in fact this idea of identification is problematic as the film seems to actively distance us from the characters and their feelings, and precludes any possibility of a value judgement on Bridget's actions. I will elaborate on this in reference to the music.

Strangely, then, the film never chastises its fatal femme. This strongly contrasts to Catherine who is portrayed as evil from the beginning of *Basic Instinct*, or Tracy who is blamed for destroying the perfection of Andy's life and possibly for killing his child. Andy is very obviously our point of identification in *Malice*, and Nick in *Basic Instinct*, although Nick himself is not a likeable character. We see him as weak next to the strong and manipulative women who surround him, playing Catherine's game and losing, falling for her story. In *The Last Seduction* this trend is taken to the extreme as next to Bridget both men appear weak and foolish, and the film implies that they deserve what they get for having been stupid enough to fall for her charms. In centring upon and identifying with Bridget the movie indicates that it is the strong and the successful who matter, and anyone foolish enough to believe in morality or loyalty will go under. This amoral stance is extremely unusual when compared to the vast majority of mainstream American films, which idealise truth, justice and the American Way.

Both of the male characters are defined in terms of their relationship to Bridget. Clay has obviously been dominated by her from the start, carrying out the drugs deal that she has master-minded. From the beginning of the film we see his ineptitude as he nearly ruins the whole deal, and grovels on his knees thinking the dealers are going to kill him. When he hits Bridget for calling him an idiot he instantaneously loses the audience's sympathy, but there is no real emphasis on this act and it is obviously an

unusual occurrence. In this the film is not portraying Bridget as a battered wife in order to give her an excuse for her actions. But it does mean that Clay has left himself open for Bridget's revenge, and that he does not retain audience sympathy when she runs off with the money. So the film cleverly manages to set up Bridget as a bitch goddess without encouraging sympathy for the men she dupes.

Mike is a different case from Clay. Alone of the three main characters he has a sense of morality, but in this film that is a weakness rather than a strength. Because of this Mike is to be pitied rather than sympathised with, and we can feel that it is his own fault that he ends up in jail for Clay's murder because he was too stupid to see through Bridget's plan, despite being well aware of her nature. It is interesting that Mike's ultimate mistake is his chauvinistic attitude towards women. When we are first introduced to Mike he is telling his friends that "women are quicksand. They trap you and before you know where you are you're married". But when he meets Bridget he is unable to deal with her independence and her attitude to him. She tells him that "fucking doesn't have to be anything else but fucking," but Mike is unable to accept this attitude from her. It is he rather than she that wants the commitment. When Bridget gives him a speech about how she has been hurt before and is afraid to get close to anyone, he readily believes her story and the fragile feminine persona that she puts on, despite all that he has seen of her. He is also easily tricked into believing she loves him and this binds him closer to her. He is well aware of her enjoyment in "messing with people's heads" and even believes her guilty of murder, but is still unable to see that she could be manipulating him. This seems to be wilful blindness, coming from Mike's strong belief that all women are just waiting to find the right man.

The need for commitment also places Mike in the traditional female role in this film, a role that he himself has described in his comments at the beginning, and this feminisation is apparent in other ways. The first time we see Mike is a shot of him drinking at the bar, and he is presented for viewing in a rather feminine way. Although he is also accompanied by diegetic rock music, emphasising his masculine qualities, we see him in a passive stance, eyes averted, presented to be looked at. He is also fragmented which is a sign that he is being fetishised - a treatment normally reserved for women. Mike is a very passive character throughout the film, reactive rather than active. It is significant that he is looking for an escape route from his dull life, but after his disastrous experience in Buffalo he is too scared to try again on his own. He attaches himself to Bridget because he sees her as a way out; he tells her: "You've been out there, and you came here and you chose me, and that proves...I'm bigger than this town". He needs Bridget's approval and romantic attentions to prove himself. She tells him in return that he has "a way of making a woman feel like a one-way meal ticket" and although he denies that this is the case, it is clear that Bridget has a point. Finally he is persuaded into going with Bridget and committing murder because she has tricked him into thinking that Trish is moving to Beston. Again he is reacting rather than acting, and it is noticeable that he sees going with Bridget and committing murder as his only option, rather than striking out on his own. He is letting Bridget make his decisions for him. So although Mike appears to be genuinely in love with Bridget - as opposed to Clay who seems more interested in her sexual allurements - Mike's love seems to be based on weakness and fear, and a need for Bridget's sanction. His passivity and malleability in the face of a strong and manipulative woman, then, make him an unsympathetic scapegoat for the crime.

The music

As our understanding of the motivations of our fatal femmes has lessened, so has the music's insight into their thought processes; the Bitch Goddess films have been noticeably less instructive about their female characters than the Mad Bad Women films. *The Last Seduction*, though, takes this opacity to an extreme. Rather than providing an emotional dimension, the music in this film actually works to distance us from the characters, and privileges an understanding of the plot as a clever and manipulative game.

The score is very jazz-oriented which in itself makes it stand out from the other scores I have looked at. This is a salient point, as the musical codes so evidenced in the other films are less established in a jazz tradition than in the 19th century-style symphonic music of Classical Hollywood that still dominates today. Because of the relative familiarity of musical codes in Romantic scoring techniques jazz scores are still fairly unusual, although many of the top composers in Hollywood have a jazz background (for example John Barry or Michael Kamen). This has two results: firstly, the score is not as obviously coded as a romantically scored piece; and secondly - bringing with it all the prejudices of elitism - it sounds less "serious", giving the film a playful air. In this it is reminiscent of the classic movie *The Sting* which also used a more popular jazz sound, ragtime, to emphasise its amusement and detract from the seriousness of the plot. In *The Sting*, too, the "big con" was seen as a challenging game.

Another important general point about the score is that it is almost wall-to-wall. There are only a few scenes in the film that have no music at all. With the emphasis on a light playful sound in the score, this reinforces the impression of the whole film as one continuous entertainment, negating the seriousness of most of what we see.

There are two main thematic representations in the score. The first (fig. 1) is associated with Bridget, and is a light, fast theme which alternates between piano, saxophone and clarinet, with a rhythmic piano accompaniment and light percussion.

figure 1: Bridget

Its light playfulness places the emphasis on Bridget's audacity rather than the very serious consequences of her actions. The second thematic representation (fig. 2) is slightly slower and funkier, with motifs that are interchangeable rather than a coherent theme. It seems to be associated with Clay, and very often the two themes intermingle and alternate. Neither theme is weighty or serious, and so the score emphasises these two characters as players, with the rest of the cast subsidiary in the game.

figure 2: Clay

Clay and Bridget are fighting each other, and Mike is just a pawn to Bridget that she uses to try and beat Clay. Although Clay is stronger than Mike, he too has been dominated by Bridget and is still successfully duped by her, finally allowing himself to be killed by her. In this context it is significant that the lively coherent theme is associated with Bridget and the slower, disjointed sounds are Clay's. He does not have the same vision that Bridget does, and cannot play the game to her level.

Mike himself does not seem to have a theme. Very often we see him in the bar, scenes which always include diegetic music. Although the diegetic music in the bar is usually quite heavy and masculine (making Bridget's ability to move into the bar interesting in terms of gender representation) this becomes rather ironic as Mike becomes feminised. The macho stud that we see early on in the film changes, and eventually cannot survive in this realm of 'masculinity,' his alienation from his surroundings symbolised when he fights his best friend and is thrown out of the bar. The non-diegetic music excludes him from the game that Bridget and Clay are playing, as he has no theme of his own, and his non-diegetic accompaniment is rarely rhythmic. He is often accompanied by the simple device of an E-flat major chord alternating with an E-flat minor chord. Discussing a similar motif in a different film, Burt says that "the continuous alternation of harmonies in this cue results in a feeling of ambivalence where time - as gauged by a clock - is momentarily suspended" (1994: 12). Mike too is in suspended animation, needing Bridget to reactivate him by taking him away from Beston.

The slow, non-rhythmic nature of Mike's accompaniment as compared to the other themes could perhaps indicate sympathy for Mike, the hapless scapegoat for Bridget's scheming. He is the only character that seems to feel any emotion and perhaps this too is reflected in the music. But generally Mike is excluded from the game by the score, and the slowness and stasis reflect his weakness which is connected to his emotion. We may pity him, but we also despise him for being so readily fooled, and for trying to play Bridget's game without realising that he is playing by a different set of rules.

The score to this film, then, is extremely unusual. It does not help us see into the character's minds - except possibly to demonstrate that Bridget,

at least, sees the plot as a game - and it does not set up or undermine any particular character for sympathy or identification. What it does do is play in the background heartlessly, negating the import of what is happening on the screen. We can be happy to see Bridget win because she has been the strongest player, and we can be happy without compunction because we have not been encouraged to identify with Clay or Mike. The music throughout has kept us at a distance from the characters, and has instead placed the emphasis on the film as a clever entertainment, rather than on the callousness of what we are seeing. Although shocked by the film's resolution we do not see it as the wrong ending; in fact it would be disappointing if Bridget was not successful.

In comparison to the normal functions of a movie score the lack of emotion here is very unusual. One of the major functions of a score is to tell us how to feel about what we see on screen, and this score does not do that. Instead its playfulness and overall lack of sympathy for the characters allows us to draw our own conclusions, although even then its amoral stance encourages us not to care. It is also unusual in that it does not explain, excuse, or even condemn the violence of the fatal femme. This could be read as excessively misogynist. While Bridget undermines the standard perception - quoted in this film - of women as desperately domestic, she supports another stereotype, the Jezebel. But the transgression of the film lies in that it encourages us to enjoy her success, because she has played the game best.

