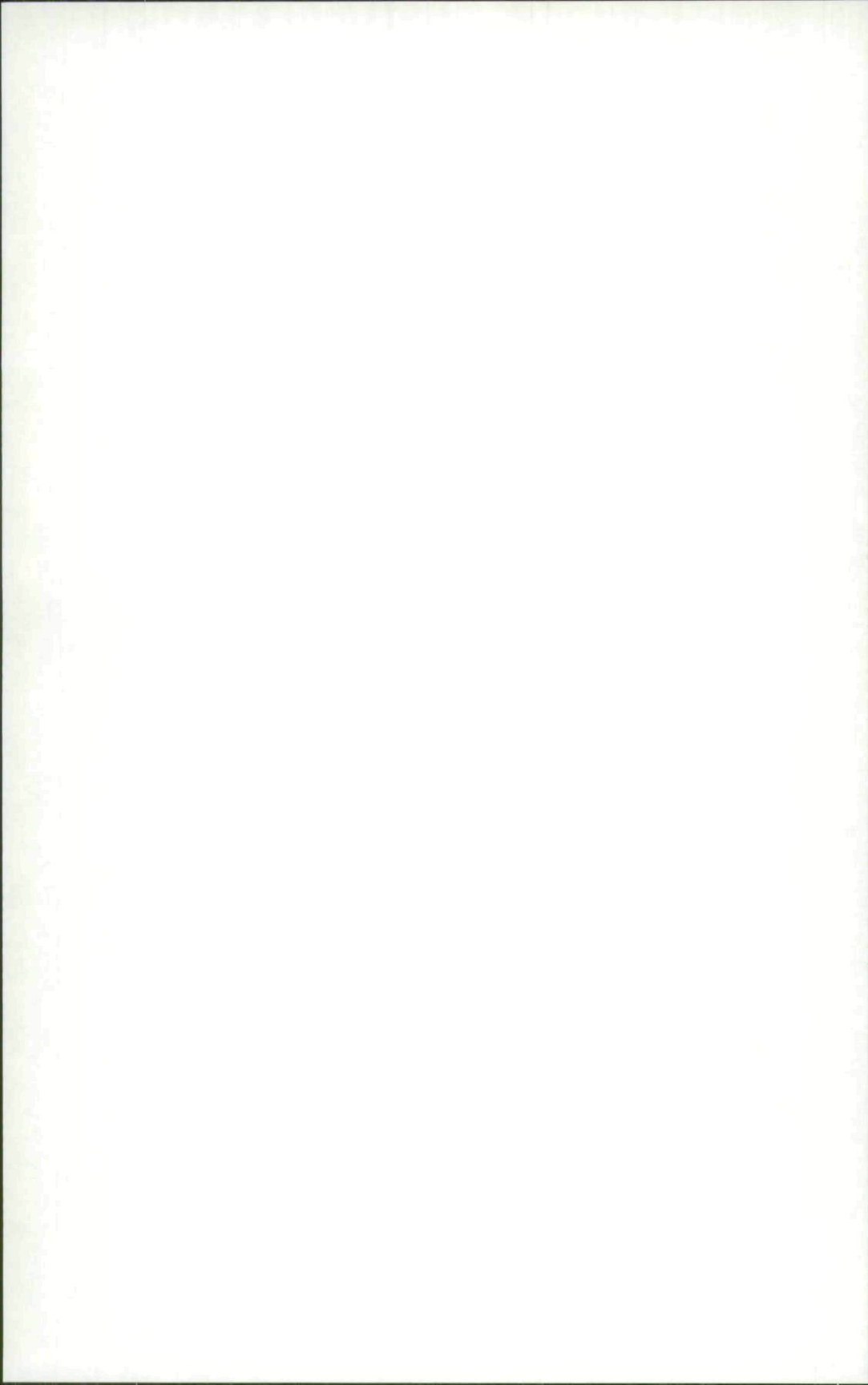


PART ONE



LEITMOTIF: NEW DEBATES
AND QUESTIONS





JAMES BUHLER

Star Wars, *Music*, and *Myth*



"Origin is the ideology of regression."
—Theodor W. Adorno

Frames and Fanfares: The Lost Plenitude of Origin

"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ."

Each film of the *Star Wars* series begins ostensibly with this text. The graphic design and layout establish the spatial and temporal distance that the text proclaims. The small blue lettering and the ragged, informal layout on the plain black backdrop make the text seem almost intimate, despite the mythic intention of the enigmatic utterance. This image is the most proximate to us in the whole film. The intimacy of this moment is established at least in part by the silence on the soundtrack. This silence is marked by the end of Alfred Newman's Twentieth Century-Fox fanfare, whose presence not only recalls an earlier "heroic" era of filmmaking, thus anticipating the restorative gesture of the trilogy as a whole; it also establishes an oscillation between presence and absence on the soundtrack, an oscillation that puts the soundtrack into play from that moment of silence. The Fox fanfare is therefore not incidental to the sonic structure of the film but crucial to the perception of this silence as absence.

All of this works to put the crucial next shot on display as a moment of origin and pure presence: music erupts out of the silence with a radiant but transparent B \flat chord, which restores the tonality of Newman's fanfare, just as the luminous title (figure 1) suddenly appears in giant black letters rimmed with gold, monumentality replacing the impersonal intimacy of the blue lettering. Image and music for the first time coincide. We witness the creation of a world, and this is the nodal point—the original image of plenitude—from which everything else in the series flows: the mythic aura of *Star Wars* is born of this synchronization of music and image.¹ While



Figure 1. *A New Hope* (1977). Primal Origin: This image, the first frame of the title sequence, is cropped so that its boundaries extend beyond the frame of the screen. The letters are also opaque rather than transparent: the field of stars is not visible through the letters.

grasping to understand what makes the synchronization of the opening B \flat chord of his score with the title so effective, John Williams invokes the notion of a mythic archetype, suggesting that "the combination . . . must speak to some collective memory . . . that we don't quite understand. Some memory of Buck Rogers or King Arthur or something earlier in the cultural salts of our brains, memories of lives lived in the past, I don't know. But it has that kind of resonance—it resonates within us in some past hero's life that we've all lived."² Yet the synchronization that is implied here never quite occurs: its image of plenitude is rent with absences. The dark interior of the lettering, which at first seems transparent, is in fact void and inscrutable. The enigmatic graphic image of the title finds a correlate in mythic discourse, of which Roland Barthes writes "its form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full."³

The aura of this opening derives from this paradox. The title is at first framed so that it exceeds the boundaries of the screen, suggesting that the content of this image defies representation. The originary moment of plenitude is lost before it can really be absorbed as the title immediately begins to recede into the distance, uncovering a tapestry of stars. The process enacts a regression from origin, a slipping of presence into absence as the title vanishes into the void; it also reveals, however, the moment of pure presence, the moment of origin, as obscuring and curiously two-dimensional. At first too close to the camera, it rapidly becomes too distant. This first shot thus articulates, somewhat enigmatically to be sure, a dialectic of presence and absence that is perhaps less naive than it might at first seem: with

distance comes regression from origin and loss of plenitude but also a feeling of depth.

