**Schopenhauer**

Okay well the next movie we're going to watch is vertigo and one thing about this movie is that it stands in an intricate web of all sorts of cultural allusions.

Three of these are Sigmund Freud the patriarch of psychoanalysis, the composer Richard Wagner, who we've talked about a bit already, though somewhat vicariously in relation to the technique of light motif, and the third name, which maybe a bit less familiar to you, Arthur schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer was highly influential not only to Wagner and Freud but also to Friedrich Nietzsche who we will look at next week.

In the case of Wagner the influence, is quite pronounced for instance his wife, cosima Wagner kept a Journal, detailing their daily activities, including nightly readings of schopenhauer, and at a certain point she only starts recording when they ***don't*** read schopenhauer.

But I think if we look at schopenhauer and Wagner in more depth you'll start to see the ways in which their ideas about the world seem quite similar.

So you might remember in the first class session I said that a question we will come back to again and again is “what even is reality,”

and schopenhauer's answer to that question is that beneath all the niceties we call human freedom or rationality, true reality consists in nothing more than a constant striving, desiring, hungering, that always leaves us unsatisfied.

human life must be some kind of mistake schopenhauer tells us, a *desperate* but ultimately *meaningless* struggle.

But he also shows us how to make peace with this condition, through the contemplation of Art, he shows us how to rise above Petty differences that seem so important in human conflict, and he shows us the importance of feeling compassion for other living beings despite how grim our situation may be.

So on one hand you could see how this idea would influence someone like Wagner whose music creates this constant sense of desire for the cadence, the desire that is left unfulfilled for 5 hours in the case of his Opera Tristan und Isolde.

for hours and hours the music gives us deceptive cadence after deceptive cadence, building this unyielding and inexorable desire for a nice and stable full cadence.

But the other thing about schopenhauer's distinction between rationality and this sub-rational level of desire hunger etc is that it gets at a distinction that we might be more familiar with in the work of Sigmund Freud.

We will talk about Freud in another lecture, but there are three main things in Freud's work that come out of schopenhauer, the distinction between the conscious mind and the subconscious, Freud's theory of Dreams, and later on we'll talk about the concept of the death Drive, but all of these things, which I think are the things Freud is most well known for, were heavily influenced by schopenhauer.

And in addition, each of these concepts play an important role in vertigo.

I think some of the allusions in vertigo should be rather clear , in case of Freud it's a bit general, there seems to be a basic spirit for jist of Freudian psychoanalysis and Freud's theory of Dreams in the movie.

But one other really interesting thing about this movie that connects it to the work of Sigmund Freud is the way it seems to be telling two stories at once.

There's the story that we see on screen and that is performed in dialogue by the characters, but there's also what you might describe as a subterranean storyline, that operates at the level of the subconscious.

And this subconscious level of narrative takes place in music.

So, the musical score acts as sort of a parallel narrative to the conscious narrative taking place on screen.

Now one of the things I said before about leitmotiv in the operas of Richard Wagner is that it functions in very much the same way, as a subconscious level of narrative

So for instance you might have two leitmotives — one associated with love or desire and one associated with death — and while a character may be singing about passion and longing for his or her lover, the music might be playing the leitmotif associated with death and so you have a situation where on the conscious level of the narrative the character seems to be talking about one thing but the music acts as a psychological indicator that there is perhaps something else going on.

Now the thing about a leitmotiv, of course, is that it not only conveys information, but it also conveys emotion, it makes us feel certain emotions, and so it acts as a way to stimulate our own subconscious or emotional feelings.

it might run parallel to our conscious understanding of the motivations of a character or might stand in contradiction to the things the character is telling us.

And exactly this sort of thing happens in Vertigo. So it may not be surprising to you that the musical score quotes the music of Wagner over and over again throughout the movie.

On one level the style of the musical score by Bernard herrmann, sounds very similar to the style of Wagner , but over and above that it also quotes the Tristan chord at a variety of very important moments in the story.

Two places this happens are at the moment that Jimmy Stewart , who plays Scotty the detective, and Kim Novak, playing Madeline, the moment they first kiss in a kind of over the top scene that is maybe even a little hard to watch, they're standing at the ocean and the waves crash in the background etcetera.