7.5: Conclusion: Games, and the masquerade

While it is most obvious in *The Last Seduction*, then, the idea of games is apparent in all three Bitch Goddess films. The central characters in these films play games with the people around them and get their satisfaction from successfully manipulating people. In *The Last Seduction* the entire plot appears to be a game played by Bridget. When Mike is shocked by her attempt to get an angry wife to agree to having her husband killed, Bridget coolly tells him that it is fun "messing with people's heads." She clearly enjoys manipulating the people that surround her. This can also be seen in *Basic Instinct*. Catherine's view of life as dangerous sport is directly referred to when Nick tells Gus that he'll "play her game," and again when she tells him on the beach that he "shouldn't play this game" because he is in over his head. His boss also tells Nick to stay away from Catherine because "she is screwing with [his] head," again reflecting her uncanny power to manipulate. Even *Malice* refers to Tracy's con as an audacious gamble. Tracy's mother tells Andy to "get into the game, go for the money yourself." Tracym however, is playing her game for a purpose - to get money. In this she is the most closely related to the femme fatale of 1940s noir, whose "desire for freedom, wealth, or independence ignites the forces which threaten the hero" (Tasker 1998: 46). But Catherine is already super-rich so her manipulation of people is more obviously something she does for her own amusement. In her conversation with Nick in his flat she tells him that the boy in her book kills his parents "to see if he can get away with it". We are never sure whether or not Catherine has killed her parents, but even if she is not directly referring to herself in this comment it demonstrates her philosophy on life; she kills people to see if she can get away with it. In *Basic Instinct* then, the game-playing is threatening and evil, although erotic. In

The Last Seduction, however, we see Bridget enjoying the contest and are never encouraged by the film itself to draw a moral judgement. We enjoy seeing her play the game because that is what the film is about.

A major element of the contest of wits in these films is again the masquerade. The mad, bad women enacted femininity in order to be liked and to gain a family, although in Alex's and Peyton's cases it also served to hide their vengeful purposes. For the bitch goddesses, however, the masquerade is more obviously a cold, manipulative strategy. The women are all gambling with high stakes and their success depends on how well they act their part. Tracy is the only character to sustain her masquerade for any length of time, for we must believe her sincere for the first half of the film. She enacts the part of the nurturing, maternal woman in order to strengthen her claim against the hospital. In *Basic Instinct* at least three of the four female characters employ the masquerade at some point. Hazel is the most successful, seeming to be a charming and ideal housewife until we discover that she killed her entire family. Beth and Catherine have a more interesting relation to the masquerade, because their guilt depends on which of them is acting the part. If Catherine is guilty she is only acting in her grief over Roxy and her fear of Beth's supposed "fixation". If Beth is guilty her whole persona is a charade to hide her psychotic nature. The effect of this would be to confirm the reality of femininity, if we ever knew for sure which of them was guilty. But the ambiguity of the film's ending lets us believe that both were really masquerading.

The Last Seduction provides the clearest examples of the feminine masquerade, as we see Bridget cynically employing it for her own ends. She enacts the frail woman for her boss, telling him she is on the run from an abusive husband, and thereby gets him to agree to keep her identity secret. Following this she successfully dupes the police on two occasions,

convincing them that the private detective she killed was trying to molest her, and getting the next detective arrested by claiming he had exposed himself to a young child. In all of these cases she builds successfully on the concept of man as aggressor and woman as victim in order to achieve her own ends, and we can clearly see that in this film she is the aggressor and the men are the victims.

So in clearly showing the mask of femininity to be false and providing no true "feminine" alternative to survive while the transgressive woman dies, the films begin to blur standard gender boundaries. This portrayal of women can be criticised on feminist grounds, however, as it is certainly questionable that the Jezebel is a more progressive stereotype than the passive mother! These films also gloss over the social reality of female oppression, where the perpetrators of violence are overwhelmingly male and women almost always occupy the position of victim. In this, as Pidduck (1995) says, these films can be seen as anti-feminist, although allowing moments of wicked escape for their female audiences.

Games, then, would seem to be the other filmic reason for female violence. If they are not macho, mothers or others, they are gamblers, doing it to see if they can get away with it. The manipulative Jezebels in this section evince a desire to win and a need to outwit in particular the men in their lives, seeing violence as just another tool to help them get what they want. Their desire for success rather than the 'normal' female desire for a family is, in my opinion, the reason that these women are so often described as mad. They may be clinically sane, but they are not fitting in to any acceptable pattern of female behaviour, and so defining them as mad allows the standard stereotypes to remain unthreatened.

CHAPTER 8: *THELMA AND LOUISE*:
"Cruisin' for a bruisin'"

Thelma and Louise (1991, dir. Ridley Scott, m. Hans Zimmer) is the
story of two women living in Arkansas. Thelma (Geena Davis) is married to
Darryl, a cheating husband who dominates her. Louise (Susan Sarandon) is
strong and independent, works as a waitress and has a troubled relationship
with her boyfriend Jimmy (Michael Madsen). The two go away for the
weekend, but in a truck-stop on their journey Thelma gets drunk and begins
to flirt with a man called Harlan, and is nearly raped by him. Louise saves
her with Darryl's gun, but when Harlan insults her she shoots him. Thelma
wants to go to the police but Louise convinces her that the police will not
listen to their side of the story because Thelma had been flirting with Harlan
all night. They decide to flee to Mexico, and Louise phones Jimmy to ask
him to send them some money. Jimmy flies out to see Louise and give her
the money, which she gives to Thelma to keep while she and Jimmy say their
good-byes. But JD, a cowboy that they have picked up on the way, spends
the night with Thelma and reveals that he is a robber breaking parole. The
next morning he steals their money, and so Thelma robs a store in the way
that JD has described to her. They then become more destructive, locking up
a policeman who has pulled them over in the boot of his car, and blowing up
a truck because the driver has insulted them. Meanwhile the police under
the direction of Slocombe (Harvey Keitel) have tapped Thelma's phone, and
when Louise phones to talk about their situation with Slocombe they trace
the call. The police then chase them and finally pin them down at "the
Grand Canyon"[1]. Thelma and Louise decide that instead of being caught
they will drive off the cliff to their deaths.

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[1] Dowell points out that they are actually at Dead Horse Point in Utah.

Thelma and Louise was a surprise hit and created a storm of critical debate. Callie Khouri, who wrote the script, said that she wrote this film because she was tired of seeing the same limited roles for women in Hollywood. Whether or not she was successful in creating a new type of role for her heroines is a matter of some debate. The film has been seen positively as showing the damaging consequences of sexual exploitation, as a gender-bending genre film; and negatively, as male-bashing, as stereotyping women, as undermining female transgression by not allowing its heroines to succeed, and so on. That there are so many different responses to the film would seem to indicate that *Thelma and Louise* is somewhat ambivalent about its message. Its heroines are part of this ambivalence. They cannot be clearly placed with either category of violent women that I have focused on in my study, falling somewhere between action heroines and fatal femmes.

The iconography of the film would seem to site the two as action heroines. Their control of cars and guns evokes Tasker's argument that action heroines appropriate technology which is more normally defined as male (1993: 132). The guns are particularly important as the gun is the standard weapon in action films. While two of the fatal femmes - Hedy and Tracy - do use a gun, they also use everyday items for their killings. Hedy kills Sam with the stiletto heel of her shoe and hits Graham with his door lever, while Tracy tries to suffocate the child with a plastic bag. This appropriation of whatever is handy is apparent in all the fatal femme films; Bridget kills Clay by spraying Mace down his throat, and kills the detective with her car. Even more inventively, Peyton uses the greenhouse to kill Marlene. Even when the emphasis is on stabbing instruments, they are all handy weapons: kitchen knives, ice-picks, broken glass, screwdrivers. In

this way, Thelma and Louise's restriction to guns as their only weapon seems to position them with the action heroines. But while the action heroines so far discussed have been acting as protectors and champions of good, Thelma and Louise are violent because of a bad experience, bringing them closer to the fatal femmes. They are perhaps the most literal embodiment of Holmlund's argument that most deadly dolls "'cruise' because they have been 'bruised', and most are in some way 'bruised' as a result of having 'cruised'" (1994: 31). Thelma and Louise are violent because they have been raped, and at least in Thelma's case it is her drunken flirting, her "cruising", that puts her in the position where this can happen. The result of the rape is to set the two literally cruising, driving to Mexico in their getaway car and committing various crimes along the way. Showing them to be "bruised" puts Thelma and Louise on a par with the mad, bad women. The difference is that they are the objects of our sympathy and interest in the film and so this could seen as a feminist statement, allowing us to identify with the victims of patriarchal oppression and thereby implying criticism of the dominant social system.

Thelma and Louise's metaphorical bruises are part of the larger need for Hollywood to explain and excuse female violence. Here we see another common position for violent women which is not included in Tasker's three categories - that of the rape victim. Their status as victims allows us to enjoy their empowerment rather than condemn them for their violence. But it is noticeable that once they start to enjoy the journey the film begins to hint at a lesbian relationship, and so their transformation into violent women is mirrored by their movement into the category of "Other".

Generically, this film is very interesting because it brings together elements of the road movie and also the buddy movie, both male genres, but with women at the centre. But it must be noted that these two women are

not in the same position as the men who are normally at the centre of these types of narrative. Firstly they have to be bruised in order to be in this position, and secondly as Grundmann says: "[i]n male buddy outlaw films, neither the autonomy of the heroes nor the appropriateness of their actions is ever questioned. In *Thelma and Louise* it is exactly this gentle but persistent question which drives the plot. Is their reaction to the assault, their decision not to report the crime, and their subsequent rampage, 'appropriate', the film asks? And, after all, didn't they 'bring everything upon themselves?'" (1991: 35) In this way the film's appropriation of male genres for women is undermined. Nevertheless it is refreshing to finally see a film which focuses on female friendship. As we have seen, sisterhood is an absent theme in Hollywood, and in its only appearance in the films I have studied (*Single White Female*) it is shown to be perverse and twisted. So to see a film where the female relationship is central and affectionate, a female "buddy" movie, is extremely unusual. As Tasker says, "Hollywood marginalises female friendships - women exist in isolation, in support of the hero, or in opposition to each other" (1998: 139). The buddy relationship makes it even more difficult to site Thelma and Louise as either action heroines or fatal femmes. In the action films looked at so far, the heroines have always been acting in conjunction with a man. And although the Mad Bad Women films centralise the female relationships and allow some space to portray female fascination with another woman (as demonstrated in Jermyn's concept of the "abject"), the relationship is always bad or twisted. The positive representation of a female relationship, then, makes this film stand out even more.

