

## Artistic Synthesis and the Interaction between the Arts

Research article

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### Film Music and the Director's Aesthetics: Concerning the Methodology of Film Text Analysis\*

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**Abstract.** The article raises the question of the necessity of applying special and individualized approaches in analyzing the music of author's cinematography. The traditionally basic trend of research of cinema music centers around functionally semantic analysis of cinematic works. However, in the movies of author-directors, music is frequently included in the polysemantic artistic space of a cinematic text in the broad sense of this concept as the assemblage of the text (the storyline narrative), the context, the subtext, the intertext, and the metatext of the cinema product. As a rule, analysis of the music of the author's film is inseparable from the visual images and peculiarities of the other elements of the phonogram (speech, noises, sound effects, silence). In this context, the following concepts require demarcation: "film music," "music of the film" and "the audiovisual solution of film." The suggested approach, based on the principles of film director's aesthetics, is expounded on the example of analysis of Robert Bresson's film *Une femme douce* (*A Gentle Woman*). The movie is of special interest due to the fact that in it Bresson's general ideas regarding the use of sound, including music, in film, are manifested to the fullest degree, including declarative utterances from the screen. In the case of Bresson, the principles of phenomenological aesthetics manifested in the director's works, especially those from his mature periods, are of foundational significance. However, the general approaches towards analysis of music in author's cinematography suggested in the present article may be extrapolated

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and applied in the research of the works of film directors who created cinema works on the basis of other and most diverse aesthetic principles.

**Keywords:** film music, audiovisual solution of a film, screen image, cinematic aesthetics, Robert Bresson, Feodor Dostoyevsky, screen adaptations of the novelette *Une femme douce* (*A Gentle Woman*)

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## Художественный синтез и взаимодействие искусств

Научная статья

### Музыка фильма и эстетика режиссёра: к методологии анализа кинотекстов\*\*

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**Аннотация.** В статье поднимается вопрос о необходимости применения специальных и индивидуализированных подходов в анализе музыки авторского кинематографа. Традиционно основное направление исследования киномузыки сводится к функционально-семантическому анализу кинопроизведений. Однако в картинах режиссёров-авторов музыка часто включается в полисемантическое художественное пространство кинотекста в широком смысле этого понятия как совокупности текста (сюжетный нарратив), контекста, подтекста, интертекста, метатекста кинопроизведения. Как правило, анализ музыки авторского фильма неотделим от визуальных образов и особенностей других элементов фонограммы (речь, шумы, звуковые эффекты, тишина). В этом контексте требуют разграничения понятия «киномузыка», «музыка фильма», «аудиовизуальное решение фильма». Предлагаемый подход, базирующийся на принципах режиссёрской эстетики, излагается на примере анализа музыки фильма Робера Брессона «Кроткая» (*Une femme douce*, 1969). Картина представляет особый интерес тем, что в ней в полной мере, вплоть до декларативных высказываний с экрана, воплощены общие идеи Брессона относительно использования

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в кинофильме звука, в том числе музыки. В случае Брессона основополагающее значение имеют принципы феноменологической эстетики, воплощённые в творчестве режиссёра, особенно зрелого и позднего периодов. Однако общие подходы к анализу музыки в авторском кинематографе, предлагаемые в данной статье, могут быть экстраполированы и применены в исследовании творчества режиссёров, создававших кинопроизведения на основе других и самых различных эстетических принципов.

**Ключевые слова:** музыка фильма, аудиовизуальное решение фильма, экранный образ, киноэстетика, Робер Брессон, Фёдор Достоевский, экранизации повести «Кроткая»

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### Cinema Music as a Concept: Nuances of the Terminology and Methodology of Analysis

When beginning a conversation about music for cinematography, it is necessary to resolve the concept of film music in the strict sense of the word, it should have been termed as original music created by a composer particular for any film as well as an assemblage of composer's works created for the cinematograph (for example, "Alfred Schnittke's film music"). However, the opinion is also widespread that all music sounding from out of the screen is film music. We can also find the identification of the concepts of "movie music" and "soundtrack," which is not quite correct, since a soundtrack may include not only the authorial music score, but also quoted classical and modern music, and even dialogs and sound effects. And still, if we highlight particularly the music of the film, the question arises about the correlation in it of authorial and quoted musical material. Can J. S. Bach's *Chorale Prelude in F minor*, used in motion pictures on frequent occasions, be called movie music? It seems that in such cases what is meant here is the diegetic or the non-diegetic *musical quotation* as an element of the author's sound-related solution to a movie episode. Thereby, upon

the examination of a cinematograph, especially the author's kind, which we will discuss further on, it would be more preferable to use the term of "music of the film," which presumes an individual approach to the cinema text and makes it possible to include in the sphere of analysis both original music composed especially for the film and non-original musical fragments (musical quotations).

