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Resounding Returns:

Echoes of Vietnam in the 1990s French Nostalgia Film

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in French & Francophone Studies

by

Damjan Rakonjac

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Resounding Returns:

Echoes of Vietnam in the 1990s French Nostalgia Film

by

Damjan Rakonjac

Doctor of Philosophy in French & Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Laure Murat, Co-Chair

Professor George Edson Dutton, Co-Chair

“Nostalgia film,” also referred to as “colonial nostalgia film” and “heritage film,” is a genre that offers audiences a romanticized representation of the French past, including (problematically) its legacy of colonialism. My dissertation, oriented around four case studies – of Régis Wargnier’s *Indochine*, Pierre Schoendoerffer’s *Điện Biên Phủ*, Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *L’Amant*, and Trần Anh Hùng’s *L’Odeur de la papaye verte* – interrogates the relationship between sound, music, and “nostalgia” in this specific body of early 1990s French films set in colonial-era Vietnam. It offers a sustained critique of the relationship between the mise-en-bande and the narrative and representational frameworks of these films. It also considers the impact of this relationship in subsequent films, such as Trần’s *Cyclo* (1995) and Việt Linh’s *Mê Thảo, thời vang bóng* (2002).

The dissertation of Damjan Rakonjac is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2024

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Biographical Sketch

Damjan Rakonjac is an interdisciplinary scholar who works at the intersection of musicology, film/media studies, and area studies. Damjan earned a PhD in Musicology from UCLA in 2023 and is expected to receive a PhD in French & Francophone Studies in the spring of 2024. Aided by several Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS) through the UCLA Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Damjan undertook years of Vietnamese language study at UCLA and at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. In the fall of 2022, Damjan co-organized Hear Việt Film at UCLA and at the Hammer Museum's Billy Wilder Theater. In collaboration with the Sundance Institute and the UCLA Film & Television Archive, this two-day event brought together scholars, filmmakers, and composers for a critical reassessment of music in Vietnamese film. Damjan has presented his work at UCLA, the Royal Northern College of Music, the Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini, and Thái Bình Dương University. He has conducted research at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and at the National Library of Vietnam.

Introduction

My dissertation interrogates the key role played by sound and music in four French "nostalgia films" set in colonial era Vietnam. In the Introduction, I offer a literature review of "nostalgia film" and a methodological overview of my analytical approach. The body chapters are dedicated to case studies of four films, centered around a musical/sonic analysis. In the Conclusion, I offer a counterpoint to the genre by considering Trần Anh Hùng's *Cyclo* (1995) and Việt Linh's *Mê Thảo: Thời Vang Bóng* [Me Thao in Its Golden Time] (2002), both reactions to 1990s French "nostalgia film."[1]

In my approach to music and sound analysis I have tried to avoid sensationalism or exoticization, though at times that is the intended effect in the films under consideration, in which case I have made sure to contextualize the genres or sounds that draw attention to themselves in such a way. Although I have a background in musicology, in this dissertation I have attempted to write about music and sound in a way that may be read across disciplines and yet remain detailed enough to prove insightful. I have tried as much as possible to use an analytical language that is free of the considerable jargon native to musicology while using its insights in order to describe the often-subtle processes at work in the films themselves. I have also relied more, as you will see and hear in the following chapters, on the historical aspects of my musicological background, in order to gain access to a deeper understanding of the musical genres and stereotypes deployed in these films.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations, from French or Vietnamese, are by me.

Because this dissertation is focused on film music/sound, I have turned to analytical methodologies and theoretical approaches of sound studies, and to film music scholarship, rather than musicology proper. I believe this is justified, given that music by itself and music as utilized in film are not the same thing. In cinema we hear partial, cut up, edited, cut-off, or otherwise modified variations of tunes, on top of which they are (typically) entangled within the sonic world of the film: they are woven into and out of the mise-en-bande. Film music is implied by and therefore also contained by film sound, but this also goes the other way: sound becomes "musicalized," or takes on musical properties, like an echo whose reverberation constitutes rhythmic intervals and whose dynamic pattern is a gradual decrescendo (a fading away). When it comes to film scores, they themselves are often written – if we take into account Gorbman's description of narrative film music – so as not to be noticed. Michel Chion writes that the cinema is "that place where music, whether created especially for the film or taken from a preexisting source, plays its role within an ensemble."[2]

For Chion, the "ensemble" of film and music represents a critical problem. He accuses film music of being a "false Esperanto," inviting "the illusion that one has an immediate connection to it" – despite the fact that one might not know much about the specific musical genre(s) deployed in the film.[3] Yet such musical background is not in the end required for Chion because he considers film music to be highly "immoral," by which he means that it cannot be adequately judged on its own merits. It must always be considered as part of the film-music ensemble. "How is it," he

[2] "Le cinéma est en effet ce lieu où la musique, qu'elle soit réalisée spécialement pour le film ou tirée d'une source préexistante, devient quelque chose de différent, jouant son rôle dans un ensemble." Michel Chion, *La Musique au cinéma*, 2nd edition (Paris: Fayard, 2019), 9.

[3] "[L]e problème avec la musique est l'illusion qu'on a avec elle d'une communication immédiate." Michel Chion, *La Musique au cinema*, 17.

protests, "that some music added last minute, written in a week and resorting to hackneyed rhetoric, can through sheer luck be inscribed into the body of the masterwork by the inventiveness of the montage and the sound engineer's 'touch.?'"[4] As Chion points out here, music often relies on the sound design. In fact it is through sound design, as much if not more than the visuals, that the music interacts with the film. Even the silence from which film music emerges and into which it fades is rarely actual silence; more often than not the sonic phenomenon of silence is presented as a sonic background, the film's quietly structured *bruit fondementale* (see Conclusion).[5]

Tony Grajeda and Jay Beck point out that "the discipline of sound studies functions best when it is able to combine analytical tools," pointing out "the need for a discursive, transmedial method of analysis, where the pedagogic tools of one field of knowledge are whetted and sharpened by those of another."[6] With my background in musicology, I am disciplinarily positioned to apply the "trasmedial method of analysis" to my dissertation. Though music is a key aspect of film sound, sound is not reducible to music. I therefore take a sound studies approach in which music is considered one part of the sonic fabric of the film, that includes soundscape (or cityscape), languages, sound effects (in French, bruitage), and silences. Claudia Gorbman, for example, has pointed out that in classical Hollywood film scoring practice, these sonic layers tend to work in conjunction with one another, as well as with the narrative and visual layers.[7]

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[4] Comment…voilà telle musique ajoutée au dernier moment, écrite en une semaine et recourant à une rhétorique éculée, mais q'une sorte d'heureux hasard, les ingéniosités du montage et la "patte" d'un ingénieur du son vont inscrire dans le corps d'un chef-d'oeuvre… ." Ibid., 15.

[5] Michel Chion, *Un art sonore, le cinéma: histoire, esthétique, poetique* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003), appendix ("bruit fondamental").

[6] Tony Grajeda and Jay Beck, "Introduction: The Future of Sound Studies," *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 2, no. 2 (2008): 110.

[7] Gorban itemizes the key relationships between these layers in the list "Classical Film Music: Principles of Composition, Mixing, and Editing," in: Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73.

"Ultimately," she writes, "it is the narrative context, the interrelations between music and the rest of the film's system, that determines the effectiveness of film music."[8]

Like music, sound has had a problematic tendency to be treated as a cultural universal. Michael Bull reminds us that sound studies itself should be applied self-critically. He cites Jonathan Sterne's advice that "Sound Studies should 'be grounded in a sense of its own partiality, its authors' and readers' knowledge that all the key terms we might use to describe and analyze sound belong to multiple traditions, and are under debate.'"[9] Ari Kelman critiques the biases inherent in the genealogy of "soundscape," pointing out that the key sound studies term, coined by Canadian composer Murray Schafer, "is not a neutral field of aural investigation at all; rather, it is deeply informed by Schafer's own preferences for certain sounds over others. *The Soundscape* is a prescriptive text that is often referred to as a descriptive one."[10] Neither reducing sound to music nor treating it as a cultural universal, my analysis aims to demonstrate how it negotiates representations of cultural difference and shapes nostalgic representations of Vietnam in 1990s French films.

The films on which I focus here have made an impact on the ways in which French colonialism in Southeast Asia has been memorialized on screen. As a number of scholars are quick to point out, they have done so at the cost of peddling colonial-era tropes. If we think of cinema not only in visual terms but also as an auditory medium then we can begin to approach this historical and filmic problem not merely as one of "vision" but also in terms of the films' sonic

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[8] Ibid., 12.

[9] Michael Bull, "Listening to Race and Colonialism within Sound Studies?," *Sound Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 84.

[10] Ari Y. Kelman, "Rethinking the Soundscape," *The Senses and Society* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 214.

phenomena, or as I label them here their "echo." An echo is a complex acoustic phenomenon that requires a medium of amplification (film in this case), projects not only away from but also reflexively reverberates back to its source – moving between present and past, between viewers and filmmakers – and grows fainter over time but may always be renewed through reiteration.

The concept of echo befits these films in their relationality to the past, and in particular to colonial history. It does so for two primary reasons. First, because these films have influenced later representations of colonial-era Vietnam. Thus, we can picture their influence as "echoing" forward in time, into our present. But just as sound echoes back to its origin, these films also echo back in time through their reproduction of pre-existing colonial-era tropes – be they narrative, visual, or auditory (and musical) in character. Panivong Norindr labels this solipsistic representational scheme "Phantasmic Indochina."[11] "'Indochine,'" he writes (of the country not the film), "is an elaborate fiction, a modern phantasmic assemblage invented during the heyday of French colonial hegemony in Southeast Asia…Its luminous aura sustains memories of erotic fantasies and perpetuates exotic adventures of a bygone era, while appealing to the French nostalgia for grandeur."[12] Situating this "phantasmic" discourse in mid-1990s France (and alongside three of the four films covered here) Norindr notes:

> [T]oday Indochina has made an enthusiastic return on the French scene. The elated reception of Régis Wargnier's movie *Indochine*, the popular and critical success of Jean-Jacques Annaud's adaptation of Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant*, and the quasi-

[11] Norindr is not focused on sound, whereas I am adapting his framework to discuss sound and music. Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997).

[12] Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 1.

> official endorsement of Pierre Schoendoerffer's docudrama war movie, *Dien Bien Phu*[…]bear witness to the reemergence of Indochina in French consciousness.[13]

Norindr is suspicious of this reemergence, a suspicion that is echoed by other scholars who have theorized the "nostalgia film," starting with Frederic Jameson, whose discussion of the genre has provided much fuel to the hermeneutics of suspicion that have beclouded the genre's reception. The "nostalgia film," Jameson asserts, "was never a matter of some old-fashioned 'representation' of historical content, but approached the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image."[14] Jameson critiques the "image" of nostalgia film but ignores the soundtrack. "Nostalgia films in the 1980s and early 1990s," Phil Powrie writes, voicing common concerns, "are more often than not constructed on regressive stereotypes, or peddle 'sentimental tourism' …even when they wear their liberal credentials ostentatiously, such as the various films which apparently function, at least in part, as a critique of war (e.g. Tavernier's *La Vie et rien d'autre*, 1989) or of colonialism (Corneau's *Fort Saganne*, 1984, or Wargnier's *Indochine*, 1991)."[15] Norindr reminds us that "the elaborate mise-en-scène of Indochina in recent French films may be largely responsible for reconfiguring and accommodating many of the phantasms that have sustained the myths of the legitimacy of the French colonial presence in

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[13] Ibid., 12.

[14] Jameson is not discussing the nostalgia film in France in particular. Nostalgia film as an international genre is discussed later in the Introduction. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, First Edition (Duke University Press, 1992), 67.

[15] Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 7.

Indochina – founding myths of this 'geographical romance' first elaborated by writers such as Claude Farrère, Myriam Harry, and André Malraux in the interwar period."[16]

In her 1993 monograph, *East-West Encounters: Franco-Asian Cinema and Literature*, Sylvie Blum-Reid observes that "[r]ecent postcolonial screen representations of the French colonial experience in Indochina meet at a particular moment, the 1980s and early 1990s. However, this return to a colonial time in Indochina has largely been neglected or is absent from earlier French commercial pictures, with only a few exceptions."[17] She interprets this resurgence as a conscious deployment of generational politics. "This colonial nostalgia seems heavily targeted at the young generations born in the postcolonial period, or roughly after the 1960s, in an oversimplified pedagogical attempt to educate them about the past."[18] It wasn't only generational differences that constituted a problem, there were also an ongoing crisis of French national identity. In *Les lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora announced the advent of "*les France*," or "Frances" in the plural, as a way that "expresses the troubles of an identity that has come into doubt."[19] It is against

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[16] Norindr, *Phantasmic Indochina*, 132.

[17] Sylvie Blum-Reid, *East-West Encounters: Franco-Asian Cinema and Literature* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 11.

[18] Sylvie Blum-Reid, East-West Encounters, 38.

[19] "Les France…exprime le trouble d'une identité devenue douteuse." *Les Lieux de mémoire: La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), xi. For critiques/(re)contextualizations of Nora's concept, see: Philippe Barbé, "Mémoire Des Lieux: Reterritorialisation de l'espace Colonial Chez Marguerite Duras," *L'Esprit Créateur* 43, no. 1 (2003): 101–12; Lia Brozgal, "Non-Lieux de Mémoire: Maps and Graffiti in the Scriptable City," in *Absent the Archive*, Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris, 17 October 1961 (Liverpool University Press, 2020), 115–62Ben Mercer, "The Moral Rearmament of France: Pierre Nora, Memory, and the Crises of Republicanism," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31, no. 2 (2013): 102–16; Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From Lieux de Mémoire to Noeuds de Mémoire," *Yale French Studies*, no. 118/119 (2010): 3–12; Bill Schwarz, "Memory, Temporality, Modernity: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, Histories, Theories, Debates (Fordham University Press, 2010), 41–58; Nancy Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *History and Memory* 6, no. 1 (1994): 123–49.

the background of these French identity crises – which Naomi Schor diagnosed as "The Crisis of French Universalism"[20] – that nostalgia film asserted itself as a genre.

The 1990s nostalgia film has precedents. The main characteristic of cinematic "nostalgia," for Powrie, is a new distance towards realism, which he depicts as a type of regression:

> If one is a critic wedded to the notion that the cinema should reflect some kind of truth, rather than merely purvey doubtful pleasure, then the cinema of the 1980s is disappointing[…]in the 1980s the cinema tended to avoid 'reality'. A few films engaged with contemporary conditions or issues, for example, the Beur film (i.e. films centering on the lives of second-generation Arab immigrant families); but the overwhelming tendency in the 1980s was to go for nostalgia, as can be seen by the uncritical adherence to familiar genres, as well as by the development of the nostalgia film proper, or indeed by the many films in the 1980s which dealt with childhood[…]It is almost as if the cinema was attempting to escape reality by a double movement of nostalgia and return to childhood.[7]

Such hermeneutics of suspicion are motivated in part by the critical and commercial success of these films with French, and indeed global, audiences (discussed below). One useful barometer of this success are film awards. The four films covered in this dissertation have garnered dozens of major international awards, including an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film (*Indochine*), another Oscar nomination (*L'Odeur de la papaye verte*), and an impressive collective

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[20] Naomi Schor, "The Crisis of French Universalism," *Yale French Studies* no. 100 (2001), 43-64.

number of Césars and Cannes appearances. In 1994, Vietnam submitted French-Vietnamese director Trần Anh Hùng's *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* (titled *Mùi Đu Đủ Xanh* in Vietnamese) as its official Oscar entry, despite the film being shot on a soundstage in Paris. *L'Amant* garnered the Golden Reel Award for Best Sound Editing – Foreign Feature. These films' overlapping presence on the awards circuit implicates a broader set of connections, including their postcolonial subject matter, an entangled network of personnel (described below), a shared connection to Vietnam of key filmmakers in the group, and the centrality of music to the narratives of the films themselves. I will now sketch some of the main threads of these connections and trace them back in time. This is not intended as an exhaustive genealogy but rather as a behind-the-scenes peek at the pre-existing discourse and collaborative network on which the films in question drew, and the prevalence of music and sound as their key stylistic and narrative features.

As a relevant example of a precedent to our films, one that prefigures their postcolonial subject matter and certainly shares personnel with them, we might mention Jean-Jacques Annaud's first feature, *Black and White in Color* (1976), a tragi-comic satire of European colonialism in Africa which garnered the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar on behalf of the Ivory Coast, where it was filmed. The film's original French title, *La Victoire en chantant* (alluding to the revolutionary tune *Le Chant du départ*) emphasizes music's key role in the narrative. The film is scored by composer and French pop star, Pierre Bachelet, who had previously scored *Emanuelle* (1974), a film about a French woman's erotic awakening in Thailand, whose pornographic exoticism, as Sylvie Blum-Reid reminds us, "became a model for subsequent films, such as Jean-Jacques Annaud's *L'Amant*." "In fact," she points out, "film critic Serge Daney aptly criticized

L'Amant for being a remake of *Emmanuelle*."[21] "One can reasonably argue," Blum-Reid asserts, "that Emanuelle set the stage for…*L'Amant*, *Indochine*, and *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, albeit in different styles."[22]

This connection between personnel is related to music, via Bachelet. But Annaud's first feature also features musical moments in its narrative and even makes (classical) music the subject of its voice-over narration. Near the beginning of the film, the protagonist and narrator Hubert Fresnoy (Jacques Spieser), an earnest young colon who will play a leading role in the military organization of the French camp (against the nearby German camp), is writing to a friend back in Paris; his voice-over dictation juxtaposed with images of traditional West African dwellings. "What are they playing in the theaters," his voice intones inquisitively. "And at the Opera? What is Debussy composing these days?"