The opening measure of Williams's score (example 1) resembles the title it accompanies: radiant but indefinite; world-defining and timeless. More and less than the B \flat chord it seems to be, this sound is a cipher in need of decoding. The music proclaims itself present even as it seems ethereal if not ghostly. This quality of the sound is a function of the unbalanced orchestration, which emphasizes the root of the B \flat chord throughout the entire orchestra at the expense of the third and fifth. The well-balanced brass chord—the trumpets, in the bright upper register, and the horns, also in the upper register, are in close position while the

The musical score for the opening chord of the Star Wars Main Title is presented in 4/4 time. The score is for a full orchestra, with the following parts visible: Violin (vln.), Violoncello/Viola (ww, vla.), Violoncello/Viola (ww, vc.), Trumpet (trpt.), Horn (hrn.), Trombone (tbn.), and Tuba. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major). The violin and viola parts play a sustained B-flat note. The violoncello/viola parts play a sustained B-flat note. The trumpet and horn parts play a sustained B-flat note. The trombone and tuba parts play a sustained B-flat note. The horn part also includes a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Example 1. *Star Wars*, Main Title, opening chord.

trombones and tuba take the root below—compensates somewhat, but not entirely, for the predominance of B \flat in the rest of the orchestra. The orchestration endows the basic B \flat with the sense of major without making it hyperexplicit. The B \flat acquires an aura, as it were, of major rather than the substance. The compositional intention of this opening chord is made apparent as the full orchestra drops out and the remaining brass instruments quickly collapse back to fanfare bursts on B \flat .⁴ Where the opening B \flat establishes a musical space, the fanfare that follows initiates the melodic impulse, first rhythmically, then in terms of pitch. The trombones and trumpets dance in a close canon, fragmenting the impenetrable unity of the opening B \flat chord and marking the thematic profile of the theme to come. The counterpoint, which unfolds in quartal rather than triadic harmony, endows the musical space with volume, much as the receding “Star Wars” transforms the flat, two-dimensional screen into three dimensions with the addition of perspective. In this instance, the melodic content of the fanfare gives the music a feeling of depth and volume as well as a sense of motion. But the quartal harmony makes this motion seem indefinite: like the title, the fanfare moves toward a vanishing point that lies at infinite regress.

It is only with the addition of the F dominant as an anacrusis to the main theme itself that the music begins to impose an order on this so far timeless and undifferentiated sonic space. The tonal motion from dominant to tonic endows the music with a temporal dimension. Music precedes the narrative and calls it into being. Music imposes its tonal order before the text outlining the saga—the first instance of a syntactically complete ordering of text—appears onscreen. The lack of synchronization between the music and the text here is itself significant inasmuch as it underscores the rift within the primal unity of music and image that obtained at the original instant. The presentation of the text here is itself novel, one of the most striking images in a film filled with striking images: the text rolls out in linear perspective so that the text plane seems to drift in space like a message in a bottle. The equation the film posits between linear perspective and tonal motion here is also quite perceptive, if ideologically loaded in ways the film perhaps does not fully anticipate. Just as perspective positions viewers (here the tilt tells us that we are not the addressee of this text) and relates figures to the background, so too tonality positions listeners, providing a musical context by which to evaluate the salience of musical figures. Moreover, both perspective and tonality naturalize the viewing and listening experience respectively.

Each phrase of the main title ends solidly, but none of them cadences on

the tonic. This lack of a tonic cadence has the effect of leaving the music open, just as the text of the synopsis initiates the action, leaving much unexplained. The music departs from the thematic material of the Main Title as the text drifts off into space. As the text dissolves in the distance, the music loses tonal coherence and becomes ambiguous if not quite atonal. An amorphous piccolo melody drifts over the murky and rather static harmony just before the camera tilts down, a highly subjective camera motion that initially seems to position the audience above the action. The motion of the camera here is significant in that throughout the entire title sequence the camera has remained stationary, its absolute stability acting as a sure foundation of the world being built through text, graphics, and music. We have no reason to doubt the objectivity of the text, indeed, the truth of all we hear and see so long as the camera remains fixed and the tonality clear. Stable tonality is to the ear what the stable camera placement is to the eye: once the camera moves and the tonality dissolves, everything becomes subject to interpretation. The movement of the camera initiates the action before the action itself, implicating the audience in what it sees: it is the desire of the audience to move the camera, to get the action going so that it may return to that opening moment of plenitude that never was; but the action itself therefore represents a fall from grace, a theater in which the stability of truth no longer obtains.

Sound Design: Music contra Effects

Your eyes can deceive you. Don't trust them. —Obiwan, *A New Hope*

If, from its very first appearance, music is thus linked with the production of myth in *Star Wars*, sound effects are linked with technology. The soundtrack in fact is an arena of contention between myth and technology, between past and future, between the Force and the Darkside. This is made evident in the way that sound effects initiate the diegetic soundtrack in each film, at first melding with the music-track and then displacing it. In each film, an indefinite low rumble emerges out of the music as the camera tilts down. The very first sound effect precedes the image, positing a continuity between music and noise. In *A New Hope*, a violent explosion of light and sound after the camera tilt brings the rebel ship into being, revealing a link between synchronization and violence that had been sublimated in the opening. Immediately after this explosion, the triangular nose of an Imperial cruiser appears at the top of the screen and ominously begins to fill it, much as the text scrolling out in perspective had filled space following the initial

moment of synchronization (see figures 2 and 3). Comparing this sequence with the opening suggests an association of the Empire with an inverted worldview: where the text had rolled out in a naturalized perspective, here perspective is denaturalized and momentarily obliterated. Sound effects, too, are linked with this denaturalized vision of technology just as music, but especially tonality, had been linked with the natural unfolding of the text.

In *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* the initial displacement of music by sound effects is, by contrast, quite gradual. The opposition between the effects and music is not dramatized with the spectacle of violence as it is in the first film: the tilt down in *The Empire Strikes Back* simply identifies the low rumble as belonging to an Imperial starship just as the camera motion in *Return of the Jedi* reveals the ghostly skeleton of a Death Star under construction before one of the Imperial star cruisers comes floating in over the top of the screen, replicating the memorable shot from the first film discussed above. In all three cases, however, a basic succession holds: we hear before we see, which grants an initial precedence to the aural over the visual.

The introduction of sound effects differs in one crucial respect from the music: whereas the opening B \flat chord of the score had been synchronized to the title card, diegetic sound is initially characterized by a *lack* of synchronization with the image and its source. These paired associations—music with an initial moment of synchronization that dissolves in order to move beyond the bonds of the image, and sound effects with an initial moment of nonsynchronization that becomes bound to an image—create a

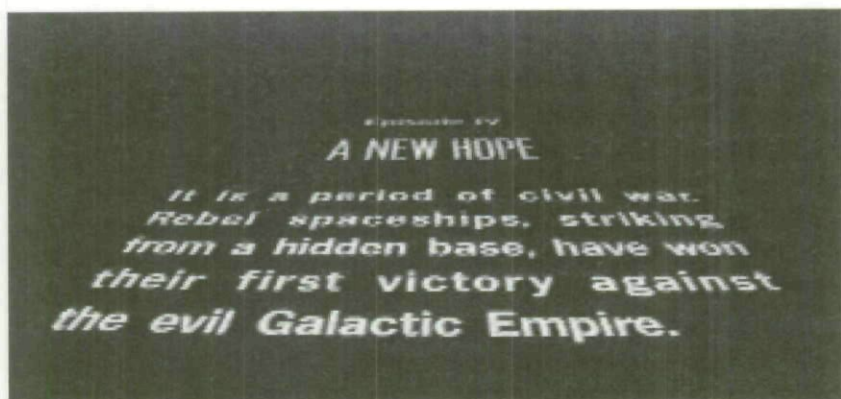


Figure 2. *A New Hope*. "Natural" Perspective: In this sequence, the text enters from the bottom of the screen and scrolls out in linear perspective, since the Renaissance associated with naturalistic representation. The vanishing point creates the impression of a triangle with its point up.