Another place we get the Tristan chord is at the moment that Judy finally has her complete makeover and exits the elevator in the hotel Jimmy Stewart looks at her she's covered by this strange green light filter.

It's also interesting that the dichotomy between consciousness or rationality and the subconscious plays out in the way the movie uses diegetic and non-diegetic music. If you remember, diegetic music is music that's actually happening in the story space, and so if the story as presented on screen acts at the level of *consciousness*, we could say that the *diegetic* music is presented on this level.

And one of the things about the diegetic music in this movie is that you have Mozart-Style music playing at various points and the characters comment on it

for instance Scotty at one moment listening to the radio complains about the music, which is in a style very similar to Mozart s, don’t you think this music is a little uh…. and Midge turns off the radio

later on there's a scene where Midge he's talking to a psychiatrist who's trying to treat Scotty with music therapy, and midge says something like Mozart is not going to help him.

Now the thing about Mozart's music is that it quite often stands as an example of the values of the enlightenment, whether or not that's a fair assesment is another question, because Mozart has some very dark and thorny music as well, but by and large his music is associated with things like balance of proportion, propriety, a sort of rational consistency between the part and the whole, the formal structure of his many of his works have a strong sense of perfection in the way they're constructed, and so on.

One way to hear this is just to listen to a typical piece by Mozart

the phrases are usually very short and memorable

usually of the same length there's a very strong sense of balance and order in his music.

you might get two short phrases and then a long phrase that is equal in length to the sum of the short phrases,

Eine kleine nachtmusik,

Compare this to the music of Wagner, for instance the prelude to Tristan and Isolde, the Opera that the Tristan chord appears in, you can listen to this piece on the canvas site, the music seems to go on and on its very difficult to say where the music should stop it's like all of the phrases are elided

as soon as you come to a pitch Center the harmony moves you in another direction, endless melody, endless yearning striving desiring.

And so in Vertigo Wagner Style music as well as actual quotes from a Wagner opera inform the non-diegetic music, which is outside the story space, functioning like the unconscious narrative.

Now, one thing that's interesting about music of course is that it is not only functioning as the subconscious narrative of the characters, but when it really moves us, when it makes us feel the *same* feelings that the characters must be feeling, there's a sense in which the distance between the characters and the all the individual members of the audience collapses. It is as though our unconscious is fused with theirs, as though the characters and the all the distinct and individual members of the audience, are fused in one collective unconsciousness.

This idea of the collective unconscious, that we are all connected at the level of feeling, even though a rational analysis of our conscious experience makes it seem like the world is made up of distinct and discrete individuals, this is an idea that is Central to schopenhauer s work.

[SLIDE 2]

You might remember at the beginning of this course I said we would keep coming back to the question: what even is reality

There are a few different approaches to this question. we might start with what could be called a top-down approach

[Slide 3]

You know I think a lot of us have a very vague idea about the relationship of Art and Truth, that art can somehow give us a window on the truth a window on true reality, but if you think about what that actually means it's not at all clear how that could be the case ,

I mean what does it mean to say that art can reveal the truth to us

after all if you take a work of fiction — a movie or novel — strictly speaking, fiction is simply false it's not true at all, or if you think about a piece of music that doesn't seem to be about anything at all, what on earth does that tell us about true reality.

Well one way this could be the case involves an idea that characterized a lot of Art in the 19th century, and that was the idea of organic unity, the idea of this throrough consistency between the part and the whole.

for instance in the case of Beethoven's 9th Symphony the theme is based on a fifth and the relationship of the fifth corresponds to the different keys that different sections of the peace are in

to talk about this on the level of large-scale keychanges: so you know, if you count up from a to e you’ll see that these pitches are in the relation of a 5th

a is the first letter of the alphabet in e is the fifth letter of the alphabet.

Now, in a typical Symphony movement you have a situation where the opening of the movement might be in the key of a, a is the tonic or the central pitch, and then the composer will use all sorts of tricks in the middle of the peace to make it sound like e is the tonic

and then by the end of the movement you'll return to a.

so there's a narrative of departure and return from a to e — back to a, from the tonic to the dominant back to the tonic on the large-scale structure of a single movement,

but most symphonies are also multiple movements long, so if a symphony is four movements long perhaps the first movement is in a, the second and third are in e and maybe the Fourth movement begins e but returns to a by the end, something like that.