The conscious concern with music displayed by Fresnoy is reminiscent of the interest in music that underlies each film under consideration. I will mention a few examples here, although a fuller analysis is offered in the individual body chapters. In *Indochine* several key scenes revolve around the practice and performance of a tango, and Camille's shooting of a French officer is replayed on stage by a Vietnamese musical theater troupe, the very troupe that shelters Camille and Jean-Baptiste from the reach of colonial authorities. Patrick Doyle's score amplifies the melodramatic aspects of the film by means of the leitmotif technique – redolent, as we will later see, of classic Hollywood cinema. *L'Amant* features a musical dénouement that is based on a diegetic performance of Chopin, subtly echoed by Lebanese-French composer Gabriel Yared's score. Yared had previously scored the classic French nostalgia film, Bruno Nuytten's *Camille*

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[21] Blum-Reid, East-West Encounters, 23.

[22] Ibid., 23.

Claudel, starring Isabelle Adjani. Schoendoerffer commissioned the well-known film composer Georges Delerue to write the aptly titled *Concerto de l'adieu*, which was recorded before filming and incorporated into the narrative as a refrain that offers structural coherence through its many returns. Trần Anh Hùng makes the development of a new musical style the very premise of his film's narrative, as Khuyến, a Paris Conservatory trained Vietnamese composer is depicted drafting a modernist musical work in between diegetic performances of canonic French composers, Debussy and Chopin. As we will explore in Chapter 4, this character arc reflects the biography of the film's actual composer, Tôn-Thất Tiết.

The musical through line of these films is one element of their connectivity. It is also remarkable the extent to which these films are connected through their personnel and the frequency with which the personnel share a personal connection to Vietnam. Reaching back to Annaud's *La Victoire en chantant* for an example, one of the bellicose French colons is played by Jacques Dufilho, who appeared in Schoendoerffer's *Le Crabe Tambour* the following year (1977). One of the editors of *Le Crabe Tambour* was Colette Landoz, Georges Delerue's wife. It was in fact through her work on that film that Scheondoerffer met Delerue, which led to Delerue's work on *Điện Biên Phủ*, one of his final scores (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Another common element is the cinematography of Raoul Coutard. Coutard, who filmed Annaud's *La Victoire en chantant*, is an important New Wave cinematographer. His very first film credit, however, was actually Schoendoerffer's *La Passe du Diable* (1956). Coutard and Schoendoerffer share a connection with Vietnam, which is where both filmmakers got their start as cameramen for the French army. Unlike Schoendoerffer, however, who spent only two (albeit dramatic) years in Vietnam (1952-54), Coutard would go on to spend over a decade there, working as a photojournalist for Paris Match and Life. In 1970, Coutard directed a feature length film about

the Vietnam War called *Hoa Binh* (which means "Peace" in Vietnamese and is also a province in Vietnam), for which he was awarded the *Prix de la première œuvre* at Cannes, and the Prix Jean-Vigo. Years of reportage work contributed to Coutard's facility for working with natural light and the seemingly improvisatory nature of his shots, qualities that characterize his work with New Wave *auteurs* like Godard and Truffaut. Coutard was behind the camera for many iconic New Wave films, including *À bout de souffle* (1960), *Le Mépris* (1963), and *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960), the last two of which were scored by Delerue. Schoendoerffer and Coutard were by no means the only "veteran" filmmakers that contributed to French postcolonial cinema. The first French film about the Indochina War was *Patruoille de choc* (1957), written and directed by Claude Bernard-Aubert, who was an early competitor to Schoendoerffer. These connections reveal the importance of Vietnam as a point of reference for the filmmakers under consideration here.

If we think of Vietnam as a connecting factor for these filmmakers then we cannot leave out Marguerite Duras, whose biography (as well as mythology) are wrapped up in her childhood in Indochina. Duras, who wrote *L'Amant* (1984), also wrote the screenplay for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), for which Delerue conducted the score and wrote a diegetic musical cue, the *Valse du café du fleuve* (see Chapter 2). Duras' own filmography, including *La Musica*, *India Song*, *Détruire dit-elle*, among other films, often prominently features music and sound (including silence) as a key facet of its characteristic sensuality. The same can be said of her literary output. In Chapter 2, I discuss the development of Duras' early literary interest in soundscape and connect it to Annaud's Durassian adaptation of sonic and musical cues in *L'Amant*.

The foregoing discussion of shared personnel, background in Vietnam, and interest in music of these films is a sample of the connections that are more fully developed in the body chapters. These factors are introduced here simply to bring to light, in an initial way, the common

threads between the films in question. At this point, I offer a brief literary review of the "nostalgia film" genre (and related designations), so as to better contextualize the style of the films under consideration. The focus of the literature review is twofold: to outline the main currents of discourse around nostalgia film in France, a discourse that has enjoyed a steady development since the 1990s and continues to the present day, and to further highlight instances in which the discourse becomes aware of the genre's sonic and musical aspects.

"Nostalgia film" is a genre that, in several guises (and names), has been theorized by numerous scholars.[23] Nostalgia film shares a close relationship with two other genre labels: "colonial nostalgia film" and "heritage film." The labels can be interchanged depending on the lens through which a common group of French films (and British films) from the 1980s and 1990s are seen. An emphasis on postcoloniality might warrant the use of the label "colonial nostalgia film" while a focus on national memory might herald the deployment of the "heritage film" label. The group of films that go under the "nostalgia," "colonial nostalgia," or "heritage" labels have also been referred to by alternate means, especially when there is a broadening out of the scope of subject matter. Norindr's term "Phantasmic Indochina," for example, applies to a broad set of

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[23] See: Guy Austin, "The Heritage Film," in *Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 167–98; Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Carolyn A. Durham, "Strategies of Subversion in Colonial Nostalgia Film: Militarism and Marriage in Brigitte Roüan's Outremer," *Studies in French Cinema* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 89–97; Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français* (Paris: CERF, 2006); Alison Murray, "Film as National Icon: Claude Berri's 'Germinal,'" *The French Review* 76, no. 5 (2003): 906–16; Alison Murray, "Women, Nostalgia, Memory: 'Chocolat', 'Outremer', and 'Indochine,'" *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 2 (2002): 235–44; Alison Murray, "Teaching Colonial History through Film," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (2002): 41–52; Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997); Dayna Oscherwitz, *Past Forward: French Cinema and the Post-Colonial Heritage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010); Phil Powrie, ed., *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Phil Powrie, "Heritage, History and 'New Realism': French Cinema in the 1990s," *Modern & Contemporary France* 6, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 479–91; Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s : Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Marouf Hasian Jr. and Helene A. Shugart, "Melancholic Nostalgia, Collective Memories, and the Cinematic Representations of Nationalistic Identities in Indochine," *Communication Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 329–49; Carrie Tarr, "Introduction French Cinema: 'Transnational' Cinema?," *Modern & Contemporary France* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 3–7.

representational conventions that apply beyond the genre of film altogether to also encompass literature and architecture. Though they emphasize different aspects of late 20th century French cinema, these genre designations offer something in common: they all describe films whose primary characteristic is a romanticized representation of the French past.

These films share more than a set of genre designations. They also overlap in terms of setting, production, and release dates. All of the above-mentioned films were released within a two year span between 1992 and 1993. The setting of each film ultimately focuses on the historical end of French empire in Vietnam, thus fitting neatly into Caroline Eades' distinction between colonial and postcolonial cinema.[24] They are also characterized by the historical verisimilitude of their mise-en-scène, presented as a form of historical authenticity. The production of *Indochine* cues us in on the omissions and elisions necessitated by nostalgia film's spectacular historiography. While its natural scenery was filmed on-location in Vietnam, epitomized by François Catonné's sublime cinematography of Hạ Long Bay, the colonial cityscapes, on the other hand, were recreated in neighboring Malaysia, since 1990s Hồ Chí Minh City could not quite evoke the postcard-perfect image of 1930s Saigon that director Régis Wargnier required.[25] Caroline Eades sums up the situation of these films in their time within the broader context of post-colonial French cinema: "The incertitude born of the failures of the recent past and the perspective of a future doomed to repeat the 'déjà-vu' seems to have provoked reflection on the heritage of colonization among the political class just as in filmic representation."[26]

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[24] Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français* (Paris and Condé-sur-Noireau: Éditions du Cerf-Corlet, 2006).

[25] For a thorough discussion of Annaud's location shooting for the film, see the portion of Norindr's book called "Restaging Indochina: Annaud's Phantasmic Love Affair with Indochina": Norindr, 139-145.

[26] "L'incertitude née des échecs du passé récent et la perspective d'un futur voué à répéter le 'déjà-vu' semblent avoir provoqué une réflexion sur l'héritage de la colonisation dans la classe politique tout comme dans la représentation cinématographique." Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français*, 24.

While these films are all set during the era of decolonization, and thus ostensibly depict a transnational phenomenon involving both France and Vietnam (as well as Laos and Cambodia in the case of Indochina), they nevertheless privilege the "French" perspective – with the notable exception of *L'Odeur*, which presents a more complex Franco-Vietnamese angle (see Chapter 4). Though the transnational process of decolonization is clearly important to each of these films, each of their points of view remains ostensibly and resolutely personal, creating room for allegorical readings of characters that represent colonial stereotypes, or entire nations. Even Schoendoerffer's war epic, *Điện Biên Phủ*, is ultimately a personal vision related to the director's memory as an army cameraman during the eponymous battle. At the end of the film, the narrator's final utterance over the blank screen – *"…ce Vietnam que nous aimons. Que j'aime.*" […this Vietnam that we love. That I love.] – collapses the collective "we" ("*nous*") into the personal "I" ("*je*"), subtly collapsing the difference between national and individual memory. The narrator, of course, is Schoendoerffer himself.

Following the tendency of these nostalgia films to collapse the collective and the personal, we might consider the outsized impact of Duras' personal history (or mythology) on *L'Amant*. So significant was her autobiographical connection to French Indochina (as popularized by the 1984 novel) to the film's authenticity that, even after the author broke off her early relationship with Annaud's production, "her" narration (voiced by Jeanne Moreau) is set in motion in the opening credits sequence which tethers the filmic narrative to the emergence of her personal memory during the act of writing. As we will see (or rather hear) in Chapter 2, her voice emerges out of silence

alongside other sonic and musical phenomena, including the key Chopinesque elements of Gabriel Yared's score.

The problem with these ostensibly personal perspectives is that they tend to represent the end of French empire as a personal drama and thus as a background to its plot trajectory. This view minimizes the reality of struggle for those who were involved in decolonization efforts on the ground. Transnational conflicts are sublimated into the personal problems, risks, and adventures that befall French colons, some of whom – like both Duras herself and the fictional Éliane Devries in *Indochina* – were born in Indochina. According to Eades, French postcolonial cinema runs the risk of projecting a (false) view of decolonization "as a process issued from colonization."[27]

This reductive view of (de)colonization stems from the fact that nostalgia film is a genre that, even when set in exotic locales, is always already oriented towards France. Many commentators have pointed to the relationship between the development of nostalgia and heritage film in the 1980/90s and the growing problems around the contentious issue of French identity around the same time. In other words, the genre is seen as a timely reaction to certain problems within French society. For example, Powrie writes that "heritage films" – which he defines as films "based firmly in French history" – can be understood as a genre "struggling to negotiate a new French identity in troubled times."[28] Powrie theorizes "heritage film" as a collection of subgenres determined by what he calls a "cartography of heritage": "'official' heritage, 'postcolonial'

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[27] The entire passage is: "c'est sourtout par la présentation de cette expérience comme passé et révolue, c'est-à-dire la prise en compte du statut du narrateur comme postérieur à la décolonisation, qu'elles contribuent à décrire le déroulement chronologique et logique de la décolonisation comme processus issu de la colonisation." Ibid., 20.

28 Phil Powrie, "Heritage, history and 'new realism': French cinema in the 1990s," *Modern & Contemporary France* 6:4 (1998), 482.

heritage, and 'Vichy' heritage."[29] As representatives of the "postcolonial heritage" category, he names *L'Amant*, *Indochine*, and *Dien Bien Phu*, three of our four key films. What is being "mourned" in these films set in Indochina is not merely the loss of territory but also "the loss of an era, of a colonial empire, of a utopian world; the loss of France's influence and prestige."[30] These films memorialize the loss of a symbolic, as much as a material, order. Once again, the history of decolonization, through the nostalgia film lens (or "postcolonial heritage" as Powrie has it), is understood to be ultimately about France. The echo returns to its source.

If we think of France as the source of these postcolonial images of Indochina then we might see in it a reflection of the changing French production context in the 1990s that encouraged the filmic assertion of French heritage, nostalgic or otherwise. This includes the national recommitment of French protectionism of the audiovisual industry with the so-called *exception culturelle* under the 1993 GATT agreement.[31] Jonathan Buchsbaum reminds us that "[s]ince 1948, the government [of France] has consistently intervened in the film industry." This comes in the form of the *compte de soutien*, which contributes public funding to filmmakers in two ways. First, it offers funds for future productions based on previous box office performance (*compte automatique*), rewarding and thus encouraging commercially viable French film productions. On the other hand there are loans (*aide sélective*) that, as Buchsbaum puts it, give "special treatment to first-time filmmakers and films promising artistic merit."[32] The early 1990s were an auspicious time for this system because the size of the cinema audience declined (due to the increasing success

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[29] Phil Powrie, "Heritage, history and 'new realism,'" 481.

[30] Ibid., 482.

[31] Jonathan Buchsbaum, "After GATT: Has the Revival of French Cinema Ended?," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23, no. 3 (2005): 34–54.

[32] Jonathan Buchsbaum, "After GATT," 35.

of television) to a nadir in 1992, the year that three of the four films under consideration were released, from a high of 400 million in 1957 to a mere 116 million.[33] The three major blockbusters about Indochina released in 1992 have a distinct commercial dimension, as attempts to reinvigorate the French audiovisual industry which, echoing the loss of France's colonies decades earlier, was feared to be losing global ground to the audiovisual juggernaut of Hollywood.

Martine Danan points out that, in the wake of these profound changes, beginning in the late 1980s the French audiovisual industry underwent a "transformation" characterized by the emergence of a French postcolonial cinema that promoted itself as "postnational," when in fact it had simply nationalized the Hollywood model. These postcolonial films, Danan writes, "reflect a significant effort to adapt the French mode of film production to the demands of the global market. The 'postnational' mode of production erases most of the distinctive elements which have traditionally helped define the (maybe) imaginary coherence of a national cinema against other cinematographic traditions or against Hollywood at a given point in time."[34] Citing *L'Amant* as one of the "most successful English-language French exports," Danan reflects on the way in which "these 'New Holly-Wave' films attempt to downplay their 'Frenchness' as they depart from Hollywood productions only through the choice of subject matter or the presence of iconic French stars," which inevitably results in "the newly-acquired importance of subject matter as the main differentiating element."[35] In this light, we might see the colonial setting of nostalgia films about Indochina, ironically, as their distinguishing mark of "Frenchness."

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Martine Danan, "From a 'Prenational' to a 'Postnational' French Cinema," *Film History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 78.

[35] Ibid.

Danan also describes the uncritical French reception of these films. "When *L'Amant*, *Indochine* and *Dien Bien Phu*…were released in France," she points out, "the extensive media coverage surrounding the three films did not lead to an in-depth examination of the past. Instead, spectators were encouraged to consume images of it passively."[36] Citing Anne Jäckel and Xavier Michel Duverger's 1993 *Sight & Sound* article, "Far from Vietnam," Danan emphasizes the fact that "there was no sign of unease among the many interviews, articles and debates which surrounded the films' appearance and hardly any attempt was made to explore further the legacy of France's colonial past."[37]

Beyond Hollywood (though not, as we will see, beyond the domination of the US film market), nostalgia films were informed by an earlier tradition of British "heritage film." Nostalgia film overlaps with heritage film and it must be considered, in part, as a French adaptation of that genre. From its inception the British genre was subject to critique from academic and intellectual circles. Claire Monk notes that films considered to be in this genre were "disparagingly labelled 'heritage films', 'Brit. Lit.', 'white flannel films' or 'nostalgic screen fictions' by academics…and (overwhelmingly male) writers and journalists aligning themselves with the intellectual left."[38] Monk asserts that this "anti-heritage discourse" characterizes British reception from the 1980s, as these films "were forcefully attacked as ideologically complicit with – or at least symptomatic of – Thatcherism's radical economic and social restructuring and reinvention of the 'nation'."[39]

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[36] Ibid., 80.