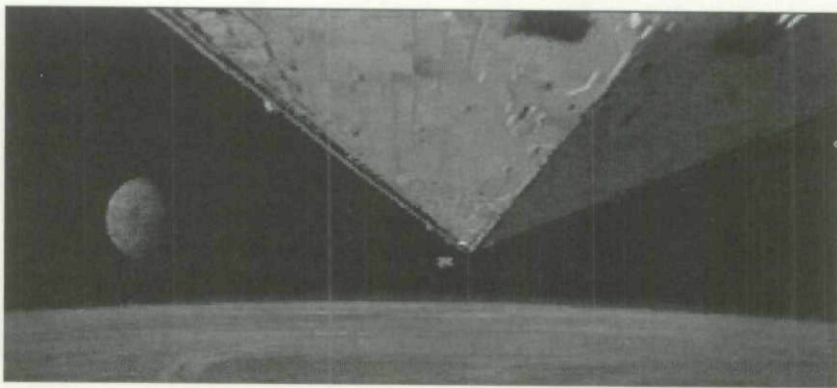


Figure 3. *A New Hope*. Inverted Worldview: Exactly reversing figure 2, the Imperial cruiser enters from the top of the screen and its triangular shape is oriented point down. The image is almost frightening, not simply because the ship is so immense, but also because its entrance at the top of the screen frustrates the attempt to decode it according to the "natural" conventions of linear perspective.

conflict of more than passing interest on the soundtrack. From the camera tilt that initiates the action in each of the films, sound effects are associated with images of technology, radical human interventions in the material world, whereas, after its initial moment of synchronization, music dissolves its bond to the image, allowing it to point to what extends beyond the material reality of cultural mediation, namely the Force. Indeed, the filmic representation of the Force depends crucially on music, which is why it is appropriate to speak of a conflict, perhaps even a dialectic between music and effects on the soundtrack. Sound design is more than a simple question of taste in these films; it is the very means by which the mythical world is constituted as agonistic. It is therefore imperative to decipher the meaning of the *mise-en-bande*,⁵ especially the fact that effects nearly always take precedence over the music in the soundtrack.

Once effects appear on the soundtrack, the music does not yield its place willingly. This is music that is composed and recorded in such a way that it can compete with sound effects. Even where the mixing of the music is so low that it hardly sounds above a low murmur, its presence is important because this mixing leaves the impression that the music has been suppressed. In other words, the specificity of the music under the sound effects gives the *mise-en-bande* its distinctive quality of conflict: the music does not make room for sound effects in general any more than the sound effects take account of the music. Music can be supplanted from the soundtrack only by means of external force: the intervention of the mixing board. Thus, sound effects must generally impose themselves on the music, ripping the tapestry the music weaves to pieces.

At the first appearance of the ships in *A New Hope*, music is generally mixed at a markedly lower sound level than effects. At points, the music is almost inaudible. The pounding ostinato figures in the strings and the brass bursts of the Rebel Fanfare,⁶ both consisting of compact motives with strong, distinctive rhythmic profiles, are two of the musical gestures that nevertheless manage to be heard clearly over the sound effects. But they obtain this audibility by radically simplifying the musical means so that they almost seem to mimic sound effects: the string figure simply hammers away at the same pitch over which the fanfare figure is stated baldly at harmonically distant levels. Strikingly, one of the first lulls in the sound effects during this opening sequence follows Darth Vader's entrance on the rebel ship, which allows his presence to be marked by an aggressive and highly dissonant musical stinger that assaults the tonal universe much as weapons fire assaults the soundtrack. This dissonant musical gesture sets Vader apart from the rest of the Imperial troops precisely because the music suddenly comes forward and takes note of him. Yet even for Vader, sound effects are inescapable, as his labored mechanical breathing, which is as responsible for defining his character as are his black cape and mask, dominates the pauses in the dialogue.⁷

The unsettling sonic effect of Vader's entrance is reinforced by the immediate cross-cut to Leia placing the message to Obiwan inside Artoo. The sound design here grants a sense of momentary sanctuary to this brief subsequence: the music levels are elevated as the Force theme appears, the first moment of tonal and thematic stability in the music since the opening credits. Indeed the way the *mise-en-bande* works here to create this feeling of sanctuary is partly responsible for establishing an association of the Force theme with hope. The laser blasts, though now mixed at a significantly lower level, as though in a distance, threaten the sonic space without actually interfering with our perception of the music. Likewise, the droid noises, parallel to Vader's breathing, do not arrest our attention on the soundtrack in the same way as does Vader's breathing. It is instructive to think about why this might be so. All of the noises associated with Vader and the droids are pseudo-organic, the products of autonomous, individual locomotion, dialogue, and breathing, and so distinct on that account from weapons fire and engine noises. Artoo's beeps are perceived as dialogue, and the sounds of C3PO moving about are clearly synchronized to his movements. In both cases, the sound source is quite evident.

Vader's breathing, however, is different. Here we have a pseudo-organic sound—indeed perhaps the organic sound par excellence—where the source is unseen. We do not really see his breathing. We can, to be sure, attribute the sound to Vader, but unlike C3PO, where the mechanism of his

joints is quite apparent, Vader's breathing apparatus is concealed by his attire. What is frightening about Vader is the way everything that is organic and human about him is masked by technology without completely destroying the sense that something is alive in there. In *A New Hope*, the music takes note of Vader, marking his presence much more so than the droids, toward whom the music is surprisingly indifferent, but without assigning a distinctive theme to him. In the later two films, Vader's musical character congeals in the ponderous leitmotif of the Imperial March, which, as we will see, not only sets up a thematic conflict within the score, but even more important, creates the potential for a dialectical engagement within the leitmotif between semiotic and mythical uses of the device.

*Excursus on the Leitmotif:
The Entwinement of Myth and Signification*

Luke, help me take this mask off. —Darth Vader, *Return of the Jedi*

While film music borrowed the basic idea of the leitmotif from Wagner, his deployment of it differs from most filmic uses of the device in one fundamental sense: its self-conscious relation to myth. Where film simply takes the signifying function of the leitmotif at face value, severing its link to myth as it were, Wagner uses the leitmotif to put signification, the language-like character of music, into play. In other words, Wagner's leitmotifs both signify and resist signifying. As Carl Dahlhaus puts it, a leitmotif seems to require naming yet always extends beyond any meaning captured by that name.⁸ In other words, the "primal baptism" linking the leitmotif as signifier with a signified often fails in Wagner's dramas as the motif reverts to music again, absorbed into the musical unfolding.⁹ Sometimes a motif appears that cannot be directly related to the drama; sometimes it cannot be fixed securely to a signified at all. Often it is the linguistically constructed drama that yields to the music, as the action is suspended momentarily to allow the presentation of a summarizing musical statement that bears only tangentially on the scene. This reversion to music in Wagner's music dramas is made possible by musical logic, which can justify the recurrence of a motif musically that might seem wholly enigmatic from the perspective of linguistic signification. Moments of musical summary arrest the flow of language in the dramas, dissolving the bond that otherwise obtains between the leitmotif as signifier and its signified and giving this music a mythic substrate, a fluid semiosis that itself points to an intelligible realm beyond signification. In this way, myth and music become directly allied against linguistic signification, that is, communication.¹⁰ The

musical quality of the leitmotif prevents it from devolving wholly into a linguistic entity; it becomes the structural analogue to myth. What is beguiling about Wagner is that he makes music's resistance to signification, the *sine non qua* of music vis-à-vis language, into the very mythic substrate of his music drama: music free of language in Wagner does not resist myth; it produces it.¹¹