In this case you have the relationship of the tonic and the dominant on the absolute highest level of structure of an hour long symphony,

on the structural level of a single large section of a piece, ie a movement,

and also — the thing about the 5th is that it's this fundamental and essential, in fact generic component of all tonal music. So in ANY piece in order to get a full cadence, in order to make the tonic note sound like the pitch center you going to find the relationship of five going to one all over the place.

And what Beethoven does in the 9th symphony is to base the main theme of his peace on the interval of the 5th so that ***now*** all those generic instances of five going to one,

that you have over the entire peace are now integrated into the theme, and you have this complete organic relationship between the lowest level building blocks of tonality up through the level of motives and theme to the highest architectonic level of an entire Symphony.

Now, when you're analyzing a piece of music , say Beethoven's 9th Symphony you have a situation where the meaning of the part only makes sense or only seems important in relationship to the big picture the big plan of the entire Symphony. The 5th on its own is insignificant it's something you find in every piece of tonal music but the way that Beethoven elevates the 5th to the level of thematic content and even to the overarching structure of the whole peace, makes every appearance of that interval thematic, structural. You know: its just As adorno says in that reading from last week, the *motive* by itself is insignificant, generic — it's only in its relationship to the musical structure that it takes on meaning.

Now another thing that Beethoven does which is really interesting is to compose things that sound like mistakes into his music

this happens in the 3rd Symphony it happens in the second movement of the 9th Symphony

for instance in the 9th Symphony there's a moment where it sounds like the timpani player comes in a bar too early, but if you really analyze the peace what you'll see is that that moment that seems like a mistake that seems insignificant in the moment

*in fact* make sense relative to the larger plan of the symphony,

because what he does for the rest of the movement is play around with different temporal groupings and different variations on the idea of coming in too early — and so you have a moment where something that seems insignificant, trivial meaningless on the surface, is revealed to be deeply structural as long as you understand the big picture.

we can already start to see that the situation is perhaps analogous to other top-down approaches to the question of what is really real, for instance in Christianity

the idea that all the seemingly terrible things that happen in the world, *in fact* all make sense as long as you put it in the perspective of God's plan, the big picture.

But also in the enlightenment scheme of things, the idea that the the structure of reason somehow shares in the structure of the universe, I mean it's pretty amazing to think that these clumps of meat encased in bone that we carry around in our heads, should be able to uncover the structure of the universe — existence of stars, galaxies, black holes, and so on.

How could this be if there weren't some meaningful coherence between the mind of an individual and the totality of the universe.

So we might call this a top-down approach to the question of Truth — of what is really real.

Now this is in contrast to another way of describing how meaning arises in life — if indeed it *does* arise. And we might call this a bottom-up approach.

[Slide 4]

Now, in the 19th century several thinkers affect something of an inversion , a revolution in the way we think about truth or meaning in the world.

[slide 5]

With Darwin we have the theory of evolution — which holds that the thing that previous thinkers like kant took to place humanity in a higher realm of existence or freedom, namely *rationality*, actually just amounts to a chance adaptation that just happens to be useful for survival.

For Marx, it may not be as well known how this bottom-up approach applies,

but many of Marx's ideas originated in the work of a thinker that came before him — the German philosopher Hegel , hegel's thinking and writing is extremely complex but one of the basic ideas,

is that what is really real what is the fundamental basis of reality is reason itself, and about as close as I can get to it is to say

that you know when we do astrophysics, might see certain regularities in the interaction of heavenly bodies, for instance, but that underlying those physical regularities are the laws of physics, and those laws exhibit the consistency and regularity of logic, of rationality.

but ALSO if you go back throughout history you get a very strong sense that human culture seems to be developing, it may not be unidirectional, there are setbacks and so on, but history seems to be moving in a direction, that human civilization is improving, and not just on a technological level, but that society is getting increasingly *moral*, so if you go back 50,000 years we,re living in caves and killing each other, if you go back 5,000 years you have societies with codes of law, and if you fast forward to the 19th century you have these developing ideas of universal human rights, which was not an available concept in the roman empire, for instance.