[37] Anne Jäckel and Xavier Michel Duverger, "Far from Vietnam," *Sight & Sound* (April 1993), 23. As cited in Danan, 80.

[38] Claire Monk, "The British 'heritage Film' and Its Critics," *Critical Survey* 7 no. 2 (1995), 116.

[39] Ibid.

Monk thinks this narrowly political and domestic view is reductive, pointing to the extent to which the "perceived dominance" of these "nostalgic screen fictions" in the UK was actually a reflection of their stateside reception. "Indeed," Monk comments, "given the economic and cultural subordination of UK film production to that of the US, and the fact that for many years the 'popular British cinema' as far as British audiences are concerned has been predominantly American, it cannot be emphasized enough that US – not UK – box-office success is the defining condition of this 'dominance.' From *Chariots of Fire* and *A Room With A View* to *Enchanted April* and *Howards End*, it is noticeable that a very high proportion of those 1980s British costume films most commonly agreed to fit the label 'heritage' were precisely those which were a 'surprise' hit in the States."[40]

Monk's astute observation about the underlying importance of the US market to a seemingly national genre such as the British heritage film brings to mind French parallels. Annaud's *L'Amant*, to take an obvious example, was shot in English in order to appeal to the US market as well as to suit the British actress Jane March. The film is still more popularly known by its English title, *The Lover*. In *Điện Biên Phủ* the transnationalism of the genre is reflected in the script itself. The film's avuncular protagonist, Howard Simpson, is a UK-born American journalist stationed in Hanoi; he is a native English speaker but also a polyglot who can switch between French and Vietnamese. *Indochine's* Academy Award may also be seen in this light. Moreover, Patrick Doyle, the Scottish composer of *Indochine*, actually had a brief speaking role in the most exemplary heritage film of all, the aforementioned *Chariots of Fire* (1981). This British production won an unprecedented four Academy Awards (of the seven for which it was nominated), including

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[40] Ibid., 118.

Best Picture and, significantly, Best Original Score. Scored by the Paris and London based Greek composer (and sometime popstar in France) Vangelis, the *Chariots of Fire* musical theme has come to be seen as emblematic of the film itself. Its expansive piano melody and echoing percussion riff now stand metonymically for the film itself. Doyle had an even more hands-on role in another well-known British "heritage" production, namely Kenneth Branagh's Shakespearean blockbuster, *Henri V* (1989), which he scored. It was on the strength of this British heritage film score, in fact, that Doyle was hired by Wargnier to write the music for *Indochine*.

We have outlined a few of the main threads of discourse about the "nostalgia film" and its related iterations as "heritage film." Next we turn to examples of scholarship that discuss the role of music and sound within the genre. Tana Wollen's 1991 essay, "Over Our Shoulders: Nostalgic Screen Fictions for the 1980s," one of the early scholarly accounts of the genre, already theorizes the "moving soundtrack" characteristic of heritage film as a strategy intended to foreclose criticism. Notice that, in Tana's account, music is closely related to the "predominantly nostalgic" quality of the genre:

> Although these fictions are predominantly nostalgic, at the heart of their wistful sumptuousness there are occasional hints of something rotten. The regret is not so much that these times are irretrievable but that admissions have to be made about the shadier parts. Some admissions can be fudged through the conventions of fiction. Narrative pull, the complexities of characterization and a moving sound-track can alleviate the severity of dispassionate critiques.[41]

Wollen recognizes the soundtrack as a source of the films' "narrative pull," an observation that will be confirmed several times over in the subsequent chapters. "The use of music in

[41] Tana Wollen, "Over our shoulders: nostalgic screen fictions for the 1980s," in *Film Genre Reader IV*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 177.

[nostalgia films] is of considerable importance," asserts Powrie, "since it supports their "'classical Europeanness.'" This adds to nostalgia films "ideological value on three counts," according to Powrie: "the legitimization of high culture…the legitimization of an inscription of the otherwise popular medium of film within a central high European culture; and, finally, the legitimization of tradition, which overlaps with the nostalgic inscription of film."[42] "[T]he history of nostalgia," Powrie continues, "is grounded in music," citing Starobinski's article that is considered at length in Chapter 1, in the context of *Indochine*.[43] In another early influential essay about the genre, "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film," Andrew Higson's also considers the use of classical music as a distinguishing mark of the genre, and an expression of its "antimodernism," which is to say its rejection of Hollywood:

> Where Hollywood in the late 1970s and 1980s specialized in the production of futuristic epics, the heritage film prefers the intimacy of the period piece, although their visual splendor lends them an extravagant, epic scale. The postmodernism of these films is actually an antimodernism that clothes itself in all the trappings of classical art – but the more culturally respectable classicims of literature, painting, music, and so on, not the classicism of Hollywood.[44]

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[42] Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*, 19.

[43] Jean Starobinski, "Le concept de nostalgie," *Diogène* 0, no. 54 (April 1, 1966): 92–115.

[44] Andrew Douglas Higson, "Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film," in *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester Friedman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 109-129.

Higson assumes that the "classicism" of film scores and diegetic classical music is antithetical to the "classicism of Hollywood." However, the use of classical music conventions in film scores, such as the *Leitmotif* and the concerto form, is itself rooted in "classical" Hollywood. In *Unheard Melodies* (1987), Claudia Gorbman defines "classical Hollywood cinema" as "an implicit model" that "effaces the discontinuity…of cutting by means of continuity editing."[45] The role of (classical) music in this model is central. It has proven so effective, according to Gorbman, that it has too often gone unnoticed. "The very fact that theoreticians of classical filmic discourse, even those who write about the soundtrack, have slighted the specific uses of music in this cinema," she asserts, "attests to the strength of music's resistance to analysis."[46] Perhaps Higson's assumption that classical music is "antithetical" to Hollywood film scoring practice is a symptom of the success, as Gorbman defines it, of this practice itself.

Four of Gorbman's seven principles of classical Hollywood scoring practice define elusive aspects of music in "classical" film scores, including: "invisibility," "inaudibility," "continuity," and "unity."[47] The suturing function of classical scores is useful for French nostalgia films which often draw on it to gloss over difficult topics indicative of historical discontinuity – such as colonial violence, exploitation, and suffering – through the liberal deployment of grand symphonic scores in the continuity style of classical Hollywood. *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, with its relatively avant-garde score and metanarrative inclusion of the development of the film composer's musical language into the film's diegesis, is an outlier in this regard (see Chapter 4).

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[45] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 72.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 73.

Perhaps we can think of the difference between classical Hollywood practice and that of nostalgia film in regard to classical music in terms of "staging." Whereas Hollywood uses classical music conventions in order to deflect attention away from itself, placing music in the background so to speak, nostalgia films tend to foreground classical music, even in the narrative. Austin links the "heritage film" genre with "classical form" and, more to the point, the often-foregrounded role played by classical music in these films as a form of "authenticated spectacle":

> The quality costume drama of the 1980s and 1990s has been termed the "heritage film" (Higson 1993). In France it is a genre closely related to *la tradition de qualité* […] although chronologically it parallels the British trend for nostalgia initiated by *Chariots of Fire* in 1981. Classical in form, historical or literary in inspiration, the heritage genre tends to place a premium on high production values, often relying on international co-productions and famous stars in order to ensure a large audience. Although spectacle is clearly fundamental to the heritage film, it is always a supposedly authenticated spectacle, legitimized by claims to historical accuracy or cultural sources; hence the number of literary adaptations, biopics of forgotten figures, and reappraisals of revolution and empire. If the form is classical, following a straightforward linear narrative, so is the music: the theme from Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* (1986) is derived from Verdi, while baroque music provides both subject and score in Alain Corneau's *Tous les matins du monde* (1992) and Gérard Corbiau's biopic of a seventeenth-century castrato, *Farinelli* (1994).[48]

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[48] Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 167.

Danan has commented on the sonic and musical implications of "heritage" in *L'Amant*. "French heritage," she points out, "was reduced to Duras' name, prominently displayed at the beginning of the movie, the name of the local company and schools, a French literature lesson and, oddly enough, a group of schoolchildren singing in French."[49] Danan states that Annaud "attempted to give the illusion of tapping authentic cultural roots while in fact creating 'visual mirages' (as well as occasional 'auditory mirages') of the past, transforming them into exotic details which might appeal to a global audience."[50]

Other scholars of nostalgia/heritage film have focused on the genre's reverberating impact beyond the privileged moment of the 1980s and early 1990s. Michael DeAngelis asserts that the 1999 Leos Carax film, *Pola X*, "arises from his confrontation with the very traditions of heritage – within and outside of cinema."[51] DeAngelis understands that the film "subverts the tradition of heritage cinema" in part by its use of sonic and musical material.[52] He points out how sounds of war and destruction are contrasted to classical music, as in Điện Biên Phủ. The introduction of classical music along with Catherine Deneuve also resembles the opening of *Indochine*. "The classical music is serene," DeAngelis writes, "and the tone of the visuals remains calm and controlled even as the camera slowly tracks to a mansion window to reveal the blonde hair and naked torso of Marie (Catherine Deneuve)."[53]

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[49] Martine Danan, "From a 'Prenational' to a 'Postnational' French Cinema," 80.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Michael DeAngelis, "Inverting French Heritage Cinema: Melville, Carax, and 'Pola X,'" *Film Criticism* 27, no. 1 (2002), 22.

[52]Michael DeAngelis, "Inverting French Heritage Cinema," 24.

[53] Ibid., 26-27.

Gwénaëlle Le Gras highlights this musical cue (in *Indochine*) as a reflection of Deneuve's "star image" ("*image de star*"), writing that "the music's lyrical takeoff marks a close-up shot. This finally reveals to us the identity of this woman, who is none other than Catherine Deneuve, and whose mystery that is tied to her star image lends the film all its amplitude."[54] Music amplifies Deneuve's star power in her establishing shot, as Le Gras points out (a process analyzed in detail in Chapter 1). [55]

Annabelle Doherty offers a comparative perspective on French nostalgia film that is particularly attuned to its sonic/musical effects. Comparing three films from the 1990s and 2000s, all set during the period of the July Monarchy (during the reign of King Louis Philippe of the Orléans branch of the royal Bourbon family, also a period of French colonial expansion) – Claude Chabrol's *Madame Bovary* (1992), Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Le Hussard sur le toit* (1995), and Catherine Breillat's *Une vieille maîtresse* (2007) – Doherty's explores "how different auteurs influence the films' sensual audio-visual recreations and consequently spectators' filmic experience."[56] Doherty's analysis of Chabrol's film *Madame Bovary* demonstrates how music and sound condition the narrative. This first passage emphasizes the role of diegetic music performance on the piano, a trope that appears in one guise or another in every film under consideration:

In one scene Emma half-heartedly plays a melancholy *Sonata K. 544 Cantabile* by Domenico Scarlatti, a piece composed between 1752 and 1757 that reconstitutes the Spanish court

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[54] "[L]'envolée lyrique de la musique marque un plan rapproché. Celui-ci nous dévoile enfin l'identité de cette femme qui n'est autre que Catherine Deneuve dont le mystère lié à son image de star donne toute son ampleur au film." Ibid.

[55] "[D]éterminer dans quelles mesures Catherine Deneuve peut-être considérée comme l'auter de ses films." Gwénaëlle Le Gras, "Catherine Deneuve, star et/ou auteur de « ses » films," *Double jeu. Théâtre / Cinéma*, no. 1 (November 2003), 143.

[56] Annabelle Doherty, "A Cinematic Cultural Memory of Courtship, Weddings, Marriage, and Adultery in July Monarchy France through Heritage Films Claude Chabrol's *Madame Bovary*, Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *The Horseman on the Roof*, and Catherine Breillat's *The Last Mistress*," *Adaptation* 12 no. 2 (July 2019), 118.

of Queen Maria Barbara, suggesting Emma's longing for an aristocratic life. Her fingers upon the keyboard stimulate spectators' sense of touch, whilst the music engages with aural senses…The moment potently reflects Chabrol's aesthetic of romantic realism through its simultaneous communication of the character's wistful imagining of a lost time and her sadness when confronted with present drab reality. Yet it also reveals historical realism, with Emma playing an early upright piano, most likely an imitation of the Pleyel or Erard pianos of the era…The piano was in important bourgeois symbol of the July Monarchy…Chabrol uses the instrument to convey Emma's longing, the historical object of décor is imbued with the symbolic meaning and the subsequent filmic memory is mournful.[57]

The analysis of Emma's seduction scene, on the other hand, focuses on the non-diegetic score in tandem with the sound design:

> The music and sound effects that accompany this forest seduction create empathy with the heroine, by reflecting her emotions. A piano solo of gentle notes accompanies the galloping images up the slope towards the woodlands, suggesting romantic anticipation. A raven's cry is heard when the riders pause to dismount in a clearing. Although mentioned in Flaubert's text, the raven also reflects Chabrol's preoccupation with fate…symbolizing Emma's own destiny. As Rodolphe commences his seduction, the music becomes more intense, ebbing then flowing, reflecting the heroine's struggle with her desire…the epiphany moment is expressed via a woman's operatic voice, possibly singing an aria from *Lucie de*

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[57] Ibid., 133.

Lammermoor, as the camera pans upwards to the treetops, following Emma's gaze. There is a sense of the spirit leaving the body, and in the background spectators discern the sound of church-bells tolling. At this point Chabrol's 'church-bell motif' marks Emma's transition to the world of adultery, which will inevitably lead to her death.[58]

In yet another article Doherty continues to brilliantly contrast narrative denotation with musical connotation. Writing of the classic French heritage film, *Camille Claudel* (1988), she reveals the music score to subvert the film's ostensibly liberatory narrative, implying that the music carries more narrative impact than either the script or the mise-en-scène. Hundreds of voices murmur appraisals or gossip, the camera lingering on certain works in the foreground, other sculptures glimpsed in the background with deep focus shots. Pausing upon Rodin's *Danaïde* the camera then transitions to the sculptor's *Je suis belle/I am beautiful* (1882), before suddenly ascending upwards. The music soars at this point to showcase the masterpiece in what Powrie identifies as a favouring of Rodin by Gabriel Yared's musical score, at odds with the biopic's feminist take. Citing Powrie, she further notes that this trend is "echoed in other French heritage films 'which often seem to celebrate women and their independence through narration and mise-

[58] Ibid., 137-138. On page 122, Doherty elaborates on the "church-bell motif": "what I will refer to as the 'church-bell motif'…marked by the actual tolling of church bells or by more metaphorical chime-like sounds. These musical toll points symbolize fateful moments in the narrative and typically transformation or metamorphosis of characters. Indeed, Chabrol's key composer, Pierre Jansen, declares his most important composition for the director to be 'a dramatic transposition of the village church-bells' in *Le Boucher*."

en-scène, but belittle them through music.'"[59] As previously mentioned, Yared, the composer of *L'Amant* (another film that supposedly "celebrates" a female view, namely that of Duras) also scored *Camille Claudel*, adding a personal connection between one of the films covered in this dissertation and Doherty's critique of music's preponderant and subversive role in this influential nostalgia film. Doherty proposes an alternative way to understand these films' representation of the past, not in the negative light of Frederic Jameson's concept of the "nostalgia film" but rather through a more ironic take framed by Linda Hutcheon's idea of "postmodern parody," as well as Robert Rosenstone's optimistic distinction between the "metaphorical truths" presented in heritage films and "literal truths about the past."[60]

As we have just surveyed, the critical literature on heritage film, whether French or British, contains certain common elements. There is a concern with the problem of historical representation as a misleading form of spectacle. There is the ever-present anxiety of influence associated with the French view of Hollywood. Finally, there is the abiding interest in, and foregrounding of, the role of music and sound in these films.

Each body chapter in my dissertation takes as its focal point a musical/sonic analysis of one of the four films that have been introduced above. In Chapter 1, "Engendering Colonial Nostalgia: Voice, Music, and Narration in *Indochine,*" I interrogate the role of voice, music, and narration as gendered sonic markers of nostalgia in Wargnier's *Indochine*. I also analyze the ways in which Patrick Doyle's score shares a common sonic framework, and is thus entangled with,

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[59] The original French quote reads: "qui souvent semblent célébrer les femmes et leur indépendence par la narration et la mise-en-scène, (mais) les rabaissent par la musique." Annabelle Doherty, "Stardom and Historical Thinking in Isabelle Adjani's French Heritage Film Camille Claudel," *French Screen Studies* 20 no. 1 (January 2020), 33.

[60] Ibid., 24.

Éliane's narrating voice. The second section of the chapter is dedicated to discussing the overarching concepts evoked by the title, including "gender" (implied in "engendering") and "nostalgia." The analysis section follows, in which I define the terms *voice*, *music*, and *narration*, describe the leitmotivs that structure the film score, and offer a close sonic/musical analysis of the film anchored in a breakdown of individual scenes.

Chapter 2, "Chamber Music, or the Sonic Spaces of Memory in *L'Amant*," explores the ways in which Annaud's film represents Durassian presence by means of a subtle weaving together of sound design, diegetic music, and the non-diegetic score by Gabriel Yared. Through close analysis of scenes, I show how the film takes a cue from the source novel's own purposive evocation of memory and amplifies it through its medium-specific relationship to sound and to music. In doing so, I focus in particular on the film's deployment of resonant rooms, or chambers, in order to evoke sonic Durassian effects.