Film music, on the contrary, divests the leitmotif of this mythic element only to surrender the most musical aspect of the leitmotif: this is the meaning of the oft-misunderstood attack on the leitmotif in *Composing for the Films*. One of the objections Adorno and Eisler raise against the leitmotif in film is that film composers do not take account of its formal requirements. Wagner's leitmotifs, which tend to be brief and salient in themselves, require "a large musical canvas if [they are] to take on the structural meaning beyond that of a signpost."¹² In particular, the relatively short sequences and the extensive cross-cutting common to film emphasizes discontinuity rather than the continuity needed to allow a motif time to be presented sequentially as Wagner's are. Film composers simply appropriate the idea of the motif without understanding the crucial structural importance of musical sequence. In his book on Wagner, Adorno suggests that Wagner's technique of sequential exposition embeds the motif within a coherent musical form while also retaining the quality of musical mobility that Wagner so cherished.¹³ Because the motif in Wagner is governed by the musical process of the sequence, it is impossible for its meaning to be completely severed from that musical process, which is why for Adorno the leitmotif is more than a signpost in Wagner. Consequently, leitmotifs do not so much attach themselves to concrete referents as they endow "the dramatic events with metaphysical significance."¹⁴ The primary purpose of Wagner's leitmotif is the production of myth not signification.

Film music, by contrast, has secularized the leitmotif, demythologizing it precisely by emphasizing its linguistic quality, the process of signification. Film typically deploys leitmotifs in a much more consistent manner than does Wagner; the motifs are much more rigidly bound to the action in film, and they are consequently rarely granted the independence motifs have in Wagner's dramas, which is one reason the music in cinema rarely obtains the level of independence of music in Wagner's dramas. A leitmotif in film is seldom allowed to arrest the cinematic flow for a summarizing statement of a motif as Wagner halts the dramatic flow to make way for a statement of his motif. While the filmic deployment of leitmotifs thus serves as a critique of Wagner's mythical impulses, it also serves as the utmost development of the least musical (because most linguistic) aspect of Wagner's compositional thought.

Demythification does not save the leitmotif, but simply reveals its poverty. As Adorno notes, leitmotifs rarely serve as anything more than musical calling cards in film: "Via the ingenious illustrative technique of Richard Strauss, [the degeneration of the leitmotif] leads directly to cinema music where the sole function of the leitmotif is to announce heroes and situations so as to help the audience to orient itself more easily."¹⁵ Adorno condemns the devolution of the leitmotif toward language here, because it transforms music into a means, a technology even, rather than the thing itself, the expression; Adorno had already found this aspect of the leitmotif troubling in Wagner. From the perspective of the philosophy of language, Wagner's leitmotifs, Adorno argues, are essentially as arbitrary as words, and it is this element of arbitrariness that the expressive dimension of music has difficulty bearing. "Wagner's leitmotifs stand revealed as allegories that come into being when something purely external, something that has fallen out of a spiritual totality, is appropriated by meaning and made to represent them, *a process in which signifiers and signifieds are interchangeable*."¹⁶ Myth does not banish this linguistic element in Wagner; it merely disguises it, a disguise that serves the purpose of Wagner's phantasmagoria.

Just as Wagner's mythic impulse does not free the leitmotif of its linguistic element but actually leads back to it, so too the demythifying impulse of film music leads not away from myth but back toward it. This is the riddle of the leitmotif, which entwines myth and signification in a knot almost impossible to solve. The leitmotif draws attention to itself; it must be heard to perform the semiotic function attributed to it. The leitmotif says: listen to me, for I am telling you something significant. So long as it remains music, however, its meaning remains veiled. The clarity promised by the linguistic function dissolves but leaves us believing that this would all make sense if we gave ourselves over to the music. Even in its wholly demythologized state, the function of the leitmotif remains mythic, the unification of what is actually disparate. "False clarity is only another name for myth; and myth has always been obscure and enlightening at one and the same time: always using the devices of familiarity and straightforward dismissal to avoid the labor of conceptualization."¹⁷

As Caryl Flinn points out, the signifying capabilities of music help mystify the diegetic world of the film by rendering its inner properties apparent to us, whereas in our world such properties are always necessarily hidden.¹⁸ This is true especially of the leitmotif, which is responsible, to a very large extent, for the sense of false clarity that characterizes much classic Hollywood cinema. Through the leitmotif, film becomes a mythic discourse, in which its mythic impulse hides behind an apparent demythologization. Demythologization in film music thus comes to serve the function of a

more insidious mystification, because that mystification sublates its myth into entertainment, which seeks the status of art while absolving itself of the responsibility that art demands.

The Nature of the Force

With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy. —Darth Vader, *The Empire Strikes Back*

If the overt mythic quality is what distinguishes Wagner's leitmotifs from general film practice, then Williams's music to *Star Wars*, especially *A New Hope*, comes as close as any film music to the tone of Wagner. *Star Wars* is likewise self-consciously mythic: it unfolds in mythic time that grants the recurrence of leitmotifs, especially orchestral climaxes, a kind of summarizing power that is more than simply the recurrence of linguistic tokens.¹⁹ A certain inconsistency of leitmotivic deployment serves as a trace of self-conscious mythologization because such moments belie another logic at work besides the obvious signifying one—a musicomythic logic. The mythic quality of the music lies in the perception of a semiosis in flux, the way the leitmotifs resist all signifieds as in the world of myth. The "Binary Suns" cue in *A New Hope* is the prototype of such mythic usage. When Luke steps outside with the two suns hanging in the sky as background, a full statement of the Force theme accompanies him despite the fact that at this point in the film nothing about the Force has been revealed. The "primal baptism" that will link signifier and signified does not occur until Ben explains the Force to Luke later in the film. Moments like this one when the music seems not entirely bound up with its semiotic function are what gives this music its mythical character. The music seems to intuit connections that are beyond immediate rational comprehension.²⁰

This semiotic failure is the mark of the mythic, pointing to a realm beyond reason, beyond language—a realm that in *Star Wars* functions as the domain of the Force, which, as with Wagner's mythic substrate, cannot be represented other than through this failed link between signifier and signified in music. Music is therefore fundamental to the representation of the Force. If the antagonism between music and effects inscribes on the soundtrack an opposition between the Force and technology, between sacred and secular worldviews, then the opposition of the Force and the Darkside manifests itself musically both in terms of leitmotivic deployment and the actual thematic structure. In terms of leitmotifs, those associated with the Force (the Force itself, but also Luke's theme, Princess Leia's, Yoda's, etc.) participate in a fluid semiosis where the bond between the leitmotif and

what it signifies frequently dissolves, as the leitmotif sheds its signlike property and reverts to music.

By contrast, the leitmotifs of the Darkside, in particular the Imperial March, strictly adhere to a signified. The Darkside is associated only with the leitmotif as a means, with its instrumental, technological deployment—that is, music as mere signification. With the Darkside, music no longer signifies in a mythic manner; it no longer signifies what lies beyond signification. Especially after *A New Hope*, no leitmotif functions more consistently as a sign than the Imperial March. Indeed, the semiotic property of this theme is so emphasized in *The Empire Strikes Back* that it does actual damage to the compositional integrity of the score, which often mechanistically matches each cut to the Imperial fleet or Vader with a blast of the ponderous theme. It is difficult to gauge the exact contribution of Williams to this mechanistic layout, as the film was recut so substantially after it was supposedly “set” that much of the score, especially in the early part of the film, proved unusable in the form Williams wrote it.²¹ Many shots that use the bombastic concert version of the Imperial March in the film are much more subtly rendered in Williams’s score, though his score, too, is dominated by this theme. The constant recycling of the ponderously scored concert version of the march in the final cut of the film, however, has the effect of emphasizing the identity of the music, the music as a sign; in that respect, the opposition between the Force and the Darkside within the music is intensified.