Now of course, as we *know* with our *own* society, ideas about Universal rights that leave out huge chunks of society for instance women and people of color are highly questionable, but one thing you hear amidst all the protesting going on these days are people saying things like “do you want to be on the wrong side of History”?

And so there is this idea that history is developing or improving, and what was the driving *impetus* of society’s improvement are rational ideas about what is true, ideas about what Justice consists in, and so on.

That all the things people do in their society come out of *ideas* people have *about* society, and that the best *most,* just most, most humane societies are those that emerge from rational ideas. So that’s Hegel,

What Marx does is invert this.

He says that you only have those ideas about what is right, because the people who are in power, the ruling class, allow you to have access to ideas that are more or less in their favor.

One thing Marx says is that the dominant beliefs about what is right in any society are just the beliefs of the ruling class. And the reason these beliefs are taken to be just the normal status quo, that you can't imagine any alternative to, is not for any logical reason, necessarily, but just that certain people have risen to a position of power, and one of the ways they maintain that power, is through ideas like justice or fairness *construed* in a *particular* way that *benefits* them.

So that - it's not *ideas* that drive society but rather relations of power, economic power, political power, and so on that Drive peoples ***ideas*** and beliefs about society. *Ideas* are shaped by *material reality*, not the other way around.

And Freud has a very similar idea. now you may be a bit more familiar with Freud's idea of the unconscious, the idea being that below consciousness - below the level of rational thought there is this subterranean level of sort of animalistic mental activity, biological drives, that is in constant struggle with the conscious mind.

For Freud, like Darwin, consciousness is just a chance adaptation, that in some ways may be useful for survival, but that can run into problems when it's *unable* to deal with *subconscious* impulses and desires. And in any case many of our conscious experiences are really just a sort of illusory reshaping of our biological drives.

So what you see here is a bottom-up approach to construing the relationship between the part and well **a big question mark,** not a whole, because the idea that there is a whole , a complete picture — requires some sort of certainty , some sort of knowledge about a complete reality that is over and above us.

in the case of a bottom-up approach there might just be constant change or upheaval , but not a whole, necessarily. Not an overarching plan that gives everything meaning.

And so we can see in the 19th century an inversion in certain ideas about what is really real that comes into tension with enlightenment ideas about the unity of the part and the whole.

[SLIDE 6]

Now schopenhauer is earlier than any of these thinkers schopenhauer was born in 1788

What schopenhauer says is that there are two aspects to the world, the world as it appears to us, and the world as it actually is in itself. Now this is by no means an original idea, this is an idea that is common to Plato and kant, it's common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Judeo-Christianity, and if you think about it it's a very reasonable idea, I mean we have the platitude that seeing is believing, there's an idea perhaps that how we see the world or think about the world is how the world actually is, but what if we had alien eyes or brains that experience the world differently, how would the world seem different to us? what role do our perceptual or cognitive faculties, our eyes ears and brains, have in shaping what we take to be reality? For Kant and Pato as well as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, true reality it's sort of a heavenly realm, for kant our rationality is what connects us to this heavenly realm, for Play-Doh in the Christian tradition, there's a distinction between the messy world of bodies or sin and the true spiritual reality of heaven. What schopenhauer does is flip this around and say no, the true reality is the world of struggle, agitation, desiring — and rationality / intelligence, etc. are just products of the **messiness** of the real world, and not really very descriptive of it.

the title of his most famous work directly address is this Gap as it appears to us which he calls representation and the world as it is in itself which he gives the very weird name of will. And there's something about schopenhauer that always seems to be just on the threshold of some sort of arcane mysticism, at times he sort of sounds like yoda talking about the force, and yet at the same time his work is quite systematic and rational.

So let's try to get our minds around he's ideas of will and representation

[SLIDE 7]

Schopenhauer describes the will as a sort of striving conflict, agitation, or struggle.

You can sort of think of this as being like biological drives, Schopenhauer was very knowledgeable about the life sciences of his own day, but it goes much deeper than this.

You know if you think about how we go through life we desire to have certain things good job a romantic partner,

and it doesn't have to be that lofty

maybe we just want you to ham sandwich, but The basic idea is that we are organisms with certain drives, you know

eat

sleep

and reproduce,

and that we’re driven by these *quite regardless* of whether we're conscious of them or not. So for Schopenhauer, what comes first are the biological drives and consciousness only arises much later.