Chapter 3, "The Musical Memorial of War: Schoendoerffer's Sonic *Adieu* to Điện Biên Phủ" interrogates the context and representational framework of Georges Delerue's *Concerto de l'adieu*, a violin concerto commissioned for the film and recorded before filming started. Complicating the picture is Schoendoerffer's personal involvement in the battle, echoing his role as a cameraman for the French army between 1952 and 1954. Chapter 3 traces the numerous examples of Schoendoerffer's personal stamp of memory on the filmic narrative and, drawing on Norindr's criticism, questions the *auteur* like level of control over production exercised by Schoendoerffer as the film's writer, director, and narrator.

Chapter 4, "A Sentimental Reeducation: Music as (Post)Colonial Pedagogy in *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*," considers French-Vietnamese director Trần Anh Hùng's first feature as a response to the contemporary wave of French nostalgia films. It goes against the grain of certain

nostalgia conventions found in the other three films. Trần states that he wanted to focus on quotidian reality, "[t]o give a daily life to a people." In Chapter 4, I analyze the ways in which the film responds to nostalgia film conventions.

In the Conclusion, I offer a contrapuntal reading of nostalgia film by analyzing two examples of films that are informed by yet go against the grain of the genre: Trần Anh Hùng's *Cyclo* (1995), a follow-up to *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* that responds very differently to the nostalgia film model and Việt Linh's 2002 film *Mê Thảo: Thời Vang Bóng*, which represents a Vietnamese take on the genre.

Chapter 1

Engendering Colonial Nostalgia:

Voice, Music, and Narration in *Indochine*

> Revue des Deux Mondes – Finally, the characters that you have interpreted on screen, have they not shaped you as much as you have given to them?
> Catherine Deneuve – No, neither the characters nor the films, but all that takes place in the off-times during the shooting of the film. It's a voyage, the meetings and all the things that you live through at that moment. Either way, it's not only the character that one plays in the film. It's all an impregnation. Régis Wargnier's *Indochine* was a particularly strong experience in this respect.[61]

This chapter interrogates the intimate relationship between voice, music, and narration in Régis Wargnier's *Indochine* (1992) in order to examine how the film deploys these sonic means to represent a gendered view of colonial nostalgia. I define, develop, and elaborates on these concepts and their relationship, and use them to analyze the film's narrative structure and content. The film relates a (fictional) story of Éliane Devries (Catherina Deneuve), a French colon and rubber baroness who was born in Indochina, and her adopted Vietnamese daughter, Camille (Phạm Linh

[61] Revue des Deux Mondes – Finalement, les personnages que vous avez interprétés à l'écran ne vous ont-ils pas façonnée autant que vous leur avez donné? Catherine Deneuve – Non, ni les personnages ni d'ailleurs les films, mais tout ce qui se passe dans ce laps de temps où le film est tourné. C'est un voyage, des rencontres et toutes les choses que vous vivez à ce moment-là. En tout cas ce n'est pas seulement le personnage qu'on est dans le film. C'est toute une imprégnation. *Indochine* de Régis Wargniez [sic] a été à ce sujet quelque chose de particulièrement fort." Catherine Deneuve and Eryck de Rubercy, "Le Cinéma Et Moi," *Revue Des Deux Mondes*, 2006, 68.

Đan). Set during the waning years of French empire in the region, the film maps the growing independence movement in Vietnam during that time onto the diverging relationship between mother and daughter. Deneuve's character narrates the film and through her voice the relationship between mother and daughter metaphorically represents a nostalgic view of French Indochina. My analysis of the film in this chapter is organized around two presentations of the same scene, introduced at the start of the chapter and then revisited near the end, when Éliane unexpectedly stops her off-screen narration of events that take place in colonial-era Indochina. This moment of rupture locates her narrating voice in the historical "present" of 1954, on site at the Geneva Accords. When she resumes her narration, she proceeds to relate earlier events that, unlike much of what had transpired before this moment in the film, she could not have personally experienced in the past. The part of the scene that resumes her narration, in other words, reflects not personal memory but rather imagination.

Voice is a central aspect of Éliane's resumption of narration here: it features the only instance of her adopted Vietnamese daughter, Camille (Linh-Dan Pham), speaking her native language, Vietnamese, instead of French. At the start of the chapter, I present the scene as a problematic discontinuity of narration that cannot be solved merely by reference to visual or narrative aspects of the film. When it is revisited once again near the end of the chapter, the scene in question no longer appears as a problem but rather as an outstanding example of how thinking about music, voice, and narration as central to the film's production of narrative content – and in particular its coupling of gender and colonial nostalgia – can yield meaning where there might otherwise appear to be an aporia.

The second section discusses the overarching concepts evoked by the title – gender (implied in "engendering") and nostalgia – in relation to the film. This section fulfils two basic

tasks: to introduce supporting literature about the film that engages with the terms under consideration, and to offer definitions that can be usefully deployed within the sonic/musical analysis section that follows. The analysis section is divided into five sub-sections, consisting of: a definition of the terms *voice*, *music*, and *narration* and an exposition of the basic dynamic of their relationship in the film; a general survey of the types of music used in the film (non-diegetic and diegetic); a description of the leitmotivs that structure the film score and an overview of the means by which they create that structure; a close sonic/musical analysis of the film anchored in a breakdown of individual scenes (in chronological order). The chapter closes with a detailed reconsideration of the "problem scene" – from the revelation of Éliane's narrative location to Camille's moment of no return (her murder of a French officer) – in light of the insights gleaned from the analysis.

We start with the problem scene. Part of the problem is a critical misrepresentation of the scene in literature about *Indochine*. At least two (otherwise perceptive) articles about the film assert that Camille never speaks Vietnamese on screen.[62] In both instances, the assertions are used to support the idea that the film privileges her near native level of French acculturation over her indigenous identity; the implication being that, as Camille becomes progressively attracted to the cause of Vietnamese independence and separates herself from her adoptive mother, Éliane, she

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[62] For example [my underline]: "Eliane conducts herself according to strict rules of civil and secular propriety, raising Camille (who never speaks Vietnamese, even toward the end of the narrative) as would a European child." Joel David, "Indochine and the Politics of Gender," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 4 (January 1, 2006): 65. "Devries' investment in Camille reflects that of France in Indochina…Like Camille, the Indochinese partake of and enjoy French culture, including learning to speak the language, as Camille does exclusively. Camille also initially dresses in Western clothing, goes to a French private school, learns Western art (music and dancing, particularly) and history, and she is thoroughly enchanted by France." Marouf Hasian Jr. and Helene A. Shugart, "Melancholic Nostalgia, Collective Memories, and the Cinematic Representations of Nationalistic Identities in Indochine," *Communication Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 339.

appears less on screen, as if her visual representation itself was premised on the visibility of her impeccable assimilation of the French language and European values. This increasing invisibility culminates at the end of the film when Camille is not shown on screen despite the fact that she is one of the Vietnamese delegates to the Geneva Accords, the venue towards which Étienne (Jean-Baptiste Huynh) and Éliane are ostensibly travelling, over the course of Éliane's narration, in order to reconnect with Camille. Her absence is therefore felt all the more strongly due to the implied severed family ties: Étienne is Camille's biological (but Éliane's adopted) son.

Patricia Lorcin reminds us that the narrative conceit of double adoption on the part of Éliane, the French plantation owner in Indochina who adopts Camille and in turn her son Étienne, sets up a situation in which historical and political realities are represented as projections of a familial relationship. Camille's identification with the plight of the suffering indigenous population thus comes to appear in a rather diminished form, as merely a rebellious outburst against her mother, a youthful phase rather than a reasoned response to historical circumstances. As Lorcin points out, the gendered perspective of a "beneficently maternal France," as allegorized through Éliane's relationship with Camille, constitutes the film's "underlying current of colonial nostalgia." Nostalgia and gender are connected concepts that are intimately related within the film world of *Indochine*:

The central relationship, which is written like a palimpsest over the film's politics, is between the wealthy plantation owner, the beautiful Éliane Devries, and her equally beautiful adopted daughter, Camille, a scion of the Nguyen dynasty whose parents were killed in an accident. It is a parable of the colonial relationship and its denouement. The two women symbolize their respective nations and it is this connection that constitutes the underlying current of colonial nostalgia. Eliane brings up Camille as her own daughter, inculcating her with French values and

providing her with a French education, but she is “betrayed” in the end when Camille joins the resistance and ends up in the upper echelons of the political elite of what eventually became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During the metamorphosis from pampered protégé to hardheaded revolutionary Camille has a son whom she abandons and who is brought up by Éliane. At the end of the film, when Camille's son has the opportunity of meeting – and perhaps reuniting with – his birth mother, it does not work out and he returns to Éliane, acknowledging her as his “true” mother. Wargnier's critique of French colonialism in Indochina…is attenuated by the overlying representational narrative of a beneficently maternal France faced with the faithlessness and deception of its wayward colonial “child.”[63]

The (above cited) authors who claim that Camille never speaks Vietnamese in the film clearly recognize the familial “palimpsest” at work in the narrative, as Lorcin lays out above, and are eager to highlight the problematic occlusion of Camille’s “rebellion” and her concomitant re-engagement with Vietnamese identity; perhaps too eager. Although it is true that there is a moment of rupture following Camille’s release from prison, after which she never again appears on screen, there is initially an intensification of interest in Camille’s character development at the moment of her rebellion. The problem scene, which is motivated by Camille’s escape North, away from Éliane’s southern plantation, contradicts the notion that Camille gradually fades from the screen as she becomes progressively estranged from Éliane and her Francophone upbringing. If anything, as Éliane’s off-screen voice resumes its narration during the problem scene, it introduces one of the key moments in Camille’s character arc: her re-engagement with her maternal language.

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[63] Patricia M. E. Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia: Differences of Theory, Similarities of Practice?,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 39, no. 3 (2013), 105-106.

Camille's Vietnamese utterance, far from being sidelined in the film, is shouted across the sweeping landscape of Northern Vietnam: "*Cô cho một chút!*" [Madam, please wait a minute!]. With these words she gets the attention of the mother of a fugitive Vietnamese family who are fleeing forced labor. In the previous part of the scene she and her husband are shown working on a railroad through the barren landscape, victims of the *mission civilisatrice*. Gathering her breath, the woman stops to respond to Camille's cry: "*Cô muốn gì?*" [What do you want?]. "*Cho đi đến phía bắc, đi phía biển*" [To go north, towards the sea], Camille specifies. With her now in tow, the family then continues on their way to Hạ Long Bay where they believe they will find honest work but instead encounter tragedy at a colonial slave market. This transitional scene represents a key step in Camille's process of self-identification with the colonized population because it sets up the crucial moment in her narrative arc in which she kills a French officer, motivated by her discovery that he has ordered the execution of her newly adoptive family. Visually, the barren vista against which her linguistic assertion of Vietnamese identity takes place appears bereft of human

Figure 1: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

habitation, a sublime natural setting that provides an evocative mise-en-scène for her moment of (linguistic) deculturation [Figure 1].

Informed by the crucial moment of narrative discontinuity represented by the "problem scene" as laid out above, we might reinterpret the erroneous idea that Camille speaks only French on screen as, technically untrue, actually expressive of the film's deeper logic, according to which Éliane's narration is endowed with the reproductive capacity to project her personal memories in the form of grand audiovisual spectacle. The film as a whole appears to emerge from the authority of Deneuve's voice. Drawing on the iconic grandeur of Deneuve's "star text,"[64] Éliane's voice-over subordinates all other voices in the film (not only Camille's) to a secondary role: that of lending sonic presence to her personal memory of, and nostalgia for, French Indochina, her birthplace. (In an earlier scene, donning the traditional Vietnamese outfit, *áo dài*, Éliane specifies to Camille that she considers herself *"une asiate*.")

Whenever Camille speaks in the film, in other words, she is actually speaking through Éliane's memory and/or imagination. Following this logical thread, it is not in fact Camille who speaks Vietnamese in the above described scene but, ultimately, Éliane herself. And this holds true of every character in the film – including, remarkably, Éliane herself in the past being recalled by her narration. The only exception comes in the form of the brief moments of narrative discontinuity set in the "present" at Geneva. From these revealing meta-moments in the film, we become cognizant of the fact that Éliane's off-screen narration, through her voice, is generating the film-world itself.

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[64] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Inst, 1979).

Daniel Frampton's concept of "filmind" provides a theoretical framework for this phenomenon, particularly because the concept is closely related to the role of narrator/narration. Frampton defines "filmind" as a film's ontological *raison d'être*; an entity that is simultaneously "in" the film and is also "the film itself." According to Frampton, traditional theories of narration that stem from literary studies do not account for the inherent possibilities of narration peculiar to the film medium:

> The filmind is not an empirical description of film, but rather a conceptual understanding of the origins of film's actions and events…Yet the concepts of the filmind and film-thinking are not intended as replacements for the concepts of "narrator" and "narration," but are simply proposals that reflect the limits of the idea of "the narrator" and the restrictive and literary nature of theories of "narration"[...]The filmind is not an "external" force, nor is it a mystical being or invisible other, it is "in" the film itself, it is the film that is steering its own (dis)course. The filmind is "the film itself."[65]

Figure 2: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

[65] Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 8.

Éliane may be described as "steering" the film's discourse through her narration and as such the film narrative may be said to be generated by her "filmind." In this way, the narrative generated be her mind – through her voice-over narration – can be thought of as "the film itself," an idea promoted by the film's promotional material, which features Deneuve, alone, overlooking Lake Geneva: reflecting on her memories, which are the origin of the "film's action and events." The same image also serves as the film's final shot, which reifies into a freeze frame, proposing itself to the viewer as a metonym of the film itself [Fig. 2].

Yet several problems present themselves when we think of the film's narrative as unfolding in this way from Éliane's "filmind." First, there is the issue of language. If the film is a projection of Éliane's narration then how can we account for the different languages that are used? To return to the problem scene, how can Éliane ventriloquize Camille's Vietnamese lines? On its face this might seem like a relatively easy problem to solve since Éliane herself speaks Vietnamese in the course of the film. Like Camille's Vietnamese utterance, however, Éliane's occasional Vietnamese lines are in effect occluded by her narrative voice (exclusively in French), bringing to the fore the more subtle question about the rapport between various languages – including French, Vietnamese, and (more briefly) Chinese – that are represented in the film.

Second, and more problematically, Éliane remembers events that she never witnessed in the first place. Indeed, Camille's Vietnamese utterance takes place precisely at a moment in the narrative when Éliane loses sight of her. Though we can presume she may have retrospectively gleaned some information about Camille's whereabouts from her close confidante, Guy Asselin (Jean Yanne), director of the S*ûreté coloniale française* in Indochina, she would have had no way to reconstruct such an intimate moment as the one shown on screen. As pointed out earlier, the film's depiction of Camille speaking Vietnamese is thus not a representation of Éliane's memory

but rather a projection of her imagination. How are we to understand the representation of Camille's growing disaffection with Indochina and French colonialism in light of its being framed by Éliane's own narration?

Third, beyond this issue of the narrator's reliability there is also the considerable problem that the film occasionally reveals to us the time and place of narration. Geneva as a "neutral" place is highly evocative in multiple senses in the film, beyond the strictly political. (We will see that it is connected to nostalgia in significant ways.) These moments take place beyond Éliane's narration yet are still within the film, which presents several problems. If Éliane's narration is generating the audiovisual spectacle of the film, its "filmind," then how are the scenes in and during which the narration takes place themselves being generated? Where do these meta-narrative scenes stand in relation to Éliane's narration and to the film as a whole?

I argue that the entangled set of questions above, which have been referenced in various forms in the critical literature, are best approached from the sonic/musical angle by a thorough analysis of "music," "voice," and "narration" in the film. Before these terms are defined and used in the analysis section, however, we need to define the broader concepts of "gender" and "nostalgia" that provide the narrative framework for their significant interaction in the film.