This opposition between the Force and the Darkside extends to the structure of the themes themselves. As the opening of the Imperial March illustrates (example 2), the Darkside is represented musically not primarily through dissonance, not really even through chromaticism, but rather through the abrogation of the dominant.²² Most typically, the march is introduced with a vamp: pounding rhythms on the tonic move to minor $\flat VI$ on the fourth beat of each measure. The concert version, for instance, opens with two measures of oscillation between octave Gs and an $E\flat$ minor chord in root position, an oscillation that establishes an important juxtaposition between G and $E\flat$. In measure 3, the harmony of the vamp grows ambiguous: the octave Gs remain prominent, but the chord on beat 4 is no longer simply minor $\flat VI$. Rather, elements of the dominant—actually a diminished chord with dominant tendencies ($F\sharp [= G\flat] - A - E\flat$)—collide with the $E\flat$ minor chord, and the whole complex sounds over a pedal G. Yet, because the first two measures “prime” our ears to hear an oscillation between minor I and minor $\flat VI$, the resulting sonority sounds more like an altered minor $\flat VI$ over a tonic pedal than a dominant-substitute diminished chord.

The musical score is for the "Imperial March" from Star Wars, measures 1-8. It is written in 4/4 time and the key of B-flat major (three flats). The score consists of five staves. The top staff is labeled "strgs., hrn." and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplets. The second and third staves are also for strings, with the third staff having a "trpt." label. The fourth and fifth staves are for trumpet and tuba, respectively. The tuba and trumpet play a melodic line that circles around G, featuring a descending arpeggiation of a minor VI chord in measures 7 and 8.

Example 2. *Star Wars*, "Imperial March" (concert version), mm. 1-8.

It is almost as though the region of $\flat VI$ has swallowed up the dominant implications of the diminished chord here. The lowered third of minor $\flat VI$ is the flatted tonic ($G\flat$), that is, the enharmonic equivalent of the leading tone ($F\sharp$), the characteristic dominant tendency tone. The flatted tonic absorbs, as it were, all traces of the strong dominant function of the leading tone into the region of $\flat VI$, a region that in tonal terms should be major but here is inflected toward minor. The tune itself (mm. 5ff.) replays something of the same opposition that characterizes the harmony: it circles around G but feigns major, melodically outlining an $E\flat$ -major triad while sardonically harmonizing it with the oscillating vamp from the introduction.²³ In measures 7 and 8, the melody, like the harmony throughout, attacks the dominant function of the leading tone, enfolding $G\flat$ in a descending arpeggiation of minor $\flat VI$ that leads back to the tonic but in a way that

the note is emphatically not allowed to show its enharmonic tonal face as the leading tone F \sharp ; indeed, that an unaltered E \flat -minor chord underpins the melodic G \flat here drives the point home. Likewise, even at the end of the tune (mm. 15–16), any dominant function that remains to the leading tone is highly attenuated as an altered subdominant (C–E \flat –G \flat –B \flat) leads plaggally to G. Here, too, the strong tonal tendency of the leading tone is mitigated, even neutralized.

Similar tonal procedures govern the Emperor's theme, which unfolds in a series of tonally unrelated triads, once again primarily minor, often a minor third or tritone apart (example 3). The untexted male chorus swinging between G minor and B \flat minor only to veer suddenly to C \sharp minor is highly effective, well scored, and the whole thing has an elemental, other-worldly quality. It is as if these triads were being moved in sonorous blocks against their tonal will. The music gives the impression that only a very powerful sorcerer, perhaps only a god, could animate these chords thus, could make them progress so against their tonal nature.²⁴

What is interesting about these two musical representations of the Darkside is that they both avoid an association with atonality and hence musical Modernism. While the music of *Star Wars* never embraces Modernism, the score, unlike the film, is not antimodern. As the tonal procedures of these two themes demonstrates, Williams does not associate atonal dissonance with the Empire, though this would have been the obvious choice given the trilogy's antimodern bent. Atonality, where it appears at all in these films, is generally restricted to appearances of the exotic, the primitive, and the unintelligible (the sand people for instance) or moments of great anxiety and excitement (battle sequences and the like). The tonal transgressions of Empire themes, by contrast, lie on the pretonal side: the material is often consonant, even triadic; it is just not deployed tonally.

Williams's reluctance to align modern music with the Empire is what saves the score and ultimately the film itself from turning into an antimodernist screed. Instead of sharpening the trilogy's antimodernist polemic, the music clarifies what is ambiguous in the story: the confrontation between ideals of social harmony. This becomes especially evident by comparing the



Example 3. *Star Wars*, The Emperor.

Imperial March to the Main Title theme, which is likewise a march but with a clear harmonic thrust: where the Imperial March seems ruthlessly ordered but stuck in place almost by the force of will, defying proper tonal motion, the Main Title soars, freely resting on the dominant.²⁵ "When I thought of a theme for Luke and his adventures," Williams states, "I composed a melody that reflected the brassy, bold, masculine, and noble qualities I saw in his character."²⁶ In general, the music of the Rebels is banal albeit thrilling, full of pathos at times but constructed so that it always *seems* natural. Yet in its very first appearance, the Main Title theme is already wearing a mask. The cross-rhythms, which are musically more interesting than the tune itself, divert our attention from the melodic content, disguising the general banality of the musical construction.

Here then is the opposition inscribed in the musical representations of the Rebels and the Empire: imposed order versus naturalized order. Where the social order of the Rebels appears natural, its technology just outdated enough to seem charming rather than threatening, the social order of the Empire appears a distortion, its technology ruthless and grotesque. These conceptions are brought over into the music, where all compositional force is brought to bear on making the themes associated with the Rebels seem natural or at worst fantastic, while those of the Empire sound rigid, ponderous, and above all unnatural. The music, in other words, works to naturalize the order of the Force while it denaturalizes the order of the Darkside, revealing it as arbitrary and artificial, a kind of technology. In musical terms, this means that the music for the Rebels and the Empire do not differ fundamentally in terms of the necessity of ordering dissonance; rather, their differences lie in how that dissonance is to be ordered. Within the score, the image of naturalized harmony associated with the Force is tonality, especially the dominant. This association with the dominant gives insight into the Force: the Darkside is an arbitrary power, a force that is wholly willed without respect to the inner nature of the thing, whereas the good side of the Force, like the dominant, is an unforced force, a force that takes account of the natural state of things; that is, where they want to go. The good side channels, as it were, rather than forces. In this way the music of the Rebels recalls an irrevocable time when technology still worked and was charged with the utopian spirit of the future, when order was happy, when harmony was possible.