Of course this rare representation of a female friendship is undermined by the hints that the relationship is lesbian. This is partly a difficulty with the restricted signifiers that surround female film characters:

"The Hollywood cinema typically keeps the representation of strong, independent women distinct from narratives of female friendship; when they collide in a narrative that does not explicitly position 'the lesbian' as 'Them not Us', the lack of distinction between the signifiers of female strength and of lesbianism becomes apparent." (Tasker 1998: 152)

But the film itself builds on this lack of distinction with subtle hints such as Thelma and Louise's lengthening gazes at each other. Their final kiss in particular has been seen as ambiguous by most critics. However, as Dowell points out (1991), both women also have qualifiers to prove their heterosexuality, in the shape of Darryl and JD for Thelma, and Jimmy for Louise. In this way the film is disappointing in that it neither shows that women can have close friendships without sexual attraction, nor dares to present the characters as openly lesbian. The kiss allows the film to have it both ways without committing to either.

Thelma and Louise has also been seen as a female version of the road movie. This is unusual because women in film are rarely seen to have freedom of movement. De Lauretis states that in film as in myth, male characters control the action and the landscape while female characters are fixed in space (1987: 44). In this context Thelma and Louise's ability to move through the countryside is unusual. Employing the standard gender binary it would be possible to argue that this freedom of movement makes the two women symbolically male. As they break out of their traditionally female constrictive roles - Louise as a waitress and Thelma as a housewife - and begin to move through space they become masculinised. Some of the iconography of the film would seem to support this reading: the way the clothing of the women becomes progressively more masculine; Louise exchanging all her (feminine) jewellery for a man's hat; Thelma stealing the truck driver's hat; and the way both these hats are blown off their heads at the end of the chase by the helicopter, a symbol of the superior patriarchal

power of the police which has finally trapped them. As Dowell says, "perhaps what [Ridley] Scott had in mind at the end was to pile up all the guns and cars that money could buy to illustrate just what Thelma and Louise had failed to hijack for their own use" (1991: 29). So there is a strong case to read the film as the masculinisation and eventual containment of Thelma and Louise. However, the entire point of the film is to see our oppressed heroines taking revenge on a succession of stereotypes of men, and so the meaning of the film can only come from seeing the two characters as women. To say that they are symbolically male misses the point entirely.

However, the film is obviously uneasy with the idea of two such transgressive female characters, and so their transgression of female roles is undermined by their reactive, rather than active, natures. They are controlled, defined and even created by men. As Thelma says to the policeman: "My husband wasn't sweet to me and look how I turned out." This statement neatly sums up the plot, as the whole narrative is based on Thelma and Louise's continuing chain of reactions to the treatment they receive from men. It also allows them to retain the victimised status which they hold throughout. Thelma has a cheating, domineering husband and is almost raped by Harlan, and it becomes apparent that Louise has also been raped although this is never completely confirmed. In fact throughout the film the male abuse of the women is so unrelenting that some critics complained that it was unfair to men. While this could be seen as feminist in that a film is finally demonstrating, albeit excessively, the types of subjection that women are victim to in a patriarchal society, it also disempowers the characters by making them reactive rather than active. Louise kills Harlan partly because of his abuse of Thelma and partly, it is implied, because of her own mysterious experience. Their flight results from their fear of the vengeful patriarchal system that would not accept their side of the story.

Thelma decides to join Louise in the flight to Mexico after an argument with her husband. The robbery not only results from JD's theft of their money, but is a carbon copy of his description of his own robberies to Thelma. Even the policeman they imprison is a "nazi". While the abuse they receive from the men in this film gives them a reason to commit their violent acts, it also controls their formation as active women.

Tasker, however, sites their reactive natures in terms of the generic conventions of the Western (1998: 54). She declares that the representation of the heroines as outlaws due to circumstances rather than intent is a feature of Westerns, and in this way the film slots in to a wider generic formula of reactive heroes, rather than simply undermining its transgressive women. So even the mix of genres in this particular film contributes to its ambiguity.

The film's stance on Thelma and Louise's violence is, unsurprisingly, ambivalent. Two of Leitch's five strategies of disavowal are apparent in this film. Firstly and most obviously three of their violent acts - the robbery, imprisoning the policeman and destroying the tanker - are presented as comic, allowing us to disavow the violence because it does not hurt anyone. More subtly, it is possible to see Thelma and Louise as fulfilling Leitch's second category of disavowal strategies, fighting against an inhuman institution, such as in *Die Hard* where Bruce Willis is symbolically fighting capitalism. Thelma and Louise are fighting the patriarchal system which is demonstrated to be flawed, and in this the film could be seen as feminist despite the ultimate failure of their attempt. This disavowal strategy is particularly important for Harlan's death. Harlan is the only one of their victims shown to be hurt, and the only violent act apart from their suicide that is not treated lightly or in a comic manner. The violence at this point is emphasised, rather than negated, by the fact that Louise does not shoot until after the danger is past. Although this places Louise in the wrong, there is

space for us to disavow her act simply because of Harlan's attitude towards her and Thelma. The use of the gun is important here for its antiseptic quality. The gun allows separation from the victim and is a clean and acceptable way to kill. Again the film is having it both ways, putting Louise in the wrong while also allowing us to approve of her action. The following three violent acts are all amusing in their way, and their destruction of the truck in particular is a typical defiant gesture beloved by action movies. Our enjoyment of the scene comes from seeing the truck driver underestimate our heroines and suffering for it. This showcase of power is a standard ingredient of action narratives, so this scene points towards their action heroine status.

This last scene is very important because it problematises the idea that they are controlled by the men in the film. Although they are reacting to their treatment by the truck driver, they *choose* to react. They have passed his truck on the road twice before and the second time Louise advised Thelma to "just ignore him." This time they decide together that they will not ignore him, and that they are "ready to get serious." There is no need for them to commit this act, unlike their other acts, because they are not motivated by anything except the desire to teach this man a lesson. Their final death shows this same choice of action; they choose to die rather than live and face the music. Their suicide has been seen as containing them and ultimately undermining their strength, showing that active or transgressive women cannot survive in contemporary Western society. But, particularly after their 'active reaction' to the truck driver, the importance of this moment lies in their capacity to choose their fate. Here again they are reacting to men, the entirely male phalanx of police that surround them. But they choose to die rather than give in, and it is their acquisition of the ability to choose that is important, even if the price for this is death.

The music

Perhaps because the film itself is so very non-committal, the purpose of the music is often unclear. Its most noticeable feature is the way it works to create sympathy for Thelma and Louise, and to negate the importance of their violent actions, as is very often the case with action films. It also clearly marks their transition from passive to (re)active characters. At the beginning of the film (excepting the opening credits) all the music is made up of pop songs, diegetic and semi-diegetic. It is relevant in more than one way that the pop music in this film is overwhelmingly Country and Western. This is mainly to create the atmosphere of the US south where the film is set, but also makes a point about the position of the women in this film. Country and Western is notorious for its oppressive attitude to women, "Stand By Your Man" being the classic example[2]. The predominance of Country and Western music, in particular at the beginning of the film, seems to situate Thelma and Louise in a restrictive social setting which loosens as they drive through the countryside and become autonomous. The non-diegetic music proper starts with Louise's decision to go to Mexico rather than trust the patriarchal legal system for a fair hearing. There are two major themes in the score. Figure 1 shows the "open space" theme, and figure 2 shows the "choice" theme first heard as Louise waits in the car, unaware that Thelma is robbing the store. Both have a southern sound with a simple solo lead guitar. Both are soft and clear, the first minor and the second major. And both refer to the women's rejection of their position in the patriarchal social system.

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2 This does not necessarily hold true for the female stars, however. Tammy Wynette herself was extremely successful, independently wealthy, and had been married several times.

Theme 1 appears at the opening credits, over shots of wide, empty and beautiful landscape. Right from the beginning the idea of open spaces is being marked out as central to the film.

figure 1: open space

The theme continues to be associated with open spaces and the two women's acquisition of freedom, the capacity to move. It appears as Louise tells Thelma that she is going to head for Mexico, as they drive into the sunlight and we see the first real signs of the wide landscape, and at other times when the two are discussing their route or driving through the marvellous scenery. Along with these shots of open space, the theme symbolises their acquisition of freedom, appearing when Thelma cries over Darryl and meets JD, therefore freeing herself from Darryl's restriction. It also appears at Louise's symbolic removal of all her jewellery, including the ring that we have seen Jimmy give to her. She is freeing herself of her past. Interestingly the most obvious showcase of the scenery - the night-time drive where Louise is looking at the stars - is instead underscored with a semi-diegetic (radio) pop song, but not a standard Country and Western song. Instead it is a female song about a dissatisfied suburban woman, very appropriate for these two women who are finally grasping new opportunities. As Louise says twice, "you get what you settle for", but finally our heroines are chasing something rather than settling for something.

The "choice" theme also marks key moments of transition. It appears as Louise sits hopelessly in the car, while Thelma is robbing the store. Thelma's sudden grasp of the power to make decisions is significant, because up to this point she has seemed almost childlike in her domination by Louise. Here she comes into her own, taking control and moving them past the point of no return, just as Louise seems ready to give up.

figure 2: choice

The "choice" theme also underscores Thelma's speech in which she tells Louise that she wishes she had killed Harlan herself - a major attitude change - and when she demands to know that Louise is not going to give up, because "something's crossed over in [her]". Its most significant appearance is at the ending of the film, where the two choose death over giving up. In this I think the music is very significant to an understanding of the ending. The two main themes both place the emphasis on their freedom, and in this the ending of the film indicates their success in gaining the freedom to choose.