The problem of gender[66] in relation to *Indochine* stems from colonial history. Kimberly Healy writes that colonial era stereotypes about women in Indochina have hemmed in the

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[66] Reflecting this historical variety of application, modern French retains a broad field of both connotational and denotational values for the word genre. It can mean quite simply "gender." But in its demotic sense, the word can also be used as a transliteration of the ubiquitous "like" of contemporary conversational English. It can also evoke the mimetic act of posing as someone for the sake of conversation, as in "she was like…" followed by a performative change in tone of voice that evokes the person under consideration. This quotidian use of genre resonates with Éliane's own remarkable ability to evoke voices (including her own) from the past. Genre also shares the English meaning "type of art," including film. That the French word "genre" can be translated as both "genre" and "gender" in English is highly relevant to the case of Indochine. As indicated in the Introduction, the film itself has been categorized under the genre label "Colonial Nostalgia" and, as demonstrated in this chapter, the film's nostalgia is framed by inherently gendered forms of representation.

possibilities of the practice of colonial history itself: "French rhetoric about Indochina, perhaps even more than rhetoric about other colonies, repeatedly involved gendered constructions of national and ethnic identity…If Indochina is not portrayed as the beautiful but problematic concubine of the French republic and one examines, rather, the reality of women in Indochina, perhaps colonial history can take on new valences."[67] As if in response to Healy's insistence on "the reality of women in Indochina," Nalini Natarajan places Éliane's problematic characterization in the film in relation to the historical problem of women in the French colonies: "In *Indochine*, the imperial allegory has a gendered thrust. Eliane Devries is an unusual colonial figure, because she is female, powerful, single, and sexually compelling. Women in the colonies had certain roles – to deflect Frenchmen away from the 'native' mistresses or 'congai,' to establish family life in the colonies, and to exemplify a European ideal of womanhood which would ensure European dominance."[68] The image of Éliane as a hard-headed and powerful rubber plantation owner who is not too delicate to whip her workers may seem to go against the grain of the available stereotypes about French women in the colonies. Yet there is at least one well-known historical precedent for such a figure in French Indochina in the example of Mme Rivière de la Souchère, who Marie-Paule Ha has noted bears "certain interesting similarities" to Éliane.[69]

An article in the August 18, 1922 issue of *Le Petit Parisien* introduces Mme de la Souchère as a recipient of the Légion d'honneur, based on the recommendation of the ministère des Colonies.

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[67] Kimberley J. Healey, "Andrée Viollis in Indochina: The Objective and Picturesque Truth about French Colonialism," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 31, no. 1 (2003): 19. For an article that considers the "reality of women" in the region before the French colonial period, see: George Dutton, "Beyond Myth and Caricature: Situating Women in the History of Early Modern Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 2 (2013): 1–36.

[68] Nalini Natarajan, "The East and Love in the Time of Decolonization," in *Romance and Power in the Hollywood Eastern*, ed. Nalini Natarajan (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 147.

[69] Marie-Paule Ha, *French Women and the Empire: The Case of Indochina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 214, footnote 134.

According to the article, she was one of the first planters of rubber trees in Indochina – from as early as 1910.[70] The article goes on to specify the size of her plantation, the size of her workforce, as well as highlight what are framed as acts of philanthropy for her indigenous workers:

> By dint of continuous labor, she made this plantation one of the most prosperous in Indochina. Today this plantation occupies an area of 3,000 hectars…More than 300 Annamites work permanently on the plantation. Mme de la Souchère has built for them a village with a church, pagodas, markets, a communal house and brick and tile houses. Thinking of everything, she had a villa constructed at Cap Saint-Jacques where her indigenous workers can rest when they become depressed.[71]

Predictably, the glaring question of why it is that these workers who lived "permanently on the plantation" should become depressed [*déprimés*] in the first place, and at such a steady rate that a separate facility was required for their recovery, is not raised. It is curious that the villa built for them was constructed away from the plantation, on the coast at Cap Saint-Jacques (today Vũng Tàu), because the site features as part of the backstory of the film. One of the first lines uttered by Éliane when she appears on screen relates the sad news that Camille's parents died in an airplane accident off the coast of Cap Saint-Jacques. The opening scene is set at their funeral procession,

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[70] "Le Petit Parisien: Journal Quotidien Du Soir," Gallica, accessed August 18, 1922, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k605114r.

[71] "Par un labeur de tous les instants, elle a fait de cette plantation une des plus prospères de la Cochinchine. Celle-ci occupe, en effet, aujourd'hui, une superficie de 3.000 hectares…Plus de 300 Annamites travaillent en permanence sur la plantation. Mme de la Souchère a fait construire pour eux un village entier avec église, pagodes, marchés, maison commune et des maisons en tuiles et en briques. Songeant à tout, elle a fait bâtir aussi au cap Saint-Jacques une villa où ces travailleurs indigènes peuvent aller se reposer lorsqu'ils sont déprimés…"

then connected, by Éliane's voice-over narration and the film score, to the subsequent establishing shots of Éliane's plantation and its indigenous workers.

Another passage compares Mme de la Souchère to a "cinematic hero" [*héros de cinéma*]:

> [W]hen she is told about any incident that has come to transpire at some spot on her domain, she jumps immediately on her horse – like a cinematic hero – and goes to render an account of what happened for herself. I was even told that she didn't mess around and would demote her unskillful or lazy foremen.[72]

In the context of the quote, "cinematic hero" is gendered masculine: the implication being that Mme de la Souchère's work on the plantation imbues her with the masculine qualities associated with the enterprising and self-reliant heroes of adventure films rather than its predictably hapless and helpless damsels in distress. Ironically, in *Indochine*, Éliane still ends up as a femme fatale; responsible as she is for her lover Jean-Baptiste's (Vincent Perez) reassignment to Dragon Island (Hà Long Bay), from which point events transpire that lead to his eventual arrest and political assassination, or suicide (the case is left unresolved).

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[72] "…lorsqu'on lui apprend qu'un incident quelconque vient de se passer en un point de son domaine, elle saute immédiatement à cheval – tel un héros de cinéma – et va se rendre compte elle-même de ce qui se passe. Je me suis même laissé dire qu'elle ne badinait pas et qu'elle lançait d'importance ses contremaîtres inhabiles ou paresseux."

Another resonance between the article and the film can be recognized in Mme de la Souchère's dominance over "unskillful or lazy foremen." In the film, Éliane fires her own French foreman, Raymon (Hubert Saint-Macary). His unceremonious return to France spins a secondary narrative arc in which his wife, Yvette (Dominique Blanc), stays in the colonies to work as a cabaret singer and ends up as the mistress of Éliane's confidante, Guy, the *Sûreté* director. Yvette's character trajectory is marked by a spectacular moment of performance of "*La môme caoutchouc*" [The Rubber Girl], a song written by Maurice Yvain for the 1932 Anatole Litvak film, *Coeur de lilas*, in which the number is co-performed by the French music hall singer Fréhel and no less a film star than Jean Gabin. Fréhel and Gabin would work together again in *Pépé le Moko* (1937), set in colonial Algeria, and Gabin would go on to play a disaffected soldier returned from colonial Indochina in the 1938 classic, *Quai des Brumes*. Yvette's cabaret performance is interesting as much for its historically reconstructed musical style as for its representation of the audience, part French *colons* part Vietnamese elites, depicted as equals in their pleasurable reception of the cosmopolitan musical fare radiating out from the cinema of the *métropole* [Fig. 3].

Figure 3: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

While Éliane and Yvette both represent French values in the film, they are not gendered in the same way. Éliane is implicitly the more masculine of the two, the "cinematic hero," while Yvette comes to stand for the hyper-feminine charm that conforms to stereotypes about French female entertainers, especially in the late-19th and early-20th century. This dynamic is most forcefully depicted by their relative relationship to motherhood. In Yvette's first scene, she refuses her husband's advances because she cannot bear the thought of being pregnant during the hot and humid monsoon season. Moreover she has already given birth to two children (who appear on screen). Éliane's relative masculinity, on the other hand, is reinforced by her never having given birth or taken a husband. Drawing on the psychological implications of the film's gendered imaginary, Marina Heung connects the way "Eliane's character is implicated in inappropriate phallic control and unfulfilled sexuality" and the "sexual symbolism" of her plantation, "with the rubber in its liquid form resembling both semen and milk, infus[ing] Eliane's usurpation of the masculine prowess with a sense of inescapable futility and lack of issue."[73] Yet she too is closely aligned with motherhood through adoption.

In relation to Éliane and Yvette, Camille stands somewhere between. She gives birth to a son but she does so illegitimately, having run away from her legitimate husband, Thanh. Though depicted as charming and vaguely submissive at the beginning her character arc evolves in dramatic fashion. By the end of the film she becomes a political leader, more powerful than Éliane ever was in Indochina (not to mention that Éliane acquired much of her land by adopting Camille). However, as Camille's character grows in independence and power of self-assertion she eventually disappears from the screen. Joel David sees the last scene in which she appears – where Éliane

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[73] Marina Heung, "The Family Romance of Orientalism: From Madame Butterfly to Indochine," Genders, no. 21 (June 30, 1995): 9 – 10.

speaks with her briefly as she emerges from the infamous Côn Đảo prison – as a missed opportunity indicative of the film's strategy of "containment" in which Camille's character is restricted to the realm of the personal, to the exclusion of the political:

> [The] film finds a way to contain the character's disavowal of historical agency, by reducing the terms of her discourse to the personal…This scene would have been the opportunity for Camille to come into her own, when Eliane's role could gracefully transition to that of a postcolonial entity, always-already irrelevant to whatever future Vietnam decides to embark on. Yet the filmmakers opt instead to depict Camille at this point as a woman divested of her past (her memory) and her present (her rejection of Eliane and Etienne), and allow Eliane to retain her thematic preeminence by subsequently and permanently erasing the Camille character from the narrative.[74]

In light of the conspicuously allegorical aspect of Éliane and Camille's relationship, in which French colonialism is personified as a relatively more benign narrative of "adoption," the film's convenient sweeping under the rug of Camille's anti-colonial turn is a form of wishful thinking. As Heung writes, the film relies on patriarchal Orientalist tropes that subordinate Camille to Éliane in distinctly gendered terms:

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[74] Joel David, "Indochine and the Politics of Gender," 81.

> [S]etting up Eliane and Camille as polar opposites – one masculine, powerful, and degraded; the other feminine, dependent, and "innocent" – *Indochine* reinstates the essentializing postures of patriarchal, Orientalist thinking. Given the mutual imbrication of Orientalist and patriarchal ideologies, it is not surprising that the film's schematic differentiations between East and West are projected onto the most fundamentally gendered themes of sexuality and reproduction.[75]

The elision of the starkly anti-colonial aspects of Camille's narrative by Éliane's quite literally self-centered narration demonstrates the way in which gendered hierarchies are implicated in *Indochine's* construction of colonial nostalgia. But the concept of nostalgia also requires its own definition in regard to the film, apart from its clear relationality to gender. Natarjan provides one alternative, for example, by describing the role of nostalgia in *Indochine* in terms of class: "Many critiques of the film have referred to nostalgia as a sentiment evoked by the film…The nostalgia would be a romantic nostalgia for a period when French and affluent Vietnamese could live together in mutual affection, both exploitative of the poor."[76] Like gender, nostalgia is inherent both to colonial history and to the film's representation of that history; but it is also motivated by the film's own historical context of production/reception.

The release of *Indochine* in 1992 coincides with the publication of the final tome (in three volumes) of Pierre Nora's monumental work, *Les lieux de mémoire*, titled *Les France*. In this last tome, as Nancy Wood summarizes, "Nora takes as his starting point the historical eclipse of France as a 'memory-nation'… in this passage from the reign of the 'memory-nation' to the 'era of

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[75] Marina Heung, "The Family Romance of Orientalism," 9.

[76] Nalini Natarajan, "The East and Love in the Time of Decolonization," 150.

commemoration' in which France is now immersed, sectoral memories have restructured the way the relationship between past, present and future is experienced, and reshaped the forms of collectivity which now cohabit in the national space."[77] The commemoration of France's colonial past as represented by films like *Indochin*e – as well as the other three films covered by this dissertation (*L'Amant*, *Dien Bien Phu*, and *L'odeur de la papaye verte*) – is implicitly involved in this restructuring and reshaping of French "national space" in the early 1990s.

Nora's historical perspective is inherently nostalgic because collective memory is viewed from a place of loss, as something that has to be propped up institutionally, a fading reality that must be retrospectively commemorated, rather than as a living continuation of a certain kind of shared consciousness. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes the intimate yet paradoxical relationship between Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and nostalgia:

> As Pierre Nora has suggested, memorial sites, or "lieux de memoire," are established institutionally at the time when the environments of memory, the *milieux de memoire*, fade. It is as if the ritual of commemoration could help to patch up the irreversibility of time. One could argue that Nora's own view is fundamentally nostalgic for the time when environments of memory were a part of life and no official national traditions were necessary. Yet this points to a paradox of institutionalized nostalgia: the stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations.[78]

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[77] Nancy Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *History and Memory* 6, no. 1 (1994): 125.

[78] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 16 – 17.

The reception context of *Indochine* in early 1990s France reflected something of this nostalgic overcompensation for loss of memory. Indochina was the first French colonial territory to gain independence, in 1954, as a result of the First Indochina War (though in Vietnam independence is considered to have started in 1945). This historical distance was made more trenchant by the intervening US involvement in the region and the development of the Vietnam War. Unlike Algeria, Indochina did not undergo the transition to independence as a nation-state but rather divided into multiple countries, with Vietnam itself divided into two distinct entities (North and South). By the time of the release of *Indochine*, Indochina had not existed for nearly half a century.

As Boym reminds us, nostalgia is not merely a longing for the past but more specifically "for a home that no longer exists," and as such it is bound up with "romance," "fantasy," and can be compared to a "long-distance relationship" and a "cinematic image," terms that evoke both *Indochine* as film and Indochina as a historical reality:

> Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past

> and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.[79]

While Boym describes the inconsistencies inherent in nostalgia through the metaphor of cinematic “double exposure,” Hasian and Shugart emphasize the key role of “selective forgetting” in the film’s production of nostalgia. They demonstrate how nostalgia serves precisely to avoid “break[ing] the frame” between reality and representation by silencing certain historically viable political perspectives, particularly that of the communist/nationalist movement in Vietnam, and misattributing the causes of anti-colonialism in Indochina to French education itself:

> [M]elancholic nostalgia often requires some selective forgetting, and in *Indochine* we encounter very little discussion of the political forces that might have brought about nationalistic or anti-colonial feelings. Indeed, the political bases for the communist/nationalist movement are never articulated; rather, as symbolized by Camille's relationship with Devries, their rebellion is cast as a childish willfulness […] Even Tanh, the only communist character who appears relatively mature and less volatile than the others, is cast in this light; the scene in which he gives voice to his political allegiance is featured as a reaction to and rebellion against his mother…he says to her…that he will use the French concepts of freedom and equality – which he learned via his education in France – against them, again

[79] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii – xiv.

> evoking the rebellion of the child against the parent (as well as simultaneously crediting France with any virtues that might be attributed to communist impulses).[80]

What sutures the "double exposure" of the "cinematic image of nostalgia" in *Indochine*, and thus minimizes and even occludes the effects of its "selective forgetting," is its audible aspect; which is centered in and embodied by Éliane's voice and the narration that stems from it. These are framed by the important role that music plays in amplifying Éliane's narration so that it becomes coterminous with the "filmind," or the film itself. In the analysis section that follows, I will demonstrate the ways in which the film deploys these sonic means to provide the illusion of continuity that serves to occlude the abovementioned inconsistencies.

That the film's musical and more broadly sonic phenomena should be closely related to its production of nostalgia should come as no surprise. Coined in a medical dissertation by Johannes Hofer in Basel in 1688, by the 18th century, as Jean Starobinski details, the neologism "nostalgia" had come to take on important musical and aural associations. Starobinski refers to a 1720 dissertation by Théodore Zwinger de Bâle which "mentions the curious apparition of an intense state of nostalgia among Swiss soldiers serving in France and Belgium when they would hear 'a certain rustic cantilena, to the sounds of which Swiss peasants would put their herds to pasture in the Alps.'" The appearance of this music genre, recognized as the *ranz des vaches*, would transport its Swiss listeners back to their homeland. This "little phrase" [*petite phrase*] had the uncanny

[80] Marouf Hasian Jr. and Helene A. Shugart, "Melancholic Nostalgia, Collective Memories, and the Cinematic Representations of Nationalistic Identities in *Indochine*," *Communication Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 338.

ability to invoke "the quasi-presence of the past" and along with it "the painful sentiment of separation."[81]

As Starobinski goes on to demonstrate, nostalgia came to be connected not only specifically with music, and its power of association with memories of the lost homeland, but more generally with hearing, which became nostalgia's privileged sense modality in the late 18th century:

> For observers in the second half of the 18th century, the privileged path of this associative magic is the sense of hearing: music is not its only cause, the noise [*bruit*] of springs amid the murmur of streams are endowed with an analogous power. Albert von Haller evokes the role of certain inflections of the voice. Phenomena of paramnesia, false recognition in the auditory domain constitute the first signs of the illness: "One of the first symptoms is to find the voices of the people one loves in the voices of those with whom one converses, and to see one's family again in dreams."[82]

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[81] "En 1720, Théodore Zwinger de Bâle, dans une dissertation latine, mentionne la curieuse apparition d'un état nostalgique instense, chez les militaires suisses servant en France et en Belgique, lorsqu'ils entendaient "une certaine cantilène rustique, aux sons de laquelle les paysans suisses font paître leurs troupeaux dans les Alpes." Ce Kühe-Reyhen, ce *ranz des vaches* a le pouvoir d'aviver brusquement et douloureusement le souvenier de la patrie…Tout cela par l'effet d'une mélodie populaire, d'une "petite phrase" qui a le singulier pouvoir de la quasi-présence du passé, doublée du sentiment douloureux de la séparation." Jean Starobinski, "Le concept de nostalgie," *Diogène* 0, no. 54 (April 1, 1966): 101.