The stages that Luke passes through in coming to master the Force, though not so straightforward as the musical conception, confirm that the Darkside is in essence a technological use of the Force. In both *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, for instance, Luke's understanding of the Force remains rudimentary, and he is susceptible to being turned toward

the Darkside in these films (especially *The Empire Strikes Back* where the seduction is an important theme of the film) precisely because his understanding of the Force at this point coincides with the Darkside. What Luke wants to learn about the Force is how to use it instrumentally; that is, how to use it to dominate nature and utterly defeat Vader. This is his only aim. Luke's instrumental conception of the Force—the Force as a technological control of nature—makes him little different than Vader in that respect. Vader's protestations against trusting in “technological terrors” notwithstanding, the Darkside fetishizes technology, much as the Imperial March fetishizes not only the tonic note, but especially the unnatural, almost mechanical harmonic oscillation between minor I and minor ♭VI. With respect to the fetishization of technology, we need think not only of Vader (“he's more machine than man,” Obiwan says of him) but even more so of the two Death Stars, whose spherical, worldlike shapes bear, in negative form, the unmistakable imprint of a utopia realized through technology. Yet in both *A New Hope* and in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke's light saber is perhaps the most fetishized piece of technology of all, although this fetishization is naturalized by casting the saber as a phallus, relic of the Father.²⁷ In these two films Luke sees the Force only as an exotic, advanced technology, a particularly efficient way of manipulating things. It is this conception of the Force as a technology that leads to the failure in the cave.²⁸ Only through the symbolic castration of his hand (and the light saber contained within it) does Luke overcome the technological conception of the Force and finally comprehend the teaching of Yoda.

Specters of Revolution

Wotan is the phantasmagoria of the buried revolution. He and his like roam around like spirits haunting the places where their deeds went awry, and their costume compulsively and guiltily reminds us of that missed opportunity of bourgeois society for whose benefit they, as the curse of an abortive future, re-enact the dim and distant past.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*

In an insightful albeit politically intemperate tract on the *Star Wars* films, Hal Colebatch uncovers how an appeal to nature underlies the legitimacy of the Rebels vis-à-vis the Empire. The Rebels, he says, are actually defenders of natural law. The value of *Star Wars*, he admits, is “reactionary,” since it seeks to “[restore] a better past that has been usurped.” These films “are about rebellion and counter-rebellion and, either directly or by implication, about natural order and natural law. In [them] the good side is seen and named by the Enemies as ‘rebels,’ and indeed they are in rebellion against the domination of evil empires. They are, however, counter-revolutionaries,

fighting to preserve the natural order against the usurpers."²⁹ The Empire, by contrast, does not offer a "natural order," "but an 'order' artificially imposed for Utopian ends."³⁰ In fact, Colebatch goes so far as to claim that *Star Wars* is "anti-utopian," because it is "about the rejection of grandiose, totalitarian schemes of empire-building."³¹ Although Colebatch uncritically follows the series in naturalizing the order of the Rebellion, and so does not see the utopian dimension in every restoration project, he does point to something crucial: the sense in which the Empire represents symbolically the miscarriage of a technological utopia. The turn from technology to the Force is a result of despair over the lost utopian hope for a better world that technology once promised. In this sense, Colebatch is perfectly correct to read an anti-utopian theme in *Star Wars*. What he ignores is that the resonance of this theme has to do with the unmet hopes of a failed revolution rather than any anti-utopianism per se. The ideological power of the Force resides precisely in its relation to Utopia, in the way that it becomes the repository for utopian energies. This, no doubt, is the purpose of religion in conservative thought: to redirect those utopian impulses that capitalism collects but cannot safely discharge on its own. While Colebatch believes that the appeal of *Star Wars* is a result of increasing secularization,³² a better interpretation might be reading this appeal as a loss of faith in the utopian promise of secularization, the project of Modernism.

The Death Star is the negative image of this new secularized world, the one the technological revolution would have wrought. It is a wholly technological world, a world constructed with all means of technology possible. But this technological marvel is portrayed as hostile to organic life. This is surely the point of showing the Death Star destroy the "peaceful" planet Alderaan in *A New Hope*: it shows how the technological world threatens to reduce the organic world to rubble. Yet the Death Star contains the strongest imprint of Utopia in the trilogy as it is really the only image of a future the films allow. The Death Star, like Valhalla in Wagner's *Ring*, thus becomes an emblem of a failed revolution, and it has to bear the symbolic consequences for the failure: we demand the obliteration of the Death Star, which we consume as spectacle, as payment for the failure of our dreams. For *Star Wars* as for Wagner's *Ring*, myth is reaction to failed revolution, to the inability to change the world. Myth serves to justify the failure, attributes that failure to the way of the world—fate—rather than a failure of human imagination and fortitude. We accept Yoda's statement of fate, "that is the way of things, the way of the Force," and thus receive absolution from the guilt of our failure.

The *Star Wars* series looks to the past—to the return of the Jedi—rather than to the future. The new hope is bound not to the technological promise

of the future, a revolution that would change existing social relations, but to the restoration of a past that never was. This has the effect of naturalizing the social relations of the Old Republic as timeless and casting technology (really, history itself) in an adversarial position with respect to the Republic. *Star Wars* despises time, preferring even death to any meaningful change. While everything associated with the Jedis appears eternal and their absence is portrayed as an aberration, the Emperor looks ancient, like someone who has lived beyond his allotted time, much more so than Yoda does even at his death. Ben, on the contrary, always seems ghostly, a visitor from the spirit world—first metaphorically in that he is portrayed as someone who has outlived his life span, and then literally when he dies and returns as a ghost. Adorno makes the following point about Wotan, who in his guise as the Wanderer, is a mythic forerunner of Ben: “As the spirit of the ancient, now dispossessed god, the Wanderer is also the embodiment of the dispossessed but new revolution. Since the Wanderer only speaks, he necessarily drops out of the action; his aura arises from his position outside society.”³³ Like Wotan, Ben’s power and aura derive from his extraterritoriality, his position outside society: “If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can imagine.”

Rebellion and Restoration

I’ve got a really bad feeling about this. —Han Solo, *A New Hope* (and elsewhere)

It is faith in restoration that fundamentally differentiates *Star Wars* from Wagner’s *Ring* cycle, which likewise, according to Adorno, posits a false revolution. Wagner, however, opts for annihilation rather than a leap into the past. His art remains steadfastly committed to the music of the future, even if that future is tinged with pessimism and is ultimately without hope for a better world. What *Star Wars* lacks from Wagner’s universe is this pessimism, which is Wagner’s critical force, his dissatisfaction with existing relations. As Adorno notes, it is “paradoxically . . . the pessimism of the *Ring* that contains an incipient admission that the rebellion of Natural Man ends up in a reaffirmation of a social system that is seen as natural.”³⁴ *Star Wars* retains hope, blunting the edge of pessimism by projecting its Utopia into the past as the “natural” state of the Old Republic.

The music of *Star Wars* is heavily implicated in the task of elevating restoration and recurrence over substantive change. Thus, all musical development in the trilogy is without consequence, as time and again the music merely celebrates a return to what has already occurred. The music for the Throne Room sequence that concludes *A New Hope*, for instance, functions

formally as a recapitulation that is satisfied with thematic identity—a return to a prior state rather than something new. The cross-rhythms in the accompaniment, while highly effective at rendering the theme climactic, give the music a martial character (Williams without irony refers to it as “a kind of imperial procession”)³⁵—and this martial character makes it seem as if the order the music enacts is violently imposed rather than internally motivated. This is not music that seeks legitimacy on its own merits.³⁶ The absence of substantive thematic work means that the music lacks a dialectic that could justify the triumphant tone.³⁷ Instead of seeming heroic, the triumph here is empty and bombastic, celebrating a victory over what posed no compositional threat. The triumph becomes empty ritual, a mere sonic spectacle that transforms the defeated into a victim of the collective.