The musical accompaniment to the violent acts is also instructive. Thelma and Louise commit five acts of violence throughout the film. The first is the killing of Harlan, which is completely free from music. This marks it out from the others, making it the most significant. It also contributes to the unexpectedness of the act; we have no warning that Louise is going to kill him, and the lack of music afterwards indicates a lack of clear emotional response. We are not sure how to feel about what Louise has just

done, and it is clear that the two women are stunned and unsure as well. The next three acts - the robbery, the abduction of the policeman, and the destruction of the tanker - are unscored themselves, but followed by light, fast, lively banjo music, giving them a light-hearted feel and negating the importance of their actions. This is a standard device for actions committed by heroes, and helps us disavow their violence. From this point on the police net is closing around them and the music becomes progressively darker, including more military drum sounds, minor harmonies, and slower movement, until the two women finally sit on the side of the canyon accompanied by static chords. There is nowhere for them to go. The sudden reintroduction of the "choice" theme, with its beautiful peaceful sound, gives the music an escape route from this static trap, mirroring their drive off the cliff.

The musical pattern of this film, then, is as follows:

Opening emphasis on restrictive diegetic music

Introduction of spacious themes as they break loose of the patriarchal control

Lively fast light-hearted music as they fly in the face of authority

Progressive darkening as they are captured

Reappearance of light as they drive off the cliff

The final sequence of the film, a montage of images of the two during their journey, emphasises their success in death. Although they are dead, the reiteration of many of their images and the continuation of their freedom music shows that it is the memory of these women, not the actual filmic ending, which is important. Here, the film actively denies the possibility of recuperation.

The music, then, shows a clear and easy identification for the audience with Thelma and Louise, and the lightness of their music as

opposed to the sombreness that accompanies the police supports a reading of the film as critical of the dominant system. Even Slocombe, the good policeman, is underscored with these dark sounds, hunting them down even as he tries to help them. In the end patriarchal authority is shown to be inherently restrictive of and unsympathetic to strong women, and the film score's depiction of the women as heroines and the police as threat backs this up.

However, *Thelma and Louise* clearly demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the idea of "feminist film". The divided critical reaction to the film makes it clear that the meaning or the political impact of a film is contained in the audience rather than in the text itself. Like so many other "women's movies", *Thelma and Louise* helps this along by building ambiguities into the text. As Clover argues, the film builds upon the "construction of males as corporately liable" (1992: 234) but then hedges its bets by including a caring male cop in the shape of Harvey Keitel. My reading of the film with the help of the music is only one of many possible readings of a text which ultimately does not commit itself. The importance of the audience is even more emphasised in Turner's comments on the film's ending (1993: 78-79). Turner states that test audiences actually opted for the present ending of the film rather than an ending where the two escaped, and even then the film was slammed for its violence towards men. Perhaps this is evidence that Hollywood audiences are simply not ready for the successful transgression of the dominant system by women. But as Elayne Rapping points out, the film's unproblematic attitude towards date rape is a sign of hope for feminism, because it demonstrates that attitudes to women are changing in its very conceptualisation:

> "It (inadvertently perhaps) pitted the gut sentiments and beliefs of a growing number of people who don't normally get heard against certain long-standing assumptions of classic Hollywood genres, assumptions

which have always reinforced the actual gender equalities upon which this society depends for many things." (1991: 32)

The importance of this film, then, is not necessarily in an intended message, but in its reflection of changing attitudes to women's rights, such as the concept of date rape, in contemporary Western society.

CHAPTER 9: *NIKITA* and *POINT OF NO RETURN*: a Comparison.

Throughout my thesis I have concentrated on Hollywood films, to show how the music contributes to the presentation of their violent female characters. it has been my contention that Hollywood cinema tries to neutralise the transgressiveness of its violent female characters by fitting them in to recognisable female stereotypes which can explain their violent behaviour in a non-threatening way; macho, mother, other, victim, Jezebel. To support this claim, I would finally like to examine a Hollywood remake of a non-Hollywood film, to see how the violent female character is treated differently. The 1990 French film *Nikita* and its Hollywood remake of three years later, *Point of No Return*, present an excellent case study, because of the remarkable plot similarity between the two versions. But they differ remarkably in the presentation of the lead character and her violence. This case study, then, will show not only that the Hollywood remake tries to modify and excuse the violence of its lead female character, but it will also demonstrate how her representation is controlled by filmic elements other than the plot, and in particular the music.

Nikita (1990, dir. Luc Besson, m. Eric Serra) opens with the eponymous heroine (Anne Parillaud) and three male companions going on a raid of a pharmacy for a drugs fix. Her companions are shot by the police, and she herself shoots and kills a policeman. She is sentenced to life imprisonment, but the Secret Service fake her suicide by forcibly injecting her with a supposed overdose, and in the shape of Bob (Tcheky Karyo), offer her one last chance of life if she agrees to train as a government assassin. Nikita attacks Bob and takes him prisoner in an attempt to escape, but when

this fails she agrees to his proposition. Her training involves learning to fight, shoot, use a computer, and most importantly being taught by Amande (Jeanne Moreau) how to dress and act in a cultured "feminine" way. At first she accepts the training regime, but when Bob refuses her request to take a walk outside the compound as a birthday treat, she becomes destructive and impossible to train. Bob brings her a cake to celebrate her birthday and tells her that she will be killed unless she improves immediately, making Nikita finally accept the impossibility of escape from her situation. When we next see her after a gap of several years, she is a polished and sophisticated woman about to leave the compound for the first time for a dinner date with Bob. The dinner turns out to be her first assassination and Bob instructs her how to kill her target and gives her a detailed escape route. However the route is bricked up, and she has to fight her way out of the restaurant. After successfully completing the test she is allowed to leave the training compound and build a new life under a new name. She meets Marco and becomes engaged to him. Her first assignment on the outside is to masquerade as a waitress and take a primed bomb to a hotel room. This goes well, and when Bob rings to congratulate her she invites him over for dinner, telling Marco that he is her uncle. Bob gives them tickets to Venice as an engagement present, but this turns out to be the setting for another hit, and Nikita has to shoot the target from her bathroom window with Marco talking to her through the door. She is furious with Bob but he wins her over by offering her her own operation, tracking a traitor. When this goes disastrously wrong, Victor the Cleaner (Jean Reno) is sent to take over the job. Victor uses acid to burn off the face of one of their victims, but when it becomes apparent that the victim is still alive Nikita's male partner becomes hysterical and Victor shoots him. He then forces Nikita to disguise herself as the victim and carry the operation through to the end, killing anyone that

gets in their way. This wanton violence shocks Nikita into the realisation that she can no longer work for the Service, and she takes an emotional leave of Marco, who then covers up for her in a final meeting with Bob.

Point of No Return (1993, UK title *The Assassin*, dir. John Badham, m. Hans Zimmer) casts Bridget Fonda in the lead role, now called Maggie, with Gabriel Byrne as Bob, Anne Bancroft as Amanda and Dermot Mulroney as the boyfriend, now called J.P. It follows the plot of *Nikita* unusually closely, but with one major difference; when the final job goes wrong, Victor the Cleaner (Harvey Keitel) is instructed to kill Maggie after the job is finished and she has to fight him for her life. This is a crucial point as I will explain later.

In both of these films the masquerade seen in the fatal femme movies becomes extremely prominent. Both women have a violent nature which the service teaches them to hide under a cultured, feminine exterior. But while in Nikita this masquerade is unproblematic and her real nature is not affected, Maggie's masquerade as a "real woman" transforms her. Nikita's unqualified violence sits upon her presentation as a child and the film maps her growth to maturity. The progression of Maggie, however, is from a qualified masculinity to a femininity. The creation of her feminine persona eventually leads to her real feminisation and through this to her rejection of violence. Jeffrey Brown argues that Maggie destabilises gender boundaries still further than other action heroines by enacting femininity to disguise her symbolically masculine role: "she is a double cross-dresser" (1996: 53). But in fact the film actually works to *re*-stabilise the gender boundaries which *Nikita* disrupted, by keeping the feminine and the violent aspects of Maggie's nature separate.

At the opening of both films there is a protracted scene under the credits of Nikita/Maggie with three male companions, walking through the city at night. Both show the four junkies dressed in old jeans and leather jackets, looking dishevelled and accompanied by non-diegetic rock music, which as I have said is a signifier of masculinity. *Point of No Return* also includes a female voice at this point, which comes to signify Maggie's inner nature at various points in the film. A further reference to her femininity is demonstrated in that, unlike in *Nikita*, the shots of the junkies walking are intercut with close-ups of their faces, which pick out the delicate Bridget Fonda as a woman from the outset. In *Nikita* we do not know for sure that she is a woman until she speaks outside the shop.

Throughout the opening minutes of the film Nikita is constructed as a child. She has no self control. We see this most clearly at the scene of her "suicide" as she snivels uninhibitedly and cries for her mother. The appeal for her mother is simple and childlike - "my mother will come and get me" - a blind faith in a parent's ability to make everything all right. However, in *Point of No Return* this appeal for her mother is transformed into something else: an early attempt to explain her violence by giving us a reason for it, that her mother cares about her so little that she did not even make the effort to be with her at her "execution"[1].