So what's really real is this level of conflict, of Desiring, and our conscious ideas about what we think we want really just amount to an illusory representation of the world.

You can think about it this way an amoeba is subject to the same sorts of drives that we are, they're expressed differently of course, and the amoeba is certainly not conscious of them but it has the same Basic underlying drives as regards survival quite regardless of whether it's conscious of them are not.

And the idea is that even though we think about our basic underlying drives in very lofty ways, for instance we might call the drive to reproduce ***Love***,

Schopenhauer thinks that this really just amounts to an abstraction or an illusion

what's really real are the underlying biological drives,

and of course these biological drives emerge out of the Chemical reactions and physical processes that underlie organic life.

But even at the level of chemistry or physics there seems to be a sort of agitation — attraction or repulsion of particles for instance — that exhibits a certain sort of striving similar to low-level organisms.

On schopenhauers account it’s agitation all the way down…to bedrock reality — reality is based in contradiction, struggle — this is what he calls the will.

Of course the word will makes it sound like inorganic matter is conscious, but as I've already said for Schopenhauer consciousness arises at a much higher level, really what the term will is referring to is a sort of inclination - like the way that certain particles are inclined to come together or repulse each other - and this inclination goes all the way up from physics to Chemistry to biology to intelligent life with hopes dreams desires and so on.

You may have seen this cartoon before —

XKCD

So, in Darwinian terms we have this idea that consciousness / reason / self-awareness etc. is at best just a chance adaptation, that just happens to be useful for survival

But for Schopenhauer its worse than that : because reason and self-reflection are what uncover the utter senselessness of life,

on schopenhauer’s account it’s very strange that beings like us humans, with complex minds capable of understanding that the world really just amounts to struggle and strife should arise at all.

You know if you go on YouTube and watch any nature documentary you’ll see all sorts of horrible things like baby seals being torn apart by predators and what not. The intro to the schopenhauer article you have, mentions turtle in java that struggle to reach a beachhead to lay their eggs only to be torn apart by wild dogs. Of course to say the natural world is horrible , or barbaric , or as a popular subreddit puts it that “nature is metal”, is really just a typically human representation of reality. It’s not reality in itself, but rather a particular evaluation of reality. On a common understanding of the scientific view of the world, there are no natural values, only facts. Nothing is inherently good or bad on its own terms, everything simply is.

But the thing about humans is that we make the world meaningful for us. In fact we can’t help but find values, meanings, patterns, significance even in random information. We looked at this a little in those illusions of the weird giraffe-dog hybrid and the sunset that looks like a smiley face, but also in the distinction between plot and story — the way plot takes all the random or insignificant occurrences that might take place, and makes a meaningful narrative out of them.

So if reason and self-reflection bring us to a point where we recognize that every struggle , every desire, every fear or triumph that happen in our lives really amounts to nothing more than blind, meaningless striving of the will - you can see how that might make us into pessimists. It’s like at the end of the Kubrick film Barry Lyndon - which takes place in the 18th century and involves all sorts of scheming and intrigue, jilted lovers, parents trying to save their dying children and so on. The last shot of the movie is a blank screen with the words

"It was in the reign of George III that the aforesaid personages lived and quarreled; good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor they are **all equal now**."

Or in Shakespeare, when the tide turns against MacBeth he looks at all his struggle in the light of his dismal fate and says that life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing.

To think that not only will we grow old, experience pain and die, but that everyone we love will grow old experience pain and die, as has every living thing that has ever or will ever exist, And not only this but on a certain view from astrophysics, the entire universe will at some point cease to exist is a pretty daunting thought.

And so Schopenhauer says it seems that life, especially the lives of beings like us who can recognize all of this, it seems that life must be some kind of mistake. At another point he quotes the greek poet plutarch, who has the charater silenus , a friend of Dionysius the wine god say

“That the best thing for a man is not to be born, and if already born, to die as soon as possible.”