The second element which must be finalized is that of methodology. Let us remind ourselves that the various aspects of existence of music in the cinematographic space were researched beginning with the era of the silent film. Cinema and music researchers, philosophers, philologists, culturologists have written a large number of interesting texts on this subject, which has not lost its relevance and demand in the discourse of art studies, especially in musicology. [1–7] The rise of interest in the specificity of interaction of music and the screen arts are enhanced by the new reality of the digital era, which has already exerted a significant amount of influence not only on technology, but also on the creative process of building the phonosphere of the film (multichannel sound formats, immersive sound, etc.). But if we glance with a certain amount

of detachment at works dealing with the music of the cinema, we could observe that for the most part they are devoted to two mutually connected questions: *what* is the music in the film doing (that is, what are the meanings of joining together musical sound with the visual element, the functioning of in-frame and off-screen music) and *how* music is doing this (i.e., the forms and means of formation of these meanings). Thereby, the main direction of research of movie music is narrowed to the functional-semantic analysis of the cinematic texts.

However, with the development of the artistic language of the cinema art and, especially, with the appearance of authorial cinematograph,<sup>1</sup> another question arose before the researcher of the musical component: *why is it* that in the film the musical sound is used *particularly in such a particular way*? And this cannot be solved only within the film; it inevitably outgrows the sphere of cinematographic diegesis, spreading into the sphere of the author's world, context and spirit of the time. The researcher is confronted with the problem of understanding the film director's aesthetics, his type of personality (and not only its artistic side), which ultimately is what determines the place and the significance of music in his films.

Representatives of authorial cinema, as a rule, have a meticulously careful attitude toward sound, including the music for their films. But if the *sound* component of the movie presents the sphere

of the sound team's professional responsibility, then the *sonic* side presents the expression of the director's personal voice. The characteristic features of the integrated music, speech, transformed noises, and distorted sounds, and the distribution of intonational accents or semantic pauses may assist, first of all, in the comprehension of the director's aesthetics, world view and world feeling — and only then in becoming a part of the theoretical interpretation of the concrete cinematic text, which in this case is comprehended by extension, as an assemblage of evident and presumed meanings expressed in audiovisual images. Thereby, music in the author's cinema is included in the artistic space in which a *polysemantic cinema* text is created, i.e., the text (screen narrative), subtext, context, intertext and metatext of dynamically developing and interacting images onscreen and off-screen (i.e., associative and intelligible) images.

Undoubtedly, in the authorial cinematograph the aesthetics and world vision of each director is unique. And still, we presume, in the artistic thinking of outstanding masters we can highlight foundational principles, aesthetic bases, which not only assist in the interpretation of a separate cinematic text and the work of a separate artist, but also provide the possibility of tracing their influence on the cinematic works of other directors (at times, quite remote from the authorial

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<sup>1</sup> The terminological interpretation of the expression “author's cinema” presents a topic for discussion (see: Andreyev A. I. Auteurism, art house i art-cinema. Istoki ponyatyia “avtorskoye kino” v zarubezhnoi kinovedcheskoi traditsii [Auteurism, Art House and Art Cinema. Sources of the Concept of “Author's Cinema” in the Foreign Traditions of Cinema Studies]. *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* [Cinema Studies Notes]. 2013. No. 102–103, pp. 168–194). In the present article “author's cinema” is understood as the director's work with brightly expressed aesthetical principles and individual artistic style.

movie). Through the understanding of the musical-sonic side of the films, it is possible to acquire a fuller perception, for example, of the transcendental element of Andrei Tarkovsky's artistic language, Kira Muratova's play irony, Sergei Solovyov's, etc. In this case, there is a wish to show how the music of the film becomes an important element of the phenomenological aesthetics of French director Robert Bresson and what can be achieved by such a type of analysis for the understanding of the interaction between music and the cinematograph.