Throughout the film, Nikita seems not to take her new life seriously. Like a child, she has no concept of the consequence of her actions. She sees her training as a game, and decides she will no longer play when Bob refuses to allow her to go outside the compound. It is not until she is forced to accept the reality of her situation by Bob's ultimatum that she begins to treat it seriously, and then only to save her own life. Bombing the hotel is a new

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[1] This difference is only possible, however, because of the existence of the death penalty in the US. In the French version of the film, the mother could not attend this scene because Nikita is supposed to have committed suicide.

experience, and her singing and dancing afterwards demonstrates her exuberance that it was so easy and her lack of remorse or responsibility for what she has done. Her relationship with Marco seems almost to be that of a child with a parent, in her total lack of inhibition and his indulgence towards her. Nikita's childlike nature continues right up until the acid scene, where she reacts to the shock by adopting the foetal position and screaming for it to stop. But now she has to face the unpleasant consequences of her actions, and Victor forces her to complete the mission. This rude awakening into reality leads to her eventual rejection of violence and determination to stop Victor killing anyone else, her forlorn "I can't take any more of this" demonstrating that this time the lesson has sunk in. It is an enlightened and more mature Nikita that takes leave of Marco in order to start a new life. In view of Tasker's assertion that action heroes and heroines cannot be in control of an adult sexuality, it is pertinent that she ends her relationship with Marco at this sudden transition into adulthood, and certainly their final scene together is their most equal. But the split serves more to reinforce our knowledge of her maturity, her acceptance that she cannot have everything she wants. In order to start a new life she must leave Marco behind, and her unhappiness at this decision, demonstrated not only through the visual image but through the yearning minor music, reinforces our knowledge of the new maturity and strength which she requires to go through with her course of action. Nikita has finally grown up.

By contrast, in *Point of No Return* Maggie's development is definitely from masculinity into femininity, rather than from childhood to adulthood. As she adopts the clothes, the cosmetics, the mannerisms of a "woman" she also begins to think as one, rejecting her masculine violence and the male skills she has learned. There are many clues to her femininity when compared to the French film. The clothes that the two women wear are a

prime example. After Maggie's training is over we almost always see her in feminine dresses and skirts, excepting the supermarket scene where her clothing is explained by the fact that she is redecorating her flat. This is in contrast to Nikita whom we often see in trousers. Nikita wears her most interesting outfit when she goes to see Bob after the Venice trip. She is angry with him, and demonstrates this by parodying the conventions of femininity in which she is supposedly masquerading through her outlandish hat, made more apparent by the disparaging expression of the (female) onlooker at the next table. *Point of No Return*, however, includes no such parody.

Another difference is that Nikita is partnered with a man for the final job, who then gets hysterical and is shot by Victor. But in *Point of No Return* Maggie's partner is female. At this point showing her to be stronger than an hysterical male partner would undermine her new status as a woman, albeit a strong one. Also Maggie is required to disguise herself as a woman, not a man, to complete the job. Nikita's capacity to carry off a successful impression of a man in order to complete her assignment demonstrates that the blurring of gender boundaries in the French film continues to the end. In *Point of No Return* Maggie's feminisation is too explicit for her to be able to carry off the same disguise.

But perhaps the most telling aspect of Maggie's feminisation is that of her objectification by the men and even the women in the film. Amande(a), explains conspiratorially to Nikita that "there are two things which have no limit: femininity, and the means of taking advantage of it" and therefore infers its status as a masquerade. But in *Point of No Return* she seems determined to turn Maggie into the societal concept of a proper woman by finding her "feminine streak". Moreau's Amande explains to Nikita that in order to look and act like a woman she must be guided by her own pleasure as a woman. But Bancroft's Amanda teaches Maggie how to present herself

for the pleasure of others; to smile, to eat correctly, to dress in an acceptable manner. She is constructed as an object to be looked at which is so often the destiny of women on the screen. Even J.P. who is supposedly her ally continues this construction through his endless photographs of her. J.P. also desperately wants to know about Maggie's past and swallows whole Bob's fairytale description of her childhood. He is constructing an ideal Maggie, and part of his ideal would seem to be turning her into an object of the male gaze.

Maggie's relationship with Byrne's Bob is more interesting. His construction and objectification of her is expressed through music. The first time he sees her as a female object of desire coincides with the first Nina Simone song, the explicitly sexual "I Want Some Sugar In My Bowl", which Maggie is playing loudly in her room. It is to the accompaniment of this conventionally 'sexy' slow jazz that he first notices her attractions as she lies alluringly half-dressed on the bed, and he stutters distractedly. Her curvaceous appearance here can be contrasted to that of Nikita who looks graceless in her underwear, and around whom Karyo's Bob is supremely controlled until their eventual kiss. In *Point of No Return* Bob's final request to take the Nina Simone album which Maggie has left behind in the flat further emphasises his objectification of her through the music. Even after she is gone J.P. can own his construction of her through his photos, and Bob through her music.

The non-diegetic music also contributes to Maggie's construction through its references to culture. Both films lay a good deal of emphasis on the acquisition of culture to control and hide the true nature of their heroines. In *Nikita* culture is represented in the music through the semi-diegetic Mozart, which she firstly uses to mock their attempts to culture her

by dancing to in a parody of ballet, and then appropriates in order to support the persona she is portraying, playing it quietly during the dinner party in her flat. The use of the light Baroque-style music over the following Venice scene, however, returns to the parody of culture as she is playing at being sophisticated before reverting to her natural self. The rest of the non-diegetic music in *Nikita* remains pop-based, relying entirely on beat and synthesisers. This more popular sound serves to emphasise the parodic nature of the high culture sounds.

The score to *Point of No Return*, however, incorporates these classical sounds into its structure. Figure 1 shows the "culture" theme which represents the culturisation and construction of Maggie as a woman, in particular by Bob, and her ownership by the people who have created this new version of her.

fig. 1: culture theme
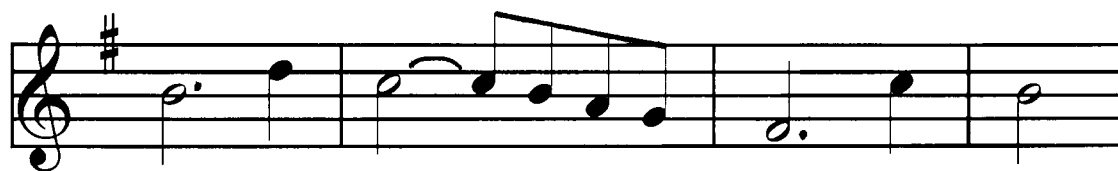
It is a smooth theme in a minor key, with long sustained notes and an overall falling pattern, giving it a sad and wistful feel. It appears for the first time as she begins to see her training as something from which she cannot escape. It is particularly notable when she finally gives in to Bob's ultimatum, and asks Amanda to help her transform into the new person that she needs to become in order to stay alive. From then on it appears at key scenes to demonstrate her lack of personal freedom and her ownership by the Service, and Bob in particular (for example, as they sit in the restaurant before her first job, and as she leaves the training compound). When it appears at the end of the bathroom assassination scene, and again as Bob

refuses to help her get out of the Service, it is emphasising her inability to escape her situation. It also underscores Bob's attempts to (re)construct her, playing under his unrealistic description of her childhood to J.P. at the dinner party, and as he picks up the Nina Simone album - the sign of Maggie's sexual objectification - at the end of the film. It also, interestingly, underscores his report to his boss that Maggie is dead. Even now he is constructing her as something she is not and we are reminded that his control over her still exists, that she is only free because he chose to let her go.

The smooth, simple rhythm of the culture theme contrasts with the dotted, syncopated rhythm of "Maggie's theme" (fig. 2) which signifies her actual character.

fig. 2: Maggie's theme

We hear this for the first time in a slow solo line, giving it a sad quality in conjunction with the minor key, as she is left to think over Bob's proposition of employment. A faster, livelier version of this theme complete with pop beat underscores her training montage. Here it shows that she is not yet taking the training seriously or allowing herself to be changed. This use of Maggie's theme gives its next appearance a greater significance: it plays as Bob gives Maggie the birthday cake, but at his ultimatum it falters and then gives way to the culture theme. This musical transition clearly underlines her decision to submit to the Service. From this point on Maggie's theme appears only rarely, at moments when the culture mask slips, for example her honest delight at receiving a birthday present from

Bob. The Nina Simone songs take its place in representing her connection with her past self - she tells J.P. that they remind her of her mother - but Nina Simone now has a double meaning, signifying her objectification by Bob who has even given her "Nina" as a codename. Maggie's own character, then, is almost completely submerged under her constructed personality. But Maggie's theme reappears when J.P. tells Bob she has gone at the end of the film. Its reiteration here signifies her eventual escape and return to herself. It would seem at this point that she has rejected everything she has been taught, even returning to her original masculine clothes. But the appearance of rejection is undermined by the music. As we see Maggie walking away we hear the theme shown in figure 3.

fig. 3: freedom theme

It is a triumphant major theme, with the melodic line remaining firmly based around the triad notes of each chord and thereby strengthening the major key. This is the "freedom" theme, having originally appeared at Maggie's first trip out of the compound, and its appearance here at the end of the film signifies her real freedom from the constraints placed upon her, not only by Bob and the Service, but even by J.P. But the freedom theme also has a Baroque sound with the descending octaves, fugal movement and harpsichord of its accompaniment. This high cultured sound, then, along with the theme's associations with the reconstructed Maggie who left the compound, indicate that she has been irrevocably altered by her experiences.

Music also plays a large part in the audience perception of the violent acts which are integral to these films. Both films clearly segregate the violence that the characters perform of their own volition and that which they are instructed to do. In *Nikita* the eponymous heroine's early violence (the murder of the policeman, the stabbing and the fight in the courtroom) is either totally free from music or underscored with odd synthesiser sounds. But the restaurant mission and the bathroom scene are underscored with a regular percussive beat and in the latter case a military snare. The restaurant mission music begins with minor synthesiser chords as Bob leaves Nikita alone to perform the assassination, but the sadness the minor chords signify is connected to her disappointment in having her happy evening and trust in Bob destroyed. The music becomes a drum beat when she snaps out of her disappointment and prepares for the shooting. This military sound is identifying her as a soldier and thereby reducing her culpability for the killings that are about to happen. The other musical episodes related to violence lend an unusual insight into her feelings. As she prepares for the hotel bombing assignment, going to the bar and then the hotel basement as per instructions, there is a fast, light syncopated beat in contrast with the slower, more deliberate beat for the other two assassination scenes. The quick pulse, in common with standard action music, prepares us for action and generates excitement. Its disparity with the other two assassination scenes seems to demonstrate that the music is expressing the character's nervous anticipation for her first proper assignment, rather than pointing out that she is following orders. This is not typical of action scenes which tend to focus on the spectacle, rather than the character's feelings. But then the team sit down to wait for their opportunity and the music stops. When the phone eventually rings, which is obviously after some time, Nikita performs the minimal task of taking the order with the primed bomb upstairs without

any musical accompaniment at all, and the feeling is one of strong anticlimax. The lack of musical beat demonstrates the lack of excitement in the eventual task.