[82] Pour les observateurs de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, la voie privilégiée de cette magie associative est le sens de l'ouïe: la musique n'est pas seule en cause, le bruit des sources et le murmure des ruisseaux sont doués d'un pouvoir analogue. Albert von Haller…évoque le rôle de certaines inflexions de voix. Des phénomènes de paramnésie, des fausses reconnaissances dans le domaine auditif constituent les premiers signes de la maladie: 'Un des premiers symptômes, c'est de retrouver la voix des personnes que l'on aime dans la voix de ceux avec qui l'on converse, et de revoir sa famille dans les songes.'" Ibid., 104-105.

Éliane's narration, which we come to discover (in the "problem scene") takes place in conversation with Étienne, echoes this early model of nostalgia as auditory pathology; except that Étienne is seldom heard to speak. The voiceover narration is exclusively Éliane's. It appears that, through hearing her own voice, Éliane produces her own nostalgia. This would not make sense apart from Éliane's ability to project, through her narration, the filmind. The film thus projects onto us, the viewers (and auditors), Éliane's symptoms of nostalgia. It is we who are meant to "find the voices of the people [she] loves" through the associative power (the power to evoke memories real or imagined) of her narrating voice.

Although hearing and voice are both implicated in nostalgia, Starobinski's article also highlights the peculiarity of music's relationship to it. He points to Rousseau's account of the nostalgic effect of the *ranz des vaches* on Swiss expats in his *Dictionnaire de Musique*. Rousseau redefines the role of music when it functions as an indicator of nostalgia: "Music, in this case," he writes, "does not act precisely like Music, but like a *memorial sign* [*signe mémoratif*]."[83] Starobinski explicates and develops Rousseau's concept of music as "memorial sign":

> The melody, a fragment of the lived past, impacts [*frappe*] our senses, but carries along with it, in the imaginary mode, all the existence and all the "associated" images with which it was unified [*solidare*]. The memorial sign [*signe mémoratif*] is a partial presence that makes us feel, with pain and delight, the imminence and impossibility of the complete restitution of the familiar universe that emerges

[83] "La Musique alors n'agit point précisément comme Musique, mais comme *signe mémoratif*." Ibid.

fugitively out of forgetfulness. Awoken by the memorial sign [*signe mémoratif*], consciousness lets itself be haunted by a past that is at once close and inaccessible.[84]

As we turn to the musical/sonic analysis section we should keep firmly in mind this notion of a genre of music that is itself more than music but that functions rather as the very condition of representability of "the familiar universe that emerges fugitively out of forgetfulness," a universe that is at once defined by "imminence" and "impossibility." In *Indochine* music serves as the *signe mémoratif* of a gendered nostalgia that makes Éliane's narrating voice the generator of the filmind. As such music serves as a marker of the past's "partial presence."

It is significant in this regard that the location of the filmic "present" from which the narration is revealed to emerge should be Switzerland, where the film ends. Switzerland is not only the place that the term nostalgia was coined but also the homeland of the authors who developed and popularized its associations with music and hearing, like Rousseau. Éliane's nostalgia is thus subtly naturalized, or made "neutral" in a political sense (neutralized), by its location in Switzerland – not France. Music is absent from the Swiss scenes except for the very last frame of the film, when it comes surging back. At the very end of the film, as Éliane overlooks Lake Geneva, the wordless chorus that introduces the film (a scene that also takes place on a body of water) is heard once again. The reappearance of this vocal ensemble – devoid of language or individuality but nevertheless multiple, like the characters that Éliane's voice makes emerge – frames the film's subtle layering of voice, narration, and music, encircling and reifying its filmind.

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[84] "La mélodie, fragment du passé vécu, frappe nos sens, mais elle entraîne avec elle, sure le mode imaginaire, toute l'existence et toutes les images "associées" dont elle était solidaire. Le signe mémoratif est une présence partielle qui nous fait éprouver, avec douleur et délice, l'imminence et l'impossibilité de la restitution complète de l'univers familier qui émerge fugitivement hors de l'oubli. Eveillée par le signe mémoratif, la conscience se laisse hanter par un passé à la fois proche et inaccessible." Ibid.

It is important to understand the function of voice in the film as an intertextual effect, one that does not emerge only from the world of the film but rather from the accumulated associations (even nostalgia) that had already accrued about the "star-text" of Catherine Deneuve. By 1992, Deneuve was one of the iconic personalities of French cinema. She had also come to figure as a national symbol, serving as the model for official statues of the bust of Marianne in 1985. David finds these intertextual associations of Deneuve as important for both the narrative of *Indochine* and its international reception: "Crucial to the trajectory of the film's international marketing strategy is the figure of France in the film. The casting of Catherine Deneuve as Eliane Devries was intended to proceed from the play on her renown as the model of Marianne, the symbol of France…Similarly relevant to the narrative would be her persona as a woman whose cool exterior conceals simmering, even dark, passions (notably in Luis Buñuel's 1966 film *Belle de jour*, reissued in 1995)."[85] Other associations of Deneuve's former roles might be brought to bear on Éliane, but it would be most useful to point out that she herself unequivocally credited her career in film to Jacques Démy.[86] It was as the leading character of his musicals, after all, a genre that puts a premium on voice and music, that she became an iconic presence on screens in France and abroad, starting with *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964).

In an interview for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 2006, Erick de Rubercy introduces Deneuve as a reluctant star: "a unique actress…as distant as a star [*vedette*] can be from the

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[85] Joel David, "Indochine and the Politics of Gender," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 4 (January 1, 2006): 75.

[86] "My meeting with Jacques Demy…was fundamental in that it gave me the opportunity to make incredibly original films, first and foremost *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, where the principle role [I played] really opened doors for me." [Ma rencontre avec Jacques Demy…a été fondamentale en ceci qu'elle m'a donné l'occasion de tourner des films incroyablement originaux, avec d'abord et surtout *les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, dont le rôle principal m'a vraiment entrouvert le rideau." Catherine Deneuve and Eryck de Rubercy, "Le Cinéma Et Moi," 55–70.

servitude of stars, but who has nevertheless not escaped from legend."[87] In the interview, Deneuve disavows the label star by associating it strictly to Hollywood and the American market: "I don't really think that the image of the star applies to the mythology of French cinema. It's very American."[88] Yet other commentators have observed that *Indochine* trades in a particularly Hollywood style mise-en-scène in order to portray the colonial past as both exotic and glamorous. Gwénaëlle Le Gras writes: "It's for this Hollywood escapism [*dépaysement hollywoodien*] that the French public presses itself into dark theaters, but also for the reunion with the image of Deneuve as a powerful and romanesque heroine, recalling the *Last Metro*."[89] Deneuve's star text, or the ensemble of images associated with her from her previous films, are at work in *Indochine*. Deneuve represents both the French nation and the glamour of classic Hollywood cinema. Indeed for a film set in the 1930s, the association with classic Hollywood cinema and the image of Éliane as a kind of star indirectly increases the film's historical verisimilitude, because the 1930s was the classic "studio era" of Hollywood and the first decade of sound films. More than her visual presence, it is Deneuve's voice that generates the filmind of *Indochine*. "Catherine Deneuve loves the cinema, profoundly," de Rubercy writes, "and when she speaks to us of herself, she speaks to use in the same voice of the cinema."[90] The film contains many voices, but it is only Éliane's voice that serves as the vehicle of narration. Her voice begins and ends the film and carries the narrative forward throughout. The unique attribute of Éliane's voice is thus its power of narration. As

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[87] "[U]ne actrice unique…aussi éloignée qu'une vedette peut l'être des servitudes des stars, mais qui n'en a pas pour autant échappé à la légende." Ibid., 55

[88] "Je ne pense vraiment pas que l'image de la star s'applique à la mythologie du cinéma français. C'est très américain." Ibid., 60.

[89] "C'est pour ce dépaysement hollywoodien que le public français se pressa dans les salles obscures, mais aussi pour ses retrouvailles avec cette image d'héroïne puissante et romanesque de Deneuve, rappelant celle du *Dernier métro*." Gwénaëlle Le Gras, "Catherine Deneuve, star et / ou auteur de « ses » films," *Double jeu. Théâtre / Cinéma*, no. 1 (November 1, 2003): 146.

[90] "Catherine Deneuve aime le cinéma, profondément, et quand elle nous parle d'elle, elle nous parle d'une même voix de cinéma." Catherine Deneuve and Eryck de Rubercy, "Le Cinéma Et Moi," *Revue Des Deux Mondes*, 2006, 56.

suggested above, this leads to two problems of narration. First, when engaged in narration, Éliane voice produces the filmind, and thus it generates all of the other voices in the film. It is from Éliane's memory/imagination, through the conduit of her voice, that the other voices emerge.

This brings us to the second problem. Even Éliane herself is split into two in the film: Éliane the off-screen narrator, whole place and time of narration are revealed during what I call the "problem scene" to be set in Geneva in 1954, and Éliane the rubber baroness of 1930s Indochina: the colonial and the post-colonial Éliane. That the narration is occurring from a post-colonial perspective conforms to Caroline Eades' idea that French post-colonial cinema tends to define itself by narratives that are always already aware of and oriented toward the end of empire.[91] Narration is thus separated from all but one voice in the film because only the retrospective voice of the older Éliane is specified as the voice of narration, while all the other voices in the film, including the younger Éliane's own, emerge from this narrating voice.

Suturing this difference between voice and narrative in the film is music. Music not only accompanies Éliane's narrating voice, lending it both the immanence of its affective reality, the feelings it stirs up, and the structuring power of its leitmotivs: the melodic, harmonic, and timbral musical fragments that recur throughout the film and provide points of repetition as well as development, and thus serve as the sonic framework of the narrative. The music can thus be described as accompanying, framing, and structuring the voice of narration. Furthermore, it substitutes for the narrating voice during the long stretches in which Éliane's off-screen narration is not explicitly heard. In the analysis below, I show that music itself emerges together with off-screen narration and how it substitutes for it in various scenes. I also show how diegetic music, as

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[91] Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français* (Paris: CERF, 2006).

well as silence and soundscape, interact with music in order to put into a believable relationality the singular narrating voice of the post-colonial "present" and the plurality of voices that emerge from the colonial "past."

Before we analyze the opening scene, we must describe the character of the leitmotivs at work in the film because they exhibit a peculiar unity. All of the separate musical motifs used in the film – with one exception that I discuss shortly – are in fact fragmented parts of one longer musical passage. The opening number of the film soundtrack, titled "Adoption" [*l'Adoption*], contains every single musical theme in the film score. In this opening title track the themes overlap so that, though exhibiting independent characteristics, they unfurl as a single sustained musical movement. Yet this "ur-leitmotif," as I call it throughout the analysis section, is only heard from about the 2-minute mark, when the orchestral music emerges from the voice and drum timbre. The vocal and drum textured music that occupies the initial 2 minutes is itself presented as a contrast to this symphonic strain: it is excluded rather than included from the ur-leitmotif and as such represents the sonic Other. The opposition between this drum-and-voice music, that we will call the "voices motif," and the ur-leitmotif, as well as the emergence of the latter from the former, is presented at the very start of the film and is broken down in detail in the analysis of the opening scene. First, however, it is important to grasp a few of the "fragments" of the ur-leitmotif, to take stock of the individualized motifs, I call them "sub-themes" to emphasize their immanent connection to the ur-leitmotif.

The surging sub-theme: The first of these is a syncopated gesture that features a single low bass note answered by an undulating melodic gesture in the middle register. This is the figure that initially emerges out of the voices motif (in the soundtrack and in the film). I call it the "surging

sub-theme" because of the way it surges into being from the voices motif, and because of its character which, like a wave, starts at a nadir (the articulated low base note) before surging upward. The plaintive sub-theme: The second sub-theme is a development of the intervallic/melodic possibilities inherent in the surging sub-theme but it takes on a character of its own in respect to melody, texture, and instrumentation. This sub-theme features a longer melodic arc that is ornamented by a richly textured movement of internal voices, and features a solo woodwind instrument (English horn) that is associated with a plaintive affect in a minor key. I call it the "plaintive sub-theme" due to these characteristics.

Palpitation sub-theme: Emerging from the plaintive motif in the "Adoption" cue of the soundtrack is our third sub-theme. It features a distinct palpitating rhythm and a restrained melodic ambitus. We will call it the "palpitation sub-theme" due to its focus on rhythm. It should be noted that the palpitating rhythm is clearly in evidence in the other sections of the ur-motif, where it serves as background, but that it is foregrounded in this sub-theme.

Another characteristic that emerges from the ur-motif is not a separate sub-motif but rather a brief moment of silence that is interjected at various points. It makes its first appearance between the initiating low note of the surging motif and its continuation. This moment of silence plays a key role in the ur-leitmotif as well as the various sub-themes engendered by it. It serves to interrupt their flow or offers a space in which other sonic events can happen. It also serves to demarcate the sub-themes from each other. At times it emphasizes affective states like hesitation or wonder.

The sub-themes, it should be noted, are rarely deployed in isolation. Rather, they are stretched, foreshortened, and combined with their complementary sub-themes in order to form longer musical chains that sustain the narrative flow. When the score is used in a continuous fashion the sub-themes tend to link together to form the ur-leitmotif either in totality or in part.

When the score is briefly deployed the sub-themes are typically used independently and in fragmented fashion. The linkages of sub-themes form a kind of syntax of the film score. Patrick Doyle’s score shows a particularly sophisticated use of this combinatory, syntactical logic which we will now analyze in a number of key scenes, along with the complementary use of non-diegetic music.

The film begins with the faint sound of wind over a mostly blank screen, which we come to realize depicts fog over water. By imitating the blank of the cinema screen in this way, the film suggests at the outset an elision between nature (fog) and culture (film screen). No music is heard at the outset of this initiating gesture, but it is soon layered in. The musical layers emerge gradually, from the bottom up: a low drone begins to sound, accompanied by percussion. The entry of music soon gives way to the visual emergence of a boat, the first of many displayed in a funeral procession.

At this stage, the musical texture is sparse, allowing much room for the mise en bande. The sound of active rowing is heard. The next musical layer, that of untexted voices, is introduced following the first shot of Éliane in the film. She stands in mourning next to the coffins of her longtime friends, Camille’s parents. The interjection of voices is introduced by way of a quickening of the drums during Éliane’s frame. The voices themselves appear as the montage cuts to another frame in which photographic images of Camille’s parents are displayed on a ritual altar.

As the monophonic (that is, single and unaccompanied) vocal melody develops, the next shot shows a curious mismatch between sound and vision. A boat carrying traditional Vietnamese musicians floats by in the middle ground [Fig. 4]. The musicians are clearly playing their instruments but their impassioned musical performance does not break through to the sonic tapestry of the scene – even though the activity of the surrounding rowers (also displayed on screen) is heard throughout. As the film title emerges, an added layer of voices (still without text) subtly buttresses the musical texture. The musicians float by silently again, this time in the foreground. The new vocal layer takes on a distinctly rhythmic role, increasing our awareness of the developing beat, which is also augmented by the growing presence of drums. The developing sense of rhythmic motion in the voices and drums is matched by the camera's increased focus on the motion of the boats.

Figure 4: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

This growing sense of rhythmic motion leads to a transitional moment in the music as well as the montage. The layers of voices that had been built up over the course of the opening scene suddenly disappear, leaving only the drums, whose low booming timbre serves in lieu of the proverbial "drum roll" to introduce the next shot: a close-up of Éliane [Fig. 5]. Éliane's close-up is dramatized by the simultaneously timed (first) appearance of the surging sub-theme.

Figure 5: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

As this initial iteration of the surging sub-theme fades, Éliane's voice enters the picture in the form of voice-over narration: "*Je n'avais jamais quitté l'Indochine*" [I had never left Indochina]. Her first words already clue us in to (without yet revealing) the location of her narration, as well as her background. First, they inform us (indirectly) that Éliane was herself born in Indochina. Second, they let us know that her narration is happening from a point in time after which she had left Indochina. As her first line is narrated, the surging sub-theme finishes and comes to a brief silence. This is the first of many iterations of the silent break which, as discussed above, is part of the film soundtrack as much as the sub-themes themselves. In this case the silence serves to create a space for the subsequent introduction of Camille, already visible on screen.

Éliane then narrates Camille's background to the accompaniment of the plaintive sub-theme, which is dovetailed into the palpitation sub-theme. In this opening deployment of sub-themes, they are expressed in their ur-leitmotif state: strung together end-to-end to form a single chain. But each sub-theme nevertheless subtly frames a distinct aspect of Éliane's narration. While the surging sub-theme introduced Camille and her tragic backstory (news of the death of her parents coincides with the plaintive sound of the English horn solo in this first iteration) the palpitation sub-theme helps smooth over the transition from the funeral procession to the subsequent footage and establishing shots of Éliane's plantation and her workers. As her narrating voices continues the music comes full circle with a second presentation of the ur-leitmotif (with all of the sub-themes linked together). The film thus begins with two iterations of the ur-leitmotif. The repetition reinforces viewers' connection of all the sub-themes to Éliane's voice-over narration. From then on they are linked in the film, so that even if Éliane's narration is not audibly present in a scene the score itself acts as its substitute and, through its syntax of connected sub-themes, suggests the continuity of her narrating voice.