This feeling of an overbearing order is furthered by the cinematography, which recalls act 3 of Wagner’s *Parsifal*, perhaps a visual inspiration for the Nuremberg rallies recorded in Reifentahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. In the Throne Room, soldiers stand in military formation with the tall lines of the Mayan monuments symmetrically framing the background. The grandiose formality of this self-consciously “beautiful” shot is contrasted with the rather more intimate informality of the shot on the platform. The marked contrast between these two shots serves to humanize the “leaders”—Leia especially. Leia’s laughs, which are calculated to seem spontaneous, are especially effective in this respect. The musical analog to the humanizing shot is the processional music in D \flat (Williams calls it “Hope and Glory” music), which offers the possibility of a variant rather than a mere thematic iteration. Unlike variation, a thematic variant, Mahler’s crucial compositional innovation, never posits a particular thematic statement as the primary, structural one.³⁸ Instead, through a chain of variants, the theme seems to evolve and expose different facets of its character as the work unfolds, giving the music the feel of a narrative sequence. The tone of the “Hope and Glory” music is in fact very Mahlerian: the ever widening intervals give a better sense of ecstasy and release than the ponderously scored Force theme ever did. Yet even this music ultimately carries no structural weight. Nothing remains of it to alter the thematic process, to give the theme a meaningful history. The “Hope and Glory” music, too, turns out to be inconsequential, as it leads only to a return of the Main Title theme for the end credits, another gesture of recapitulation, a return of what has already occurred. The contrasting middle section of the main theme, which had appeared already in the “Hope and Glory” theme, is treated quite freely in the end credits, giving the whole restatement a quality of openness elsewhere lacking. Yet here again this openness yields not something new but only a return of the title theme, now with the extra measures at the end of

the contrasting strain (cf. mm. 35–37 of the Main Title) removed rather than expanded as it might have been. Williams normalizes what is deviant rather than preserving it; he excises the deviation so as to restore the theme to its presumably primal shape.

Hence, nothing actually happens musically in any of these scores. The themes simply remain the same; none of them are really born of a thematic process, despite the obvious motivic relations among the themes.³⁹ The musical logic throughout *Star Wars* remains that of an original and its derivatives. Each theme has a characteristic shape and orchestration, and deviations serve not to carve out the possibility of a thematic variant but to communicate semantic content, although that runs counter to the mythic intention. When we hear a polytonal version of, say, the Rebel Fanfare, we know this represents not so much a thematic variant as something gone thematically awry. The polytonal deviation here carries only semantic information. Musically it is an inconsequential variant without import for the original, which we still hear along with the variant as deviation from pure origin.

The lack of substantive thematic work therefore relates back to both origin and the signifying aspect of the leitmotif. Adorno suggests that Wagner's leitmotifs "founder" because the sequential procedure does not permit substantive transformation of the material.⁴⁰ The sequence fails as an expository device because it marks time without pushing the gesture toward something new, toward something other than it is. The music of *Star Wars*, on the contrary, tends more toward developmental procedures, such as motivic fragmentation, than to sequence. Yet the purpose of the developmental passages in *Star Wars* is not *Durchführung*, a leading through to a dialectical synthesis as in sonata form; like Wagner's sequences, if more incoherently, they are a means of marking time.

The development is only apparent. Rather than pushing music forward to something new, development simply agitates, which affects, among other things, the function of modulation in the score. Where the thematic construction of the films is largely diatonic, especially for the themes associated with the Rebellion, and often harmonically rounded as well, the large-scale construction is amorphous: the music nervously flits from one key to another with little sense to the overall progression other than that the theme constantly sound fresh. In other words, Williams does not deploy modulation so much structurally as coloristically: a change of key brightens or darkens the sound, makes the old sound new, or perhaps increases the tension. Harmonically, modulation makes the music sound frenetic; it is constantly on the move, impatient with staying in place. Thus even in his concert suite, Williams shows little concern with large-scale harmonic rounding, and the movements often end in a key other than that

in which they began.⁴¹ Lacking a structural function, modulation comes to serve the purpose of pseudo-development, which circles about and agitates without leading anywhere in particular,⁴² and it is this frenetic churning in place that substitutes for consequential thematic work in the score.

Both Williams's clear thematic profiles and pseudo-developmental elaborations and Wagner's gestural motifs and sequential expositions thus prove inadequate to enacting a musical process beyond marking musical time as mere duration. Perhaps the fundamental problem lies less in the sequential exposition and concomitant lack of thematic working out (as Adorno suggests); perhaps the problem lies more within the semiotic structure of the leitmotif itself, which requires the recurrence of thematic identity as a condition of semiosis, even when that semiosis is in a state of constant flux, and which can interpret nonidentity only as a deviation for semantic effect. The leitmotif projects the primacy of the original state as an ideal even where it participates in the fluid semiosis of myth: we long for the return of the thematic model, just as Obiwan longs for the return of the natural order of the Old Republic. (That we also long for the return of the strong tonal orientation of the Rebel themes likewise demonstrates the strong naturalizing power of tonality; tonality in this respect is the musical analog to the Old Republic.) Everything seeks to escape the eternal flux of myth and to return home to the semiotic (and tonal) stability of origin. Yet, throughout *Star Wars*, Williams's score associates such semiotic clarity with the Darkside because the linguistic function implies an instrumental rather than mythic invocation of music.

Herein lies the ultimate irony of both the series and its music: restoration of origin entails regression to the Darkside, which is nothing but the recurrence of primal violence: the split between dark and light, sound and music, is the condition of possibility of origin. This split finds exquisite expression in the very opening of the score, as the unpitched triangle—a noise—and the high B \flat tremolo of the violin join to paint the shimmering afterimage of the originary primal moment, which itself combines music (the B \flat chord in the orchestra) with noise (the sound of a cymbal crash). The aura of the opening chord lasts only as long as the union of the tremolo and the triangle: when the violin reattacks its high B \flat at the beginning of the Main Theme (m. 4), the aura has vanished. The music fills this absence with violence, delivering sharp blows through the cross-rhythms. Musically, too, regression to origin can never vanquish the Darkside because the Darkside is always already there at the primal moment that never was.