Now this is all a very grim image of the world, and even if we accept Schopenhauer’s premise that the fundamental level of reality is strife and agitation, there still might room for a more optimistic, or at least a more constructive view of things. When we look at Nietzsche for instance we will see another possible conclusion we could take from this worldview.

And even in Schopenhauer there are some activities that that are available to the human intellect that might assuage some of the misery of existence. One thing we could do is turn our backs on the world - to become monk-like ascetics, and in fact Schopenhauer is quite influenced by buddhist thought in this regard, in particular the way that certain buddhist traditions use asceticism as a way to overcome desire. But another approach to this involves the experience of art. You remember how in the segment on autonomous art I pointed out how, for Kant aesthetic experience involves experiencing an object outside of a self-interested desire to for instance make love to the naked body depicted in a sculpture or to eat a bowl of fruit in a still life painting. Well for Schopenhauer it’s much the same sort of thing — in aesthetic experience we gain a momentary break from the constant desiring that characterizes the will — when we listen to a great piece of music or get absorbed in a great work of art we have a brief period where we stop worrying about this or that quotidian concern, we even gain freedom from bigger questions like “what am I gonna do with my life”?

Now we’ve spent a good time talking about will, but what about the other element in schopenhauers title - representation?

I said that for schopenhauer, our eyes ears and minds make us see the world in a particular way — really there’s just blind, meaningless, undifferentiated striving but we see the world in terms of distinct objects, distinct people who think they desire specific things and so on. Another way to think about this is to think what if the universe is not a noun, but a verb. I mean we think of the universe as a thing, but beneath that everything that exists comes into being at some point and eventually ceases to exist and so it might be more accurate to think of the universe as one big process, that is constantly in motion. If this is the case then when we talk about things or objects, that’s really just an illusion or a representation of reality - an objectification of it - for schopenhauer the universe is not a bunch of stuff, but one big ongoing process. The things we think of as distinct and independent objects are just the way we objectify certain characteristics of this ongoing process. It’s interesting how hard this is to communicate in language, at least in english, because the structure of english takes nouns to be primary. You know, think of parts of speech a verb is a noun, but a noun is not a verb. But for schopenhauer this is just one more way that we construct a representation of underlying reality.

Some examples he gives of the way the will is represented or objectified into separate and distinct objects:

Teeth / Digestive organs are objectified hunger

Genital organs are objectified sexual desire, &c., &c.

So this brings us to music, and one thing that’s very interesting here is the central place he gives to music in his vision of the world. For most thinkers before and after schopenhauer, music was just sort of a play thing, but for schopenhauer music uniquely gives us a window on to the world as it is in itself.

So how does it do this?

a moment ago I said that one of the ways we can get a moment of rest from the will is through aesthetic experience so that when we get absorbed in a great novel or film or painting we have a moment where we can experience the world not in terms of self interest bodily desires and so on but in terms of the beauty of the artwork itself. But for Schopenhauer one problem with all of these art forms is that they deal with representations of reality, so a novel or a film Will be about certain characters with certain desires for certain objects a Painting depicts separate and distinct objects and so all of these art forms deal with representations of reality.

But the question is if everything we experience is a representation what is music a representation of?

That's the question

And for Schopenhauer Music isn't about anything at all rather Music seems to be a direct embodiment of the will. We spent a good deal of time talking about cadences in The last lecture and one of the things that you may have noticed in a cadence is that the way Harmony functions is to set up this really palpable expectation or even desire for the central pitch the tonic. And one of the ways that composers play with desire in a piece of music is to constantly avoid landing on the tonic together with the harmony of the tonic. So when you listen to wagner's music Wagner keeps setting up these expectations that we're going to arrive at the central pitch and very often we do in the melody but at these moments we get the wrong harmony and so the music doesn't sound finished.

Play some cadence stuff

The cadence is death

The cadence is cliche / formulaic

This just goes to show the way that desire is more important than the object that we think will fulfill our desire.

Schopenhauer says that because music is it direct copy of the will and not a copy of some mundane object like a bowl of fruit or a human face, rather it seems to spring out of the same basic striving and struggle that is at the basic level of reality, he says music could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all, no world of mere physical objects to depict or imitate.

Now you can imagine why his ideas would be so popular among 19th century composers

In the next lecture we’ll look at the way this plays out in the music of Richard Wagner