The progression of musical forces and styles in this opening scene suggests direct parallels to the outline of the history of Western art music, but also hints at certain "ethnic" or historical-regional elements. The music of the opening scene not only frames Éliane's voice-over narration it also presents a kind of narrative logic that that brings into relation voice, narration, and music – all this before Éliane has uttered a word. The basic division of the opening scene music, as just described, is that between the initial part of the scene, characterized by the drum and voices music, and the purely instrumental quality of the second part that accompanies (and comes to be affiliated with) Éliane's narration.

The history of Western music as traditionally taught begins in the monophonic a capella repertoire known as Gregorian chant. Monophonic means that all voices sing a single melody, while “a capella” refers to the rule of the papal chapel, which is that singing should take place unaccompanied by instruments. The “pure” sound of Gregorian chant has long been considered the timbre of Western art music’s historical origins. The voices that emerge in the beginning of the film bear a sonorous resemblance to Gregorian chant. The second major development in Western music history is the advent of polyphony, or the weaving together of multiple vocal lines, affiliated with the so-called Notre Dame School starting in the 12th and 13th centuries. The subsequent period from the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance is associated with the rise and development of vocal polyphony. Around 1600, a major development occurs with the emergence of opera as a genre. Instruments and symphonic textures now come to be preponderant and to rival voices for preeminence, a process completed in the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the symphony as the preeminent classical music genre.

Given this brief survey of Western music history, we can observe a kind of narrative logic inherent in the opening gestures of the film score. Voice is the key unifying element of this progression of musical styles. Initially we hear the single line, whose monophonic texture is reminiscent of Gregorian chant. Next comes the advent of polyphony with the addition of the second vocal line. Finally, as the symphonic aspect of the score burst into the scene, we have the appearance of Éliane’s voice-over narration. Just at the moment when the non-vocal part of the score begins, Éliane’s voice provides a sense of continuation. Whereas the voices in the score are abstracted and multiple, Éliane’s narration is singular and rooted in language. This can be understood as a reflection of the film’s use of voice(s), in which the apparent polyphony of voices of represented in the narrative all ultimately issue from Éliane’s monovocal narration.

The selective silence of the traditional Vietnamese ensemble in the opening scene clues us in to the subjective point of view of the film and attunes us to its deeply nostalgic perspective: that of a story narrated from memory, where details may go missing. It is important that the missing detail should be the funeral ensemble for Devries' best friends, because it indicates a partial repression of that painful memory, a mark of forgetting that represents the passage of time, her numbness in the present moment (at the funeral), or some combination of these. Either way the effect is like that of glitch in the matrix, serving to warn us, if we are attentive listeners, that the mise-en-scène presented before us is taking place in past tense, or (from another perspective) being generated by an act of narration in the future. This past tense quality is confirmed by the first lines of the film: "*Je n'avais jamais quitté l'Indochine…*" [I had never left Indochine].

The very first scene in which diegetic music is deployed follows on the heels of the opening scene. Immediately following Éliane's opening monologue, we are thrust into the interior of the plantation house, where Éliane and Camille are dancing to a tango that is being broadcast on the radio. The tango scene is an opportunity to develop the gendered dynamic between mother and daughter, as described above, with Éliane performing the masculine leading role. It is also a moment of pedagogy, highlighted by low shots of feet maneuvering, with Éliane teaching Camille the steps [Fig. 6]. As such, the dance lesson represents Camille's education, oriented toward learning French values and following European fashions (including the passion for Tango redolent of cosmopolitan society in the period *entre deux guerres*). Camille wears a Western style dress while Éliane is donning a Vietnamese *áo dài*, suggesting a deeper background of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation. Their dance lesson stops unexpectedly, when the radio broadcast is interrupted by white noise. As the music resumes, we cut to a different room in the house where

Éliane's father, Émile (Henri Marteau), is spending time with his young Vietnamese mistress, or *congai*.

Figure 6: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

This initial tango scene is a preparation for a later elaboration of the tango as diegetic music, when Éliane and Camille perform a tango for the assembled guests during a Christmas dinner ("*le Réveillon*"). We see the needle being dropped on a record. Éliane's father and his congai are standing near it. Émile directs the congai to fan the record player to prevent it from overheating. Thus the father's congai is associated with the tango in a subtle way. In the first tango scene the music lingers in the air while Émile looks at her in admiration. His passion (if not hers) is embodied by the sound of the tango emerging from a different room. In the later tango scene, the congai is (literally) fanning the flames of this "passion" though not by serving Émile but rather the machine that produces the diegetic music. The passion she fans is not that of Émile for her but rather of Éliane for Camille. A subtle transference occurs by the operation of the reappearance of the diegetic tango, creating a parallel between Camille and Émile Devries' congai. The resemblance

between Camille and the congai has been pointed out by Natarjan among others,[92] as has the sexual tension inherent in the later tango scene:

> [A] subtle sexual motif appears to underlie Devries' and Camille's relationship. For instance, they are often shown dancing together, especially the tango…Camille at first resists Devries' invitation to dance, but Devries pulls her onto the dance floor anyway; Devries, wearing a black silk sleeveless dress, pulls Camille's white silk scarf and jacket from her shoulders to reveal her white silk sleeveless dress. Camille, uncomfortable, nonetheless follows Devries' commanding lead in a quite beautiful and rather erotic tango. As they dance, Devries whispers to her: "I'd like to be alone with you in a small mountain chalet. With a smoking chimney, like in fairy tales."[93]

When Jean-Baptiste – Éliane's lover with whom Camille has fallen in love – shows up to the Christmas party, the diegetic tango music takes on a new valence, as an indicator of Camille's growing passion. As Éliane meets Jean-Baptiste outside, the music is heard more faintly. When the camera follows their coordinated glance over at Camille the music grows louder, as if to emphasize her blushing response to being seen by Jean-Baptiste but also his developing ardor. To

[92] "For those nostalgic for Empire, the first few scenes are ambiguous. The rubber plantation is the site of a whipping, yet soon we see a scene in the Devries home, where the old father caresses a congai—concubine – young enough to be his granddaughter. Indeed, the physical resemblance between the two at first sight is remarkable. This may create in a viewer skeptical of Empire the sense that Camille herself has prostituted herself to French colonial stewardship. This connotative effect of the scene adds to the sense of exploitation that a denotative reading of the Senior de Vrais with the young congai suggests. The exploitative atmosphere is further reinforced by the tolerance of the whole group to the old man's lecherousness. Eliane, unexpectedly, doesn't seem to mind, nor do the other women working there. They protest against this particular congai but not the concept of the congai herself." Nalini Natarajan, "The East and Love in the Time of Decolonization," in *Romance and Power in the Hollywood Eastern*, ed. Nalini Natarajan (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 150.

[93] Hasian and Shugart, "Melancholic Nostalgia," 340.

emphasize the point, Éliane tells JB: "*Elle est irrésistible*." As they go into the house and Jean-Baptiste starts to berate Éliane with increasing emotion, the music grows louder. This is both the diegetic effect of them returning gradually closer to the source of the music but also contains an extra-diegetic element: that of matching the rising tide of Jean-Baptiste's feelings and the increasing volume of his voice. At the loudest point of his diatribe, the music stops entirely, leaving a moment of silence in order to frame the slap and counter slap that follow.

Jean-Baptiste's introduction, which occurs well before the later tango scene, is musically individuated. He is introduced for the first time in the previous auction scene, where something of his impetuous nature is revealed, but it is not until this scene that we are introduced to his fundamental struggle as a character: that between the rigor of military regulation (and the colonial regime) and his reflective sensibility as a naval officer moved by fine art. The motivic material is borrowed from the ur-leitmotif. It appears to be a transformation of the surging sub-theme which introduces Éliane's narrative voice. Perhaps it is better to label it a transmogrification for what it borrows from the opening ur-leitmotif is ratcheted up in intensity and made monstrous. It bursts out in a rapid tempo whose repetitiveness, coupled with the abrasive militaristic timbre of loud brass instruments and pounding drums as its prime sonority, amplifies the both the visual image of fiery destruction and the passionate quality of Jean-Baptiste's mentality at the moment. He has just ordered the burning of a suspect sampan (small boat), with a father and son on board, and the martial thrust of the music lets us know that the fire is destroying him on the inside as well.

When Jean-Baptiste visits Éliane's plantation, guilt stricken, she is in the process of whipping a worker who declares, "*Tu est mon père et ma mère*." The worker's familiarity with French indicates the presence of linguistic influence on the plantation. The worker was whipped for attempting to "desert," suggesting he lives on the plantation (like Mme de la Souchère's

workers) and has been able to absorb a certain amount of French there. Reciprocally, in the next part of the scene, when Jean-Baptiste notices the boy whose sampan he sunk Éliane gets him to stop running by yelling after him in Vietnamese. She also tells him to leave in a colloquial way "*đi đi*" [*please go*] suggesting some intimacy with the language.

This moment of linguistic transculturation harkens back to the earlier rowing scene in which Émile shouts "*Mau lên*!" [let's go!] at his team of indigenous rowers in Vietnamese, encouraging them to victory over their French rivals, including Jean-Baptiste. The announcement of their victory amplifies the thematic of linguistic transculturation. The announcer begins his announcement in French but then proceeds to read out loud the names of Émile's Vietnamese team in a native accent. These proper names, uttered in the background, are the first sonic markers of the Vietnamese language in the film. They are framed by the faint diegetic sound of chamber music over which they are read, suggesting their containment within the colonial framework of the *mission civilisatrice*.

By the time Jean-Baptiste finds himself on Éliane's plantation, following the rowing scene and the auction scene, it is the third time they share screen space. This time a developing relationship is suggested by their physical approach, as Éliane nurses his sudden nosebleed. But the plaintive sub-theme that makes a brief appearance here is fragmented by long moments of silence, implying Éliane's hesitancy, and especially her unwillingness to be seen in an unguarded romantic moment (she explains to Jean-Baptiste during the auction that she is not the kind of person who can display her emotions in public). In the subsequent lovemaking scene between Éliane and Jean-Baptiste the palpitation sub-theme and the plaintive sub-theme are used, once again with a great deal of fragmentation caused by momentary interruptions of silence, even more noticeable this time. The silences also serve to foreshadow the tragic events that occur by Jean-

Baptiste coming into her orbit: his death, the loss of Camille, and (ultimately) by implication the loss of Indochina. When the music stops entirely before their union, she warns him: "Our story hasn't begun yet, it's not too late." Then, still without music, her narrating voice enters: "I should have fled. But nothing existed but him."

In this moment, Éliane's past voice and her "present" voice-over narration seem to cross paths, as if her warning to Jean-Baptiste was an act of imagination, a wish inserted to warn him of the tragic path that, in retrospect, Éliane the narrator knows will unfold. The lack of music makes the efficacy of this moment entirely reliant on the nostalgic interjection of the present into the past through their elision in Éliane's voice(s). In the post-coital opium scene, the palpitating and plaintive sub-motifs reappear, entangled as in the love making scene, and dotted by the same strategic silences, which in this case frame Éliane's inhalation.

The stormy affair is brought to a halt during a particularly musically significant scene. Éliane storms out of a gambling den in which Jean-Baptiste had just rejected her declaration of love. The pouring rain frames the mise en bande, to which is added a furious background music composed of quick string patterns. As Éliane enters her car (and the rain sound fades into the background allowing the music to come forward) the plaintive sub-theme emerges, this time in a more robust orchestration featuring brass: the timbre of Jean-Baptiste's tempestuous introductory music. A silence suddenly interrupts the mounting sub-theme and Éliane interjects a startled sound: a reverse shot reveals Jean-Baptiste in front of the car and the sub-theme resumes on cue, soaring with a full orchestral palate as Éliane's drenched love interest pounds on the car window with his fist. This scene of primal passion is once again interrupted by silence, as Jean-Baptiste opens the door and bursts inside. Éliane asks the driver to wait outside and a re-orchestrated and re-

harmonized version of the entangled (plaintive and palpitation) sub-themes emerges, reflecting this "fresh" attempt at love between them.

Following this romantic arc between Éliane and Jean-Baptiste we are introduced to the parallel arc of Camille and her intended groom, Thanh. While Éliane and Jean-Baptiste's relationship is interiorized by the immanence and intensity of the non-diegetic score, Camille and Thanh's relationship is exteriorized by the use of diegetic music and the withholding of Éliane's narration. As Guy finishes explaining the circumstance of the Yen Bai "mutiny" and Thanh's expulsion from France due to his having protested against France's swift execution of participants, Thanh offers a snide retort to Guy in the form of a paternalistic explanation to Camille: "*J'ai été méchant. Je suis puni*." The end of his clever retort is dovetailed by the start of diegetic music [36:02] represented by a trio ensemble playing a waltz. As Thanh and Camille dance smoothly to the waltz, demonstrating their impeccable acculturation, Thanh takes the opportunity of their intimacy and the cover of the music to communicate a revolutionary message in Vietnamese. The cut to the next scene features Thanh's mother who speaks with Éliane in Vietnamese, once again reinforcing the theme of linguistic transculturation from both sides.

The rumor of mutiny as related by Guy materializes in the subsequent scene in which the mandarin, a longtime friend of Éliane, is murdered before her eyes. This sets of a revolutionary chain reaction and Éliane rushed to her plantation, where the rubber processing plant has been set on fire. The music throughout the scene is reminiscent of the militaristic brass fanfare of Jean-Baptiste's introductory music. The theme of fire and destruction is shared, as is the strong timbre of brass and heavy drumming.

The next key scene is that of Jean-Baptiste's first encounter with Camille, marked by a combination of non-diegetic music and silence, like the romance between Jean-Baptiste and Éliane.

The action seems to take place in Cho Lon, the Chinatown district of Saigon. Jean-Baptiste is drinking tea and playing a board game with the proprietor of a street stall (Anna Lim) who is speaking Chinese, which he appears to understand. Camille's class is walking through the neighborhood singing a French song. The innocence of their song is interrupted by a prisoner who escapes custody nearby, causing a brief chase scene (with attendant music) punctuated by a shot from a policeman's gun. Camille's classmate yells her name as she lies unconscious on the ground, the dead prisoner laying supine over her. As the Chinese lady comes over to cut Camille's blood-soaked shirt, the music articulates the palpitation sub-theme. It is fragmented by distinct silences, as Camille is checked for bullet wounds. The lady tells Jean-Baptiste "it's the prisoner's blood" in Chinese, and he nods in understanding. As Jean-Baptiste picks up Camille in order to remove her bloody shirt the palpitation sub-theme becomes more continuous and then interlocks with a superimposition of the plaintive sub-theme. Camille hugs Jean-Baptiste as the themes play out: the very themes whose intertwining represented Jean-Baptiste and Éliane's passionate romance. Once again, silence plays a crucial role. As the music momentarily halts when Camille lays back down the palpitation pauses long enough for Camille to tell Jean-Baptiste: "You have saved my life."

Around [1:04:18], when Jean-Baptiste's is taking a junk ship into Ha Long Bay to his new outpost on Dragon Island, all of the sub-themes are once again performed back to back; except the surging sub-motif, which appears at first at the start of the film (after the vocal music), now appears last. And the themes have for the most part been re-orchestrated and re-arranged. The plaintive sub-theme bursts into the scene first, pausing intermittently during Éliane's off-screen narration in order to interject as her voice evokes the remoteness of the location. She admits that she believed he would quit the Navy after his reassignment but (like Conrad's Lord Jim) he defies expectations by facing official sanction rather than fleeing. The appearance of the surging sub-motif begins

what appears to be an entire ur-leitmotif sequence, re-arranged in a more martial vein. But just as the final (plaintive) sub-theme is making its appearance the sequence is cut short by an interruption caused by the appearance of Jean-Baptiste's superior, Hebrard, who plays the proverbial Kurtz figure, both of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which takes place in the Belgian Congo and Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* where he is transposed to Vietnam.[94] The music that introduces his appearance in the film is low and slithery; yet for a moment when camera reverses shot to show Jean-Baptiste greeting him, the music momentarily takes a grand turn, before resuming the low tone with the counter shot. This vaudevillian caricature is justified by the fact that the character appears very briefly on screen and yet we need to be inspired by loathing for him: he will be the victim of Camille's revenge.

Meanwhile, in the royal city of Huế, in central Vietnam, Camille is preparing for her arranged marriage to Thanh. A significant moment occurs when Éliane pays her a visit. The two sit overlooking a lotus-studded lake and Éliane declares that she will inherit the land: "*Le domaine t'appartient*" [The estate belongs to you]. Following a long silence, the camera pans out to reveal the two women in the context of the lake and surrounding traditional structures, like a landscape painting. At this point, the vocal music from the very beginning of the film recurs for the first time. It serves as a point of transition into the foreshortened depiction of the wedding ceremony itself. The diegetic sound of the ceremony is glossed over in silence, like the traditional Vietnamese ensemble at the beginning of the film, and overlayed with the textless chorus. The association with Gregorian chant is heightened by the voices being truly unaccompanied (unlike in the beginning

[94] One wonders if the great Polish actor Andrzej Seweryn was cast as Hebrard partly in order to suggest a resonance with the Polish-born Joseph Conrad.

of the film, where, they are accompanied by percussive sounds). The concept of sacred ritual is thus both projected by the music and translated for a Western audience.