Notes

1. See Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 193.

2. Craig L. Byrd, "Interview with John Williams," *Film Score Monthly* 2, no. 1 (January–February 1997), <http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/features/williams.html>. Accessed 14 January 1999.
3. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. and ed. Annette Levers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 124.
4. The five takes of the Main Title available as a supplement on the recent release of the Special Edition CD demonstrates that the opening of the score gave Williams considerable trouble. The first three takes mediate between silence and sound by means of a pickup, each apparently rendered in slightly different fashion. This pickup has the disadvantage of introducing the dominant right at the beginning, which produces the effect of the music coming forth out of the tension of the dominant rather than being created out of nothing as it occurs in the final version. Moreover, the pickup places more emphasis on the tonic, sets it in place, as it were. The effect produced is very unlike the graphic of the title itself, which is on the move from the moment we see it. The fifth take of the theme is interesting, too, for its insubstantiality. Rather than the B \flat chord, we hear only octave B \flat s and then the fanfare. The effect is much more creation ex nihilo than the demarcation of timeless space followed by a creation ex nihilo, as in the version opted for in the film. If the pickup in first three takes had made the B \flat chord too specific, the last one lacks any sense of being there at all. Yet the very existence of the fifth take shows that someone was still uncertain that the fourth take had captured the moment musically in the right way.
5. For a theoretical explication of the *mise-en-bande*, see Rick Altman (with McGraw Jones and Sonia Tatroe), "Inventing the Cinema Soundtrack: Hollywood's Multiplane Sound System" in this volume.
6. Rebel Fanfare is the term Michael Matessino uses for the leitmotif that first occurs as the Rebels prepare to be boarded at the opening of *A New Hope* ("A New Hope for Film Music," liner notes to *The Star Wars Trilogy: A New Hope* [Lucasfilm, Ltd. CD 09026-68746-2, 1997], 11). Its distinctive sound, the juxtaposition of major triads a minor third apart, is derived from a cadential figure of the title theme.
7. Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 193.
8. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).
9. Cf. Justin London, "Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score," in this volume.
10. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss has gone so far as to suggest that myth and music share the characteristic "of both being languages"—"forms of expression" might be a better term—"that, in their different ways, transcend articulate expression," that is, language. *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 15.
11. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1989), 125.
12. Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing For the Films* (London, Athlone, 1994), 5.
13. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 36.
14. Adorno and Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, 5.
15. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 46.
16. *Ibid.*, 45; my emphasis.
17. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1989), iv.
18. Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–9.
19. The self-conscious mythic tone of *Star Wars* connects it to the phantasmagoria of Wagner: at the root of its effectiveness is that *Star Wars* makes us believe in "the absolute reality of the unreal" as Paul Bekker once remarked about Wagner's

music dramas. As Adorno so astutely notes, Bekker's remark relates the mythic component of Wagner's music dramas to the commodity form, which wants us to forget the labor invested in producing the commodity. *Star Wars* partakes of this same economy: it wants us to believe, if not in its universe per se, then in the reality of its illusion qua illusion, its myth of entertainment. "Phantasmagoria," Adorno writes, is "the point at which aesthetic appearance becomes a function of the character of the commodity. The absolute reality of the unreal is nothing but the reality of a phenomenon that not only strives unceasingly to spirit away its own origins in human labor, but also, inseparably from this process and in thrall to exchange value, assiduously emphasizes its use value, stressing that this is its authentic reality, that it is 'no imitation'—and all this in order to further the cause of exchange value" (*In Search of Wagner*, 90). The spectacle of sound and images in *Star Wars* is not simply empty and "unreal"; rather, this spectacle receives a kind of false import from the mythic substrate, which suggests that the spectacle is significant, that it contains something authentic, universal, and true beyond its status as a commodity, when in fact this pseudo-authenticity itself is the very thing that furthers its exchange value as a commodity among other commodities.

20. Significantly, the use of the Force theme in the Binary Suns cue was not Williams's idea but Lucas's. Williams had written a different cue, amorphous and moody, darker and more troubled than the one used in the film; this cue utilized neither the Force theme nor any of the leitmotifs of the film, probably because the scene itself lacked a clear motivation for a connection. The music here draws a connection that cuts across the film, revealing a latent connection that could not otherwise be known. Here, Lucas shows himself to be quite sensitive to the mythographical possibilities of music, which in turn suggests that the conflict between effects and music on the soundtrack is probably not accidental. Lucas is someone attuned, not indifferent, to music.

21. Michael Matessino, "John Williams Strikes Back," liner notes to *The Star Wars Trilogy: The Empire Strikes Back* (Lucasfilm, Ltd., CD 09026-68747-2, 1997), 9 and 12.

22. Williams himself is less than forthcoming about revealing the musical procedures that make the march so effective. Speaking about how the march represents Darth Vader, he says, "brass suggests itself because of his military bearing and his authority and his ominous look. That would translate into a strong melody that's military, that grabs you right away, that is, probably simplistically, in a minor mode because he's threatening. You combine these thoughts into this kind of a military, ceremonial march, and we've got something that perhaps will answer the requirement here" (Byrd, "Interview with John Williams"). As the analysis below suggests, Williams's invocation of the minor mode here is something of an interpretive red herring—the Force theme, after all, is also set in the minor. Rather, an interpretive cue needs to be taken from the almost inconspicuous clause that ends the sentence: "because he's threatening." In musical terms, we might ask: How does the march stage a threat to tonal order? It is this that the march captures so uncannily well.

23. Cf. Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, whose analysis of the theme is quite muddled.

24. In this respect, music symbolically links the Darkside to technology, though the Empire fears technology even as it fetishizes it.

25. Kalinak's analysis of the Main Title is, like her analysis of the Imperial March, less than adequate. Her claim that the Main Title is a "modified sonata allegro form," for instance, makes little sense (*Settling the Score*, 193).

26. Michael Matessino, "A New Hope for Film Music," 11.

27. This fetishization extends to the music: the Main Title theme overemphasizes the leap to the high B \flat , repeating the gesture far too many times so that it comes to seem almost ritualistic.

28. It is perhaps worth pointing out here the way the music strengthens the connection between the snow creature's lair and the cave on Degabab: both scenes share not only a subterranean locale, but both also make use of that technological musical marvel, the synthesizer. The musical effect of the synthesizer in these two scenes is without doubt quite different, but the instrumental connection nevertheless suggests an affinity: both scenes emphasize the way Luke associates the Force directly with the light saber. The use of the synthesizer, a kind of intrusion of the sound effects into the musical portion of the *mise-en-bande*, serves perhaps to indicate Luke's misappropriation—or at least misapprehension—of the Force.

29. Hal Colebatch, *Return of the Heroes: The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars and Contemporary Culture* (Australian Institute for Public Policy, 1990), 37.

30. *Ibid.*, 11.

31. *Ibid.*, 16.

32. *Ibid.*, 95.

33. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 135.

34. *Ibid.*, 139.

35. Byrd, "Interview with John Williams."

36. The music of the *Star Wars* trilogy is at its most problematic when it turns celebratory, especially at the end of *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*. The changes in the recent rerelease confirm that even the filmmakers found the ending of *Return of the Jedi* flawed. Not that the new ending improves matters much; indeed, in some ways it makes things worse. The lack of tension in this sequence is the peril of all concrete images of utopia: they always seem banal. The new version, with cuts across the Empire replacing the Ewok celebration, evokes the time of Carnival; yet because the general oppression had never really had proper filmic representation, the release depicted in this sequence rings false, seems too broad for the context of the film. In this sense the original ending was better. At least with that ending, the celebration had been confined to the representation; in the revised version, by contrast, everything is universalized, which magnifies the problem of the depicted utopia rather than containing it.

37. This is a loose paraphrase of Adorno's critique of Wagner: "The more triumphantly Wagner's music resounds, the less capable it is of discovering an enemy to subdue within itself; the triumphant cries of the bourgeois victory always drowned out its mendacious claims to have done heroic deeds. It is precisely the absence of any dialectical material on which it could prove itself that condemns Wagnerian totality to mere duration" (*In Search of Wagner*, 51).

38. Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86–92.

39. The closest any of the scores comes to thematic transformation is the derivation of the Imperial March from the falling third of the storm trooper music and the Han and Leia theme from Leia's theme (Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 194, 192).

40. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 37.

41. The Main Title (a cross between the opening and the End Title music from *A New Hope*) moves from B \flat to G; Princess Leia's Theme from D to E; the Throne Room from F minor to G.

42. Even this illusion of development disappears in the later films, which at times suffer from a tedious piling up of themes, one right after another with little development. After the first film, there are also comparatively fewer summarizing statements that are not simply covering shifts of location. Sequences such as the Binary Suns sequence where the film pauses to take breath and reflect, allowing the music to come to the fore on its own, are actually rather rare in the series.

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