### The Aesthetics of Robert Bresson's Cinematic Sound

Robert Bresson (1901–1999) is not easy to comprehend particularly in his seeming simplicity; after all, his name has become for a long time the synonym of the asceticism of the artistic language in the cinematograph. His style has been called “spiritual” [8, p. 190] and even “transcendental.” [9, p. 187] Film studies of Bresson's cinematography, undoubtedly, overcome his “seeming simplicity” and penetrate into the thin layers of artistic created by the director and hidden from the superficial glance. Researcher of the French cinema Vladimir Vinogradov writes about Bresson: “The director's methodology, the circle of the issues that were of interest to him had always been situated away the mainstream influences. He was rather characterized by the image of a hermit who was solving substantial matters and not aspiring to be comprehensible or widely known. His perception of this art differed from the established. Espousing other expressive techniques, at times opposite of the traditional ones, Bresson considered that the essence of new art consists not of external effectiveness or entertainment, but in the disclosure

of the nature of things and events.” [10, p. 209] It is particularly the “disclosure of the nature of things” that forms the semantic center of Bresson's aesthetics, a kind of response to the call of Edmund Husserl, the founder of philosophic phenomenology: “To the things themselves!”

It must be noted that the researchers of Bresson's heritage concentrate most of their attention on the analysis of the visual side of the cinema form, as well as the creative postulates, attractive in their philosophical aphoristic character (and, once again, their austerity), of the producer himself in his *Notes on Cinematography*. The sound aspect of Bresson's movies, if it is noticed at all, only “by peripheral vision.” In this case, this does not comprise a reproach, but, on the contrary, — the acceptance of the fact of knowledge and vision on the part of cinema theoreticians of the inseparable unity of the audiovisual space of films. All the professionals in the sphere of cinema understand quite well that the research of music as a component of the reality of the film detached from the film is not a misunderstanding of the specificity of the cinematograph, but merely an indispensable procedure of abstraction within the process of theoretic interpretation and the understanding of the composition. But it is particularly this abstracted “taking out” of the music from the film that the researchers try to avoid, thereby saving themselves from the critical attacks from both musicologists and cinema theorists.

This is how, for example, Bresson's attitude towards music is expressed by one of the well-known researchers of his work, Paul Schreider: “Perceiving sharply the possibilities of music, Bresson does not use it at all while demonstrating everyday

realities, limiting himself to the vision of synthesized ‘documental’ sounds. Any music artificially brought into everyday realities, would turn out to be a ‘screen,’ each musical fragment brings in a certain interpretation of an episode.” [9, p. 189] At the moment, having a perception of the director’s work as a unified entity (unlike Schreider, who wrote his work in the early 1970s, while Bresson’s last film was made by him in 1983), it is possible to agree with this assertion as with a general intension. But after having read the chapter “The Soundtrack” of Schneider’s text, it also becomes possible to form the opinion that Bresson did not use music in his films at all. All the more so, because the director back in the 1950s gave himself an inner suggestion fixated in his *Notes on Cinematography*: “Without musical accompaniment, without any assistance or support. Without any music whatsoever (except, of course, that music which is played on visible instruments).” [11, p. 12]

Nonetheless, there is quite enough music (both on-screen and off-screen) in Bresson’s film, especially in the first films, where the producer collaborated closely with composer Jean-Jacques Grunewald (*Les anges de péché* [*Angels of Sin*] 1943; *Les dames de Bois de Boulogne* [*Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne*], 1945; *Journal d’un cure de campagne* [*Diary of a Country Priest*], 1951). And in the film *Quatre nuits d’un rêveur* [*Four Nights of a Dreamer*] (1971) we even see a few explicitly put-in “concert” scene with guitar music (their role in the film is a topic for a separate discussion). The truth is that Besson gradually eliminates the musical sound from his films — but this happens not in a purely mechanical way, but through a complex process of “crystallization” of the director’s artistic style, which is expressed in carrying out

a kind of phenomenological reduction of the movie material. Bresson’s attitude towards sound in the mature and late periods of his work is expressed by his utterance: “If it is possible to replace a film shot with one or several sounds, this should be done without any faltering.” [12, p. 244]

### The Significance of Music in the Phonosphere of Robert Bresson’s film *Une femme douce* [*A Gentle Woman*]

Due to the limited character of the space of the utterance, I wish to cite only one example of Besson’s use of music in his film *Une femme douce* (*A Gentle Woman*, 1969). The fact of the matter is that this film is not merely one of the film adaptations of Feodor Dostoyevsky’s novelettes — in this role the film has come into the view of researchers numerous times. Thus, Ilya Popov writes: “Bresson in his film concentrates on the depiction of the problem of the impossibility of full-fledged communication between spouses and, more broadly, between man and woman, and, unlike the transcendent solution of this problem on the part of Dostoyevsky, the director leaves the dramatic conflict between the spouses unsolved...” [13, p. 131] Kirill Rodin also accentuates in Bresson’s approach the motive of uncertainty, in particular, related to the reasons of the heroine’s suicide, concluding: “Bresson preserved the bitter feeling of perplexed pity for the viewer.” [14, p. 202] Generally, concurring with the cited interpretations, it must be stated that the music, left outside the framework of analyses in the quoted articles, plays no small role in manifesting the director’s conception. Moreover, in the context of the subject matter of the present text, the film *Une femme douce* (*A Gentle Woman*) is of special interest by the fact that

Bresson's general ideas and perspectives on the specificity of the use of sound and music in cinema are manifested to the fullest degree (up to the declarative utterances from the screen).