The other important episode is that of the surveillance of the ambassador prior to the final operation. Marco comes home celebrating leaving his job at the supermarket in order to go into business building boats. The scene is accompanied by a light major theme with a slowish beat, giving it a relaxed feel, which continues over the change to her surveillance operation and throughout the whole montage. The overpowering impression is that the music is paralleling her career advancement - getting her own operation - to Marco's. This is consistent with the rest of the film, as throughout Nikita's status as an assassin is treated as just a job, the same as any other. Her work colleagues are shown to be normal people just doing their jobs and sometimes making mistakes. The friendly ease which exists between her and Amanda, among the team for the final job, and even to some extent between Nikita and Bob, demonstrates the normality of this life to her and her happiness within it. She is delighted at the success and ease of the hotel bombing, and Bob wins her over after Venice by offering her a career opportunity, her own operation. While her ignorance of the consequences of her work is part of her childlike character, it is also a necessary component of the characters of all the people we see. They simply think about their work as a job which they take pride in doing well. In this context Nikita's determination to finish the final mission even after it has gone wrong can be seen as professional pride. She wants her first operation to be a success.

Maggie's attitude towards violence in *Point of No Return* is completely different. True to Hollywood conceptions of violent women her violence has to be accounted for. This is the pertinence of the absence of her mother from

her 'execution' and in particular from her 'funeral', despite Maggie's desperate pleas for her. The film thereby infers that Maggie is rebellious and violent because of her bad relationship with her mother. Even at this early stage of the film, then, where she is supposed to be wantonly violent, excuses are being made for her. When she kills the policeman it is significant that although she puts the gun to his head, she does not pull the trigger until the policeman has made a move towards his own gun, so that the killing can be given a slightly defensive air. In the scene that follows where she stabs the senior officer through the hand, we see grainy shots from her perspective, emphasising that she is under the influence of drugs and so not responsible for her actions. Both films make the stabbing more acceptable by showing the officer first hitting the heroine hard enough to knock her off her chair, but this is helped along in the Hollywood version by the slight synthesiser emphasis in the soundtrack on both acts, which helps to mirror them by treating them as the same despite the stabbing being far more serious than the slap. Maggie's fight in the courtroom is also helped by the presence of "action" music - fast beat, repetitive rhythms, and a continuing movement with no emphasis on any of the actual violent acts. As mentioned earlier, it is standard for action movies to treat violence and action as spectacle. Leitch (1994) explains how audiences can disavow the violence that they see on screen by being insulated against the consequences, making fight scenes exciting rather than disturbing. The music contributes to the ignorance of consequence by keeping an overall sense of pace and energy, and not emphasising individual acts of violence. In this particular fight scene the underscore binds the whole scene together and presents it to the audience as an exciting spectacle, not giving us the opportunity to consider the feelings of - or consequences for - the people involved. In this way,

Maggie's violence is not given a negative slant. "Violence is ... justified if it doesn't hurt its victims" (Leitch, 1994: 12).

These qualifications continue in the portrayal of Maggie's early attempt to escape by kidnapping Bob after he has offered her the chance to work for the Service. In *Nikita* Karyo's Bob is softly-spoken, almost sympathetic to her plight, and Nikita's violence is emphasised by her destruction of the furniture and kicking Bob unnecessarily while he lies injured on the floor. The music that accompanies Nikita's dash for the exit is a light upbeat major theme, detracting from the seriousness and urgency of the scene, which only becomes minor and therefore darker-sounding when it becomes apparent that her plan will not work. By contrast, in *Point of No Return* Bob is cruel to Maggie, snarling at her to "do something to help [her] country for a change" and responding to her plea for time to think with: "yeah, why don't you think about it Maggie? You've got one hour!" Maggie's violence against him, then, is seen as justifiable revenge for the way he treated her when she was confused and frightened, and her dash for the exit is accompanied by fast minor music, a darker sound than in the French film. The more serious nature of the music in the Hollywood film emphasises Maggie's desperation.

In *Point of No Return* Bob's nastiness is mirrored throughout the portrayal of almost every member of the government force. The other team members in her first job in the hotel clearly show impatience with and contempt for their inexperienced assassin. Keitel's Victor cold-bloodedly shoots her friend and team member for getting hysterical during the horrific acid incident. His own reaction to the realisation that the victim is still alive when he pours acid onto her face, is a shrug of the shoulders and a casual "she's not dead" (as opposed to Reno's shocked exclamation and involuntary jump away in *Nikita*). Maggie's boss plans to have her killed

and Victor attempts to carry this out. Bob continually betrays her trust with ulterior motives. Even Amanda betrays her by telling Bob of her visit. This unequivocally black picture of Maggie's colleagues makes her final rejection of them unproblematic, and makes her own violent actions less reprehensible by providing a much worse alternative.

Maggie's own attitude to violence deteriorates immediately after her transformation into "femininity". When she sees the hotel destroyed by the bomb she has planted she reacts with horror. The music emphasises her feelings. As she moves out to her car in the hotel car park the freedom theme is playing. Here it is signifying her freedom from apprehension now that she has completed her first assignment with no unpleasantness. But it is abruptly wiped out with the noise of the explosion. After this there is a dramatic minor upward run of strings, underscoring Maggie's horrified reaction. When Bob arrives on the scene and asks her how she is, she responds with "I just blew up a hotel. How the hell do you think I am?", putting into words the horror and anger which the music has already implied.

After the next assassination - the bathroom shooting - Maggie tells Bob that she wants to leave the Service. The feminisation that we have witnessed through her appearance and her changing attitude to violence is made explicit here as she pleads, "I know you like that you made me into something different. But you're not looking close enough. I AM different." Bob only overturns her refusal to undertake the next assignment when he promises to help her get out of the Service if she completes one last job. When this goes wrong, Maggie's desperation to finish the job is accounted for by her commendable desire to leave the Service.

However, the most important contribution that the music makes to excusing Maggie's violence is in the two scenes where she is killing under strict orders, the restaurant scene and the bathroom scene. In *Nikita* these two scenes are underscored by a regular slow beat and snare, giving them a military feel. Nikita is portrayed by the music as a killing machine with no emotion. In *Point of No Return* these assassinations are underscored by the theme shown in figure 4, which I have called the "nightmare" theme.

fig. 4: nightmare theme

This music symbolises Maggie's obedience in acting out the instructions of the people who own her, the Service. But its interest lies in its structure. Its underlying triplets give the music a cyclical feel and a problematic rhythmic base which is difficult to break down. This is exacerbated in the introduction to the theme by the supporting strings playing every second triplet beat, which makes the rhythm very difficult to determine. The cyclical feel, the lack of movement, is added to by the static melodic line which moves from the fifth note up or down a semitone and then back, with the length of the notes becoming shorter through each phrase. The music modulates up by tones and semitones at irregular intervals. The combined effect of these musical strategies is to give the theme a nightmare-ish feel, a feel of being trapped and unable to move, with the overall harmonic rising only contributing to the escalation of tension because we expect it to rise to a climax. The nightmare feel builds when the music slows to half speed, the musical equivalent of slow motion, negating any movement to an even greater extent. This musical feeling emulates

exactly what Maggie is supposed to be experiencing, her feeling of being trapped and unable to escape.

In both these scenes the music and the images work together very effectively. In the restaurant the theme begins as Maggie prepares for the shooting. At this point the image is also slightly slowed down, adding to the feeling of unreality and nightmare. The beat enters as Maggie walks towards the target, giving the music a heavier texture. The theme stops and the music slows to arpeggios as we see the target group, and then returns slightly faster than before as the camera switches back to Maggie. The ritardando to half speed coincides with the raising of her gun and the half speed music starts at the shots, as the nightmare is intensifying. The theme continues as she tries to escape and comes to a halt as she sees the bricked in window. From this point on she is no longer under instructions and must fall back on her own resources in order to escape with her life. It is important that this is not characterised in the music by Maggie's own theme, indicating that even though she is no longer acting under instructions she is still a trained product of the Service. Instead, her need to use her own resources to escape is characterised by the female voice and the rock guitar that appeared at the opening of the film. The rest of her escape is accompanied by typical "action" music - fast beat, percussion, synthesisers, plenty of dissonance, and the occasional fast moving string line - again placing the emphasis on the action of the scene, her fight to escape, and not on the violence that enables her to do so.

The second use of the nightmare theme is during the bathroom scene. Here its connection with the images is even more notable. The frequent cuts away from Maggie demonstrate that the theme is directly linked to her, because we only hear it when she is visible on the screen. The music starts as she enters the bathroom, signifying the start of the mission. It continues

through the gun assembly and only falters at J.P.'s untimely insistence on a conversation. The triplet movement continues quickly and lightly as she tries to focus on the target, but at J.P.'s proposal of marriage they stop and the music slows, continuing slowly and melodically as he pleads with her. The lack of the nightmare theme indicates that her attention is no longer on the job. When J.P. leaves to answer the door the theme re-enters, stopping at the cuts to J.P. As the music rises and the tension builds, the cutting between shots becomes faster, often coinciding with the musical beats to give the scene a choreographed quality, fitting in with the cyclical triplets and adding to the trapped feeling of inevitability. The theme climaxes as Maggie shoots and immediately stops as the door opens, changing to a slow minor to underscore the following confrontation between J.P. and Maggie.