In the perspective of Bresson's aesthetic principles, Bresson's music cannot be examined merely as a composite part (or element) of the screen image of the storyline — music particularly embodies (or is generated by) the visual image itself and the dramaturgical situation. It becomes tantamount to the voice of the model (as Bresson dubbed his actors), but not in the sense of an informationally laden utterance, but as a way of manifesting of one's being in the world. This transformation of the essence of music of a film follows especially clearly upon comparative analysis of the literary basis and the on-screen manifestation of the storyline.

The action of the novelette is transferred to a setting that is contemporary for the director, to France in the 1960s. As we remember, the main protagonist finds the body of his young wife, who threw herself out of the window, and during the course of the next several hours “speaks out” all of his life with her (Dostoyevsky has a subtitle “A Fantastic Story,” which means, according to the writer's explanation, the highest intelligible reality of what occurs).

The “talking through” of Dostoyevsky's protagonist is significantly reduced in the film. But even the rare verbal comments of the characters are bereft of any kind of actor's expressivity (unlike the main protagonist's passionate monologue in the novelette), which fully

meets the director's aesthetic principles. Moreover, in this film Bresson, possibly, the only time in his cinematic work, makes use of in-frame space and time, in order to expound directly his own programmatic ideas about the use of voice and speech in film, putting them into the heroine's mouth. For this end, Bresson creates an interesting type of extension of Dostoyevsky's primary material. In the Russian writer's novelette, we read: “I told the bride that there would be no theater, however, I allowed the theater to be attended once a month, and in a decent manner, in the armchairs. We went together, we were there three times, having watched *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Singing Birds*, it seems. (Oh, I don't care, I don't care!) We went there maintaining silence and returned home in silence. Why, why did we start maintaining silence with each other from the very beginning?”<sup>2</sup> In Bresson's film, the main protagonist first promises the bride that he would take her to the movies, and only rarely to the theater, because of the expensive prices of the tickets. The phrase: “Why did we start maintaining silence with each other from the very beginning?” (spoken in the presence of the lady-housekeeper, generally, into emptiness) — is pronounced by him particularly prior to his going to the cinema. The pair watches a pseudo-historical “costume” film, in complete silence (this forms yet another message of Bresson: “No historical films whatsoever, these ‘theaters’ and ‘masquerades.’” [11, p. 40]). A little while later, we already see them in a theater, at a performance of the play *Hamlet* (there is no mention of *Hamlet*

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<sup>2</sup> Dostoyevsky F. M. Krotkaya [The Gentle Woman]. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30 t.* [Complete Compilation of Works in 30 Vols]. Leningrad: Nauka, 1982. Vol. 24. P. 15.

in Dostoyevsky's novelette). Bresson gives a considerable amount of screen time to the presentation of the theatrical production, and particularly, as long as the scene of Hamlet's duel scene with Laertes lasts. After the performance, the Gentle Woman returns home, without undressing, goes to the living room, takes a volume of Shakespeare from the shelf and reads aloud<sup>3</sup>: "I knew it. They missed it so they could scream. This is what Hamlet advised the actors: 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, with a light tongue: but if you start shouting, as many of your players do, then I would be equally pleased if the town-crier spoke my lines.'" (It is clear that what is meant here is not the duel scene, but the earlier episode of Hamlet's conversation with the strolling actors). Thereby, Bresson, by means of double mediation (Shakespeare's text and the model in the film) transmits from the screen his negative attitude towards "theatricality" and "actors' affected behavior" in cinema, contrasting it with the natural behavior of a model — he writes about this numerous times, insistently in his *Notes*: "The model. A voice combined with physical action, stemming from equally sounding syllables, sounds *automatically* with deviations and modulations intrinsic to his true nature [the author's italics. — *Yu. M.*]." [Ibid, p. 15]