This association of the theme with the shots of Maggie lends credence to the trapped feeling it creates. The music is so closely associated with Maggie that we know it is describing her feelings. The feeling of unreality created in each scene, first through the slow motion and secondly through the correspondence of cuts to beats, intensifies the nightmare quality of the music. The theme makes one final appearance, as Victor grabs Maggie's throat and tries to throttle her towards the end of the film. Here it recalls not only the strict obedience to the rules which she showed in her own assassinations, and that he is now demonstrating even though he is close to death, but also intensifies her feeling of literal entrapment. Its obvious demonstration of her feeling of entrapment by the Service and her unwillingness to carry out their instructions makes this theme one of the most telling and emotive aspects of Maggie's rejection of violence.

These two films, then, demonstrate an entirely different attitude towards their central character. *Nikita* provides us with a female character

who hides a violent, 'masculine' nature behind a self-consciously 'feminine' exterior. At the same time her childlike portrayal works to de-sexualise her, throwing in to sharp relief the performative nature of her femininity. In this film the gender categories are blurred, and Nikita's true nature is separated from her image, which we clearly see as a masquerade.

Point of No Return, however, seems unable to retain this ambivalence about gender. In following the plot of the French original so closely, it cannot place Maggie into a stereotypical female role in order to explain her violence. What it does instead is to move her from masculine to feminine throughout the course of the film, so that she is always inscribed within accepted gender boundaries. Her violence is associated with her masculine nature at the beginning of the film, and as she becomes feminised she rejects her activity. Furthermore, the film tries to make her a victim of a bad mother. In this way not only is she inscribed in a typical female position, but motherhood again can be held responsible for the female violence. As in *Malice*, the mother gets the blame for creating a monster.

The film therefore firmly reinscribes the gender boundaries that were transgressed in *Nikita*. Maggie's transformation from masculinity to femininity and her rejection of violence are inextricably linked, reinforcing the gender stereotypes that equate femininity with passivity. This is an explicit example of the Hollywood inability to cope with female violence. But more importantly, Maggie is unable to maintain a masquerade of femininity without being transformed into what she is enacting. *Point of No Return*, then, collapses the distance between its female character's exterior and her interior, between her essence and her image, so that the performative nature of gender so clearly seen in *Nikita* is denied.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed the way in which music impacts on our understanding of films, and how its usage can be seen as ideologically constructed. Female violence was chosen as a test case for the impact of music on our film viewing because dominant cultural discourse equates femininity with passivity, making the violent woman a difficult image in film. This means that the score has to work extra hard to neutralise her transgression of gender norms, giving us a clear opportunity to examine its ideological potential. It has been my premise that active women have their activity explained in ways which qualify their transgression of dominant ideals of femininity and lock them back into a standard gender framework. By relating her violence to a stereotypical female role, such as mother, lesbian or victim, the narratives explain away their heroines' transgressive behaviour. The musical score's ability to colour our perceptions of what we see, and create links between different aspects of the film, is a major facilitator in this process.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to review my arguments in terms of three separate areas which my work has addressed:

1) What have we learned about the films under analysis in this thesis by looking at their musical scores?

2) What has the study of the scoring techniques for violent women added to the field of film music theory?

3) From the discussion of the films here, what can we learn about the relationship between gender and violence in contemporary film, and in particular the pleasure we can get from them?

What have we learned about these films?

The two different types of violent women that I have looked at here complement each other, the good action heroine the obverse of the bad fatal femme. Because she is good, the action heroine must be sympathetic, and so although she appropriates a masculine role and masculine iconography, she must be "feminised" in some way in order to retain sympathy, and perhaps believability. Consequently, the action heroine is subject to forms of representation that the action hero is not, such as the emphasis on her maternal instinct. Her violence is very often coupled to her perceived "masculinity", and in the course of the narrative she rejects her violence in favour of her feminine role. The music plays a very strong part in portraying the action heroine in this way. Chapter 5 demonstrated how the heroines of *Aliens*, *Terminator 2* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* are feminised in order to retain or regain sympathy, and that motherhood is an important strategy employed to this end. The music helps to emphasise their mothering as the one clear and harmonious feature in an otherwise desperate and musically dark situation. This use of the score to darken the films is important, because it shows that where action heroines can adopt the iconography of action heroes (if not the same lack of justification for their behaviour within the narrative), they cannot also take on the same musical attitudes. Rather than being treated as victorious, noble or even light-hearted, the action heroine's violence is problematised by the dissonant and non-rhythmic accompanying music which slows the action and adds a feeling of desperation. *Point of No Return* treats its heroine's violence in a similar manner, and although it does not feminise its character through making her a mother, her growing femininity is linked to her rejection of violence. In this way the action heroines are shown to be acting through necessity rather

than through a natural bent towards violence, whereas action heroes are rarely subject to the same level of qualification. The hero's actions may require justification, but his capability to be violent is a natural given. The heroine's activity is far more constrained, and the music is a very important factor in undermining it. It would appear that the action heroine narratives utilise Leitch's second strategy of disavowal rather than his third. While their violence can never be seen as natural, they are shown to be using it in the fight against something inhuman - the psychotic aliens, the technological revolution, patriarchal domination, and the secret service on two occasions. This throws them into a consistently defensive role, situating them in the more usual female position of victim and making their transgression of the violent gender boundary more acceptable. While Thelma and Louise do demonstrate elements of Leitch's third disavowal strategy, more in keeping with the action hero film, they pay the price of their lives for crossing this boundary. It is a significant point that as the music in this film becomes progressively darker, more in keeping with the other action heroine scores discussed, the return to major, peaceful themes in *Thelma and Louise* underlines not their choice of motherhood but their choice of death. Not having a child to save them, their only other option is to end it all.

By contrast the fatal femmes are bad characters, and as such their violent behaviour is condemned. Because of this their violence is rarely disavowed, but can rather be emphasised - their weapons particularly vicious, their natures especially monstrous. Even so, they have to be explained in a way which sites them within a female stereotype, so that their activity does not threaten the established gender boundaries of Hollywood film. So the fatal femmes are mothers or "others", their violence explained through their reproductive systems or their excessive, deviant sexuality. But

their ability to masquerade as the stereotypical domestic woman makes them all the more monstrous. Their 'masculine' violent natures are set against this model of traditional femininity, which they enact with some measure of success. This is emphasised in the Mad Bad Women films through their further contrast to the good woman. The fatal femme's desire for what the good woman embodies - a happy domesticity - and her ultimate failure to achieve this where the truly feminine, passive woman succeeds, strongly upholds patriarchal discourses of femininity. The Bitch Goddess films are less obviously patriarchal; although these women are evil they are also attractive in their power, and the films ultimately refuse to explain away their violence.

The music has again contributed a great deal to these alternative portrayals of the fatal femme. The scores for the Mad Bad Women films have set up the transgressive fatal femme as a clear threat to the ideal of domesticity in each film. This is particularly obvious in *Fatal Attraction*, although ironically we can also see that the ideal is false. In *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* the peaceful domestic music extends to include Peyton when she takes on a domestic role, but excludes both her and Claire with dissonant accompaniment when they act against the domestic realm. Even *Single White Female* follows this pattern, the flat initially associated with gentle themes, but becoming a site of threat and dissonance throughout the second half of the film. And although *Single White Female* is unusually introspective on its fatal femme, it does still eventually condemn her as a threat to the "proper" patriarchal system. This contrast of threatening dissonance with the peaceful, tonal music representing the domestic ideal recalls McClary's work on opera madwomen. As with the operas studied by McClary, all three of these films eventually contain their excessive mad woman within patriarchy, characterised by the dissolution of excessive dissonance into a clear tonality.

However, the non-diegetic musical accompaniment for these mad women does not portray the same beauty and allure that characterises the opera madwomen. The dissonance is usually ugly and horrific, such as Alex's fuzzy synthesiser accompaniment in *Fatal Attraction*, and the re-establishment of tonality is a relief rather than a loss.

The musical score that seems best to portray the allure of excessive chromaticism is the score to *Basic Instinct*. Here the music is unbalanced, dissonant and constantly moving through unrelated key areas, but at the same time shimmering and attractive. However, the music is never contained within a tonal framework, mirroring Catherine's ultimate success. In this film patriarchy - and tonality - lose out to the allure of the powerful woman. In fact, the Bitch Goddess films subvert all the musical conventions that we see in the Mad Bad Women films. *Malice* in particular can be seen as subversive, because of its emphasis on the domesticity that is so important in the Mad Bad Women narratives. But in *Malice*, this domestic picture is ultimately shown to be false, and the purposely overblown idealistic music is ironic. Although the fatal femme ultimately fails and the music for the final scene is rhythmically regular and tonal, the end credits are again accompanied by the excessive domestic music, refuting patriarchal control and confirming the film's irony.

The Last Seduction never even enters the standard musical conventions that appeared in the previous scores, employing a less obviously coded jazz score instead. In this, and in refusing to condemn its fatal femme's violence, this film does not direct our feelings at all. Rather than explaining, excusing or condemning its transgressive female character, the musical score admires her success and ultimately reinforces her amoral attitudes. So in all three Bitch Goddess films the music has worked against standard patriarchal resolution, rather than for it.

Thelma and Louise, too, is problematic. Along with all its other ambiguities the film remains ambivalent about the reinstatement of patriarchy. The major, valedictory music at the end would seem to indicate Thelma and Louise's success, but their deaths mean that patriarchy, by default, has won. This lends an ironic twist to the idea of tonal, major music being associated with patriarchal victory.

In all of the films I have studied, then, the music makes a fascinating and valuable contribution to the representation of the female characters. For the action heroines and the mad, bad women the music tends to re-situate them within a patriarchal framework. The bitch goddesses too are stereotyped as "other" or as Jezebel, but the music in these films tends to open up a space to admire them, or to critique standard filmic ideals of femininity. In demonstrating the ability of the music to direct our attitudes towards these women, this thesis has shown the strong ideological potential inherent in the film score.