In this sense, it is important to accentuate how Bresson chose his "models": (not actors, who, in the director's opinion, brought in theatrical artificiality of gestures and intonations, alien to the cinema) for his

films: "Her voice draws for me her mouth, eyes, and face, creates for me her integral portrait, outward and inward, better than if she herself were in front of me. The best sight reading is achieved only by the ear." [Ibid, p. 10] This is particularly why the director preferred auditing the candidates for the role by phone, rather than meeting with them in person. In summary, Bresson needed a model — but not as a soulless mannequin, but in the opposite meaning, as a unique personality, with the entire "set" of expressive means intrinsic to it, of which the most important and defining was the voice. According to the director's thought, the voice was "the soul created by the body." [Ibid, p. 23] (We could remind ourselves of the phrase ascribed to Socrates: "Speak, so I can see you.") And it is not by chance that Bresson never hired his models a second time, having preserved on the cinema screen the uniqueness of the model, its "mysterious visibility" — and the uniqueness of the viewer's "meeting" with it.

In *Une femme douce* [*The Gentle Woman*] there is a transfer of the meaning of the sound expression — to the signification of listening and hearing (a trans-sonar understanding). And here we approach the music of the film. In Dostoyevsky's novelette there is no mention at all of any role of music in the heroine's life. Unlike that, in the film the heroine has two passions — books and gramophone records. Music sounding from out of a record player becomes her means of "speaking-in-silence." Several times the Gentle Woman attempts to set up a true

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<sup>3</sup> In a film by another director, the scene would demonstrate incredibility, but here yet another one of Bresson's programmatic attitudes towards models marginally visualized: "Speak, as if you spoke to yourselves. A monologue instead of a dialogue." [11, p. 28]



inner connection — an understanding with her husband by means of music sounding on a gramophone record. Moreover, at first, there is the sound of a record playing rock-and-roll, the Gentle Woman quickly changes it in her husband's presence; in one case — for a record playing Mozart's music, and in another case — Henry Purcell. However, the hearing-understanding does not occur between them. (The listening to the music would be identical to the husband hearing his wife.) When after a certain period of time the main protagonist finally hears the voice of his wife, humming a tune (at first, the viewer does not hear anything, and then he recognizes the already familiar melody by Purcell), he asks the housekeeper in wonderment, mixed with terror: "What, does she sing?!" — "Sometimes she sings, when you are not at home." — "In my house?! Did she fully forget that I exist?"

It must be noticed that in Dostoyevsky's novelette, the woman's singing in the work's final section also makes the strongest impression on the protagonist-narrator (he even rushes out of the house in bewilderment). The writer dedicates a rather fair share of very emotional lines to describing the character of this final singing. Dostoyevsky writes about the gradual change of the character of the heroine's singing (she was singing some rather simple romance songs) during the course of her married life: her voice gradually changed from a rather strong, sonorous and healthy to being "poor" and "unhealthy." On the other hand, in the film, the heroine gives her "healthy" voice to the music on the gramophone record and presents herself in her singing as already "sickly-to-death." The song of the Gentle Woman becomes for her husband an existential event: for the very first time he hears her and perceives her as a personality, but already as one not belonging

to him, separate from him, which has forgotten him. And, as it becomes understandable, in this instance, musicological analysis gives way to a hermeneutic feeling, an aesthetic experience and understanding of an artistic experience, *careful listening*, an immersion into the artistic space created by the director. After all, it is particularly about the film *Une femme douce* [*The Gentle Woman*] that Bresson said: "I consider it that sounds are more important in the creation of a new world than sight. I feel myself a musician more than an artist." [12, p. 251]

### Conclusion

Let summarize the attempted reflections about music and its connection with the aesthetics of the film director in the following theses.

1. It is important to separate the concepts of "film music," "music for film," and "the audiovisual solution in a film."
2. The role of music in an author's film cannot be understood in full when separated from the director's general aesthetic principles, as well as from all the sound phenomena integrated in the film (speech, noises, sound backgrounds); in such cases musicological analysis plays an auxiliary role.
3. The "extraction" of music from a film for the sake of carrying out musicological analysis is possible only as a necessary stage of theoretical abstraction. For the creation of a full-fledged theoretical model of the composition, the music must be "returned" to the multilevel cinematic text of the film.
4. Music for authorial films cannot be examined only from the position of its already well-known significations and functions, since when connected to a film scene, the music can not only change the film shot, but can also change itself.

5. Non-diegetic music in authorial cinema is not only and not so much an interpretation or a background of the visual element, but it becomes, first of all, the means of the director's artistic manifestation, his attitude towards the action on screen, which in its turn depict his aesthetical views and principles.

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