What has this study of violent women contributed to the field of film music analysis?

My analyses of the films under discussion in this thesis have been based on wider discussions of musical meaning, both within and without the film score. In Chapter 2, I argued that film music carried specific meanings in a way that concert music did not, through its connection to the filmic images. But following cultural theories of music I also argued that music brings culturally defined meanings with it *into* the film as well as receiving meanings *from* it, such as the obvious instrumental coding for characters in the *Lethal Weapon* films. Once a particular sound or group of sounds has a

connection established with a certain type of filmic image, this process in itself creates new meanings which future scores can draw upon. Through chapters 3 and 4 I mapped some general conventions of scoring violence, and my analyses used these conventions as a springboard to examine how female violence is treated differently to male violence. For example, I showed how action heroines are accompanied by dark and murky music, while fatal femmes are often accompanied by dissonant and chromatic music with uncertain key bases. These analyses have also shown how the musical accompaniment sites the violent female character within certain acceptable female stereotypes, to lessen her transgression. In this way I have positioned my musical analysis within the framework of theories of gender and violence on film. While similar work has been done on classical film scores, for example Kalinak's work on musical stereotypes of the fallen woman and the virtuous wife (1982), my thesis has looked at more contemporary films. Here the gender stereotyping is informed by changing discourses of femininity which resulted from the feminist movement of the 1970s and the backlashes of the 1980s. Through the analyses presented here, we can see that the process of stereotyping main female characters in the music is still pervasive, but perhaps more subtle. The heroines of contemporary film are more violent than their classical counterparts, and the discourses surrounding them are more politically sensitive, so the music has to work harder and more insidiously to keep them within the standard gender boundaries of mainstream film.

I have also tried in this thesis to produce a framework for the study of musical attitudes to violence. There is still much to be said about Hollywood's love affair with increasingly graphic violence, and the more and more complex strategies of disavowal which must accompany this. From the work undertaken in this thesis we can see that the movie score

makes a major contribution to the disavowal of the ultra-violent images, but unfortunately my discussion of techniques for scoring violence is necessarily simplistic owing to time constraints. In making recommendations for future research from my thesis, then, I would begin here by calling for more in-depth analysis of the processes of scoring violence. One interesting way to address this would be to look at the increasing visibility of violence on screen, and how scoring techniques have changed accordingly. In classic Hollywood cinema where the violence was less visible, music often worked to emphasise the ugliness of something that the audience could not see. With the increasing visibility of on-screen violence, the musical rendering of violent acts seems to have changed considerably. Owing to the strong academic and public interest surrounding the effects and the censorship of film violence, studies into its presentation are extremely important, and the neglected area of music is crying out for some intensive research.

The other area in which I would recommend further research to extend on the work presented here, is the analysis of the musical portrayal of other minority interest groups in Hollywood, and in particular the portrayal of race and ethnicity. This thesis has not attempted to address these, firstly because of the rarity of non-white female characters in the sort of roles I have been looking at, and secondly because race raises a whole new set of issues which should be dealt with in more depth than I have had time for. The category of race tends to subsume gender in Hollywood, with black women defined in terms of their race before their gender, and with black female spectators also identifying in that order (Gaines: 1994). The stereotyped portrayals of ethnic minorities in these films are mirrored by the musical scores, which use conventional "ethnic" sounds - often inauthentic - to score these characters. An example given in this thesis is that of the instrumentation in *Lethal Weapon*, where Riggs is scored with an electric

guitar, bringing with it associations with heavy rock and hence of a white, working-class masculinity; whereas Murtaugh is scored with the saxophone, an obviously "black" sound, which situates him comfortably as the comedy black sidekick. Further research in this area could build on the analytical framework presented in this thesis to examine how music establishes minority characters as 'other', or situates them within wider cultural discourses of ethnicity, and this analysis would throw into relief the 'whiteness' of mainstream scoring techniques. Again this is a hugely important area in contemporary film studies, and one to which musical analysis would make a valuable contribution.

What have we learned about the pleasures of violence and the place of gender in contemporary film?

In chapter 1 I described the main pleasures of movie violence as lying either in spectacle, or in empowerment. Music can make an important contribution in turning violence into spectacle. Chapter 4 showed how action scenes are scored to maximise excitement and minimise negative reactions to the violence that these scenes include. Music can also aid our pleasure in empowerment, by supporting the hero(ine) with heroic consonance, for example, and undermining the villain with dissonant evil sounds. In terms of gender we have seen that the violent heroine brings a particular resonance to the process of empowerment because of her more usual position as victim. In this way, social discourses of gender play a large part in our pleasure in female violence, and perhaps the dark sounds of the action heroine scores add to this resonance in the woman's empowerment,

emphasising her victimised status and the desperation that makes her violent.

I argued in chapter 1 that the pleasure created through the process of vicarious empowerment was equally accessible both to men and to women in the audience, because we can identify across the gender divide. But I also argued that our identifications with characters are not totally free-floating because there is a strong social dimension to this process of identification. This being the case, while both men and women can identify with such characters as the action heroine, there is an extent to which she will hold more resonance for female audience members who experience her more normal disempowered position on a regular basis. While female audience members may have this peculiar access to the action heroine, however, the pleasures of identifying with her will not necessarily be less for male audience members, because they can experience her empowerment whilst simultaneously disavowing their identification with her normal victimised status on gender grounds.

This possible gender split in the audience through social factors is more apparent in the case of the fatal femmes, who are set up as an explicit threat to patriarchy. While vilified in the film and by male and female audience members alike, these women can provide moments of wicked escape for their female viewers, as suggested by Pidduck (1995: 72). In making these women threatening to men, the films bring the gender divide to the foreground and play upon the unequal status of men and women in a patriarchal society. Here then, the social dimension of identification increases in importance. However, in the case of the mad, bad women at least, patriarchal ideology is reinstated and the audience enjoys seeing these transgressive female characters held to account for their actions. The mad, bad women films appear to be a product of their time, in that they are

combining the trend towards increasingly graphic film violence with the backlash against feminism apparent after the 1970s. But the bitch goddesses are also a product of their time, less convincing in the re-establishment of patriarchy, emphasising the destabilisation of gender boundaries that has occurred in contemporary society. Here the pleasure can come from the transgression itself, the re-establishment of norms less important.

This is an interesting conclusion because one of the most important pleasures to be found in film comes from their clarification of real life. Penley argues that this is particularly the case in filmic portrayals of the relationships between men and women. She states that:

> "it is by now well-known that the narrative logic of classical film is powered by the desire to establish, by the end of the film, the nature of masculinity, the nature of femininity, and the way in which these two can be complementary rather than antagonistic." (1991: 71)

With the dramatic change in female roles in contemporary film, this clarity can be harder to attain. So while violent women have entered the cinematic mainstream, they have done so by firmly establishing themselves in a stereotypical role, to lessen the threat of their transgression of gender norms. Hollywood's need to re-inscribe gender boundaries around a potentially transgressive female character is particularly demonstrated in my comparison of *Nikita* and *Point of No Return*. In doing this, the films attempt to retain a clear sense of what it means to be masculine or feminine. As explained in chapter 2, the music is particularly important here because it makes the supposed emotive content of the narrative tangible, clearly signalling it to the audience, and having an effect on our reactions to these characters.

So in clearly marking different gender roles Hollywood is continuing its mission to simplify messy reality, presenting us with clear and easily defined characters with stereotypical characteristics. Because the female

position is consistently passive, the strong women I have studied have their activity compensated for by their "proper" gender role. As such they are not just sited within a female stereotype, but their violence is related to the stereotype (for example, to the protection of a child, or revenge for their victimisation), so that the clarity of gender boundaries in mainstream film is not threatened. As my analyses have shown, the music plays a consistent and valuable role in the linkage between a female character's violence and her stereotypical role.

To end on a note of hope, however, I would like to argue that despite their qualifications, these violent women are helping to change accepted female representations. In some ways, it is easier for the movie women to cross the gender boundary than for movie men, because in making this transition the woman is raising her social status, whereas the man would be lowering his. It is up to the women, then, to change standard gender representations. But because the parameters of both masculinity and femininity are so firmly inscribed, an annoying catch-22 situation arises. While qualifying the female character seems to disallow female activity outwith accepted stereotypes, the lack of these qualifications leads to her being identified as "really a man". As Gledhill says:

> "Assertion of our social difference - maternity, feeling, irrationality - seems only to make patriarchal equations: woman as earth-mother, woman as other. On the other hand, constructions of our culture - heroines as strong and powerful bring charges of male identification, or substitution. We seem trapped. However we try to cast our patriarchal feminine identifications, all available positions are already constructed from the place of the patriarchal other so as to repress our "real" difference." (1984: 42)

In this way, the very qualifications that would seem to deny women the freedom to act, do at least work to identify them as female within a

restrictive system of identification where "woman" has come to signify "passivity".

So in some ways the feminine qualifications of these characters are positive. Tasker (1993: 135) argues that we need to see action heroines in the context of action cinema, where they are transgressing gender roles through their very presence, rather than in the context of feminist film making where they will always be found wanting. They may be masculinised in order to function within the macho world of the action film, but they are still being marked as women (149). In this way they are providing a space where women can be active without losing their feminine status. As Cowie says, "[i]n this sense a film is not "progressive" as a given effect of its content but as the result of its insertion within particular institutions and discourses" (1988: 112). In the Hollywood context, the violent woman is transgressive simply by being there.

Whether or not she is "progressive", however, is another question. The ultra-violent woman, and in particular the fatal femme, has been widely condemned for hiding the reality of social violence, where women are overwhelmingly the victims. As Waldman points out: "there's more to a positive image than meets the eye" (1990). So while these women may allow us "moments of wicked escape" (Pidduck, 1995: 72), their transgressiveness does not necessarily commute into progressiveness. However, their very presence seems to indicate a rising acceptance of active roles for women in a wider social context, and that acceptance can only be positive.

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