When Camille leaves, Éliane is devastated. As a way to balance the desperation of her sentiment the film includes a rare moment of levity in which Éliane goes out to watch a cabaret performance with Guy. This is the performance of "*La môme caoutchouc*" mentioned earlier in the chapter. Yet it is another diegetic performance that truly captures the imagination of Éliane and Guy. This is the traditional Vietnamese musical theater in which the disguised Camille and Jean-Baptiste participate. They have been rescued by a performance troupe following their flight (after Camille kills Hebrard). Camille, who appropriately enough plays a royal character (she is technically a princess), passes out just at the moment that Jean-Baptiste, donning the traditional makeup of the genre, hands her an instrument. She is swiftly taken to a midwife.

The birth of Camille and Jean-Baptiste's son, Étienne, is intercut with scenes of revolution, as peasants in the region (Tonkin) revolt and burn the local mandarins alive (who are supporters of the colonial regime) over a pyre loaded with imported European furniture. A strident version of the plaintive sub-motive is heard as the pyre is set ablaze.

On the heels of this incident, Guy, in his capacity as Sûreté director, connects the dots, realizing that there is a troop of travelling performers spreading revolutionary ideas (and actions) in their path. He organizes an operation to root them out with the codename Operation Molière. During this operation Jean-Baptiste is captured by French soldiers dispatched to the region in the name-appropriate act of baptizing his son. The legend of Camille and Jean-Baptiste grows as all the Vietnamese women claimed to have suckled the baby Étienne as police marched his father out of the North Vietnamese highlands. During the initial suckling scene there is a quiet iteration of the palpitation sub-theme, layered with the diegetic sound of a woman singing a traditional

Vietnamese song nearby. Éliane's narrative voice then enters the picture, putting the legend into words. Éliane description of the growth and spread of Camille and Jean-Baptiste's "legend" is underscored by the plaintive sub-theme, while the camerawork traverses a group of people in the foreground including Vietnamese peasants and French soldiers, like a religious frieze, all of whom are transfixed by the sight of this French-Vietnamese baby.

The legend that has just been narrated comes to life with another performance of traditional Vietnamese musical theater [Fig. 7]. This time it is an instance of a reformed theater that depicts contemporary themes. We observe several characters dressed as ordinary peasants rather than grand historical personages. These represent the family that Camille took flight with. Camille herself is the protagonist of the story and her shooting of Hebrard is the central moment in the narrative. A Vietnamese actor plays Jean-Baptiste in a French Navy uniform. The realism of the costumes and props is belied by the traditionalism of the music. Éliane and Guy lurk in the background of the audience, observing the legend of Camille and Jean-Baptiste as it takes place before their eyes on stage.

Figure 7: *Indochine*, directed by Régis Wargnier (Sony Pictures Classics, 1992).

This is a breaking point in the narrative. Camille is arrested and sent to prison. Éliane is outraged that Guy does not attempt to pardon her. They break contact for five years. It is only with the advent of the *Front populaire* that the Éliane is amnestied, which dates the event during or shortly after 1936.

The reconstructed prison site is introduced by a persistent barrage of low percussion. As the (now amnestied) prisoners themselves appear the vocal music from the beginning of the film reemerges, now with a modified melody. Rather than the uplifting trajectory at the start of the film, and during the wedding ceremony, the vocal line trudges along with a downward trajectory. As if in concert with the score, the prisoners are shown moving downward over a dirt mound. The polyphonic potential of the double vocal lines is more developed than at the beginning, suggesting the strong (but silent) opinions and of the emerging prisoners many of whom, like Camille, will continue to participate in anti-colonial struggle. As we get a close up of the prisoners marching forward, the vocal line transforms into the plaintive sub-theme: now carried aloft by a combination of voices and instruments, with rhythmic accompaniment and the harmonic support of brass. This is the very first instance in which voices are integrated into the instrumental score, as if the opening of the prison has liberated the strict division between voice and instrument that is manifest in the narrative up to that point. As the gates of the prison opens and Éliane, along with a mass of people, rushes in to reconnect with prisoners, the plaintive sub-theme surges forward. A crowd of people gather around Camille, calling out to her as “the Red Princess,” thus epitomizing her legend as the royal child turned communist, but also symbolizing her final break with both Éliane and France. From this point Camille leaves the filmind altogether, which is rooted in Éliane’s perspective. Her parting words are fateful: “Your Indochina no longer exists…She’s dead.” [*Ton Indochine n’existe plus…Elle est morte*].

At this point a particularly dissonant iteration of the plaintive sub-theme arises as an expression of Éliane's feelings. As the sub-theme fades and harmonically resolves for the final time, we switch to a shot of the now abandoned plantation. The plaintive sub-theme dovetails into the palpitating sub-theme as Émile walks through the plantation for the last time, and transforms into the plaintive sub-theme as Éliane taps the sap of a tree. The music highlights the trickling feel of the sap with another iteration of the palpitating sub-theme. When Éliane returns to the house she is crestfallen at having to admit to her servant that she sold the plantation. Her exit through a door is timed with the articulation of the first gesture of the surging sub-theme (which introduced her voice in the film): the low bass note from which the rest of the theme surges. Except this time the upward surge does not occur. The low bass note carries over into a cutaway shot of a ship clearing a narrow strait between two hills. The image is not of Vietnam, as it initially appears, but of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. A ship horn is the first sound to reply to the low bass note left hanging in the past. We cut to an image of Éliane and Étienne on board the ship, on the top deck. A Swiss flag is waves in the wind directly behind them. "*Je suis parti pour la France*" [I left for France], she continues. In the next cut, she declares: "*Demain la France perd l'Indochine de bon*" [Tomorrow France loses Indochina for good]. Étienne decides not to see his mother, Camille, who is part of the Vietnamese delegation to the Geneva Accords. He declares to Éliane: "*Ma mère c'est tôi*" [My mother, that's you]. As Éliane overlooks Lake Geneva, the chant-like voices reemerge like the nostalgic memory of a maternal melodrama.

Having traversed a number of key moments in the film, and observed how the sub-themes, the vocal theme, and silences form a highly economical syntax, and how they interact with voice and narrative, we are ready to revisit the problem scene in question. At its foundation is the fact of Camille escaping from her wedding and thus from Éliane's sight. As she is about to get on a train

heading North, the camera fades to Éliane in the act of narration for the first time in the film's trajectory a transition effected by a soft iteration of the plaintive sub-theme, so often connected with Éliane and her desire. The moment is tinged with regret: "I loved her more than anything else in the world. I never told her," Éliane declares as the clear image of her inside a boat cabin emerges. Music sustains her continued narration here, continuing into the palpitation sub-theme. Just when it seems that she has exhausted her powers of narration due to the pain of remembering the painful separation from Camille the surging sub-theme emerges. This is the sub-theme that begins the ur-leitmotif and thus generates the film score. It is also the sub-theme with which the initial appearance of Éliane's narration is associated. In concert with the music, Étienne reaches over to her at this point and, in a show of support, asks her to continue her narration.

From this point, Éliane's description becomes less definitive. She begins with the negative assertion that Camille was not arrested at the Hanoi train station. But the continued development of the music, now as a soaring plaintive sub-theme, makes the transition feel continuous. Camille is seen traversing the northern Vietnamese landscape alone, over Éliane's narration and the accompanying score. The palpitation sub-theme introduces the scene of the train tracks labor camp in which the family with whom she flees to Ha Long Bay is introduced. It is a particularly slow and lugubrious iteration of the sub-theme, punctuated by the heavy sound of low brass. The brass seems to offer a timbre homologous to the clinking metal heard on site. The sound of hard labor makes the music feel tired, thus expressive of both Camille's condition and that of the workers. The palpitation jumps to a loftier register as a French official is carried into the scene. At his arrival the music stops, plunging us into the unforgiving realism of the scene, away from the protective guidance of Éliane's mothering narration – including the music that continues the presence of her comforting voice. He berates a Vietnamese foreman for the slow progress of work then shouts

assertively: "*Làm đi!*" [Get to work!]. As the workers take orders in both Vietnamese and French, a close up shot reverse shot highlights two workers: the husband and wife of the family that takes Camille into their care.

This is an important point. It is just at the moment that Camille loses a mother that she finds another one in the form of the anonymous Vietnamese woman. The film will make the connection between Éliane and Camille's new maternal attachment through music. As the family is seen escaping the labor camp no musical cue accompanies them. Only their heavy breaths and fleet footsteps echo across the desolate landscape. But soon, as Camille makes her appearance alongside them on screen, the palpitation sub-theme resumes. It is only after the redeployment of this music, previously heard over Éliane's narration, that Camille tries to reach out to them. Her initial attempt at communication is not conducted in Vietnamese but French: "*Attendez!*" [Wait!]. Only after this fails does she deploy her first and only Vietnamese lines in the film [1:14:56] as described earlier in the chapter. As she joins the family in their flight, the music surges ahead, louder and bolder, as if echoing across the massive landscape shot that opens up. The theme that bursts through at this point is a modified, highly dissonant reworking of the plaintive sub-theme. The music dies down with a flash forward in time. It is later in the day and the family has stopped for rest. The father figure prays before a portable ancestral altar. And the woman introduces her name, Sao (Như Quỳnh).

As Camille seeks Ha Long Bay with the Vietnamese family, Éliane's presence follows them in the form of non-diegetic musical accompaniement, issuing in a particularly dramatic moment. The camera reveals a distant landscape shot taking in clouds and hills. A powerful and languorous iteration of the plaintive sub-theme, almost immobile in its slow tempo, rises out of the dramatic frame, as does Éliane's narrating voice: "I often dreamt of her at night," she begins.

"I don't remember the static dreams [*rêves immobiles*]." The cinematography and the music are thus revealed to represent not Camille's current reality but rather Éliane's memory of her dreams at the time. And yet by her own admission she does not remember these dreams. So they must be reconstructions of her imagination, vague impressions of dreams evoked for us the viewers (as for Étienne, who is listening to her narration) by the agency of her narrating voice, the locus of the film's filmind. A sweeping crescendo in the music increases both the emotionality of the scene in which Camille and the family are seen to discover Ha Long Bay and the presence of Éliane. It is as if her narration had added wind to the music's sails. When she resumes her narration to explain the nightly route of the trade ships the score conveniently quiets down, leaving a niche for her voice, and highlighting with subtle notes each one of her phrases.

The score's continuity is interrupted suddenly by a conspicuous silence timed to a cut away to a shot of Jean-Baptiste sleeping under a mosquito net. The silence itself seems to startle him awake. As he tosses and turns, his uneasy sleep is a premonition of the gruesome turn of events to come. The music never relents. As the camera cuts to the slave market scene a persistent beat emerges, marking the rigid, inhuman process of organization happening as the workers are weighed and separated. Jean-Baptiste notices the family left to die in rafters in the shallow water of the bay. A shot counter shot then reveals Jean-Baptiste's spotting of Camille in the crowd of kneeling workers. His sighting is marked by the palpitation sub-theme, hesitant at first, with pronounced silences between phrases, but as Camille turns back to look at him the music grows in presence. As Jean-Baptiste decides to protect Camille a hopeful arrangement of the plaintive sub-theme arises. As the pair walks by the other processed workers, they also rise up and the sound of their voices is heard, accompanied by the palpitation sub-theme, restated more powerfully now. The loud silence left in the wake of the sudden interruption of this sub-theme indicates Camille's

realization of the fate of her adoptive family. She yells the name of her unfortunate mother figure repeatedly into the silence: "*Sao!*" In Vietnamese, "*sao*" can be associated with the two-part word meaning "why" [*tại sao*]. Her scream, heard by the other Vietnamese laborers, threatens the colonial order so essentially revealed by the slave market. Her subsequent murder of the Kurtz-like French officer, and her flight with Jean-Baptiste subsequently becomes the stuff of legend – a legend only preserved by virtue of Éliane's nostalgic narration.

In this chapter, I analyzed the role of voice in Indochine as a gendered sonic marker of nostalgia. The film's melodramatic articulation of voice includes both diegetic and non-diegetic instances of music. The score shares an intimate sonic framework and is, as demonstrated, entangled with Éliane's own narrative voice: it represents the latency of her narration when her voice-over is not explicitly heard. The classic style of film scoring also helps prop up the glamorized old-Hollywood style "star-text" of Deneuve that is so important to Éliane's status as not only an individual from Indochina but an allegorical figure who represents France's relationship with Southeast Asia during the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial period.

The various genres of non-diegetic music that are present in the film are almost always framing acts of speech, whether a tango over which dancing and intimate conversation can take place, period French vaudeville songs that offer historical verisimilitude, or traditional Vietnamese musical theater that contains a play-within-a-play function which mirrors the film's own narrative and thus once again recapitulates Éliane's voice-over narration. It is ultimately her voice that engenders the film's colonial nostalgia.

Chapter 2

Chamber Music, or the Sonic Spaces of Memory in *L'Amant*

> In regard to the sounds of language, [the act of] *writing out loud* is not phonological, but phonetic; its objective is not the clarity of messages, the theater of the emotions; that which it seeks (from a perspective of enjoyment [*jouissance*]) is impulsive incidents, language covered in skin, a text in which one can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, an entire stereophonics from the depths of the flesh: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of sense, of language. A certain melodic art can give an idea of this vocal writing; but since melody is dead it's perhaps in the cinema that one finds it most easily today. It's enough for the cinema to record very closely the sound of speech (which is basically the generalized definition of the "grain" of writing) and make heard in their materiality, in their sensuality, the breath, the gravity, the flesh of lips, the entire presence of the human muzzle (that the voice, that writing be fresh, supple, lubricated, finely grained and vibrant like an animal's snout), in order to succeed in deporting the signified very far and in throwing, so to speak, the actor's anonymous body at my ear: it granulates, it sizzles, it caresses, it rasps, it cuts: it orgasms.[95]

[95] "Eu égard aux sons de la langue, l'écriture à haute voix n'est pas phonologique, mais phonétique ; son objectif n'est pas la clarté des messages, le théâtre des émotions ; ce qu'elle cherche (dans une perspective de jouissance), ce sont les incidents pulsionnels, c'est le langage tapissé de peau, un texte où l'on puisse entendre le grain du gosier, la patine

The final passage of Barthes' *Le plaisir du texte* describes a cinematic "writing out loud" that itself expresses a fundamentally musical and sonic (rather than linguistic) conception of the voice. This Barthesian relationship between the musicality of the voice and the sensuous aurality of *écriture* is echoed in the opening of Jean-Jacques Annaud's filmic adaptation of *L'Amant*, which puts into relation music, sound, and voice: all echoed by the haptic quality of the visual montage. Through the complex layering of sounds and images, which will be the subject of analysis later in the chapter, the film's first minutes suggest an intimate, sensuous, and even sensual correspondence between the act of Durassian writing, the voice of Duras "herself," and her biographical memory.

Figure 8: L'Amant, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

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des consonnes, la volupté des voyelles, toute une stéréophonie de la chair profonde : l'articulation du corps, de la langue, non celle du sens, du langage. Un certain art de la mélodie peut donner une idée de cette écriture vocale ; mais comme la mélodie est morte, c'est peut-être aujourd'hui au cinéma qu'on la trouverait le plus facilement. Il suffit en effet que le cinéma prennent de très près le son de la parole (c'est en somme la définition généralisée du "grain" de l'écriture) et fasse entendre dans leur matérialité, dans leur sensualité, le souffle, la rocaille, la pulpe des lèvres, toute une présence du museau humain (que la voix, que l'écriture soient fraîches, souples, lubrifiées, finement granuleuses et vibrantes comme le museau d'un animal), pour qu'il réussisse à déporter le signifié très loin et à jeter, pour ainsi dire, le corps anonyme de l'acteur à mon oreille: ça granule, ça grésille, ça caresse, ça râpe, ça coupe: ça jouit." Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1973), 89.

It is not until the end of the film that we are shown the Parisian studio in which the opening scene takes place. It is only then that the film, over the sonic admixture of voice-over narration and a Chopin waltz, is revealed to be contained by the studio, the sonorous space of Duras' literary reworking of memory [Fig. 8]. In this way, borrowing from Duras' own recursive narrative strategy in *L'Amant*, the opening already represents an act of closure. On the first page of the novel, Duras describes her retrospective mood with characteristic pithiness. "Very early in my life," she asserts, "it was too late."[96]

Awarded the Prix Goncourt (1984), *L'Amant* cemented Duras' already canonic status as an *auteur* working at the intersection of literature and film. Accordingly, the novel consistently utilizes filmic effects. In turn, Annaud's film adaptation embraces Durassian tropes that overlap with the genre conventions of colonial nostalgia cinema, linking *L'Amant* to other contemporary films covered in this dissertation.

Because of the semi-autobiographical nature of Duras' oeuvre, in order to fulfil the requirements of a successful adaptation the film must not only relate the narrative of *L'Amant* but it must draw on the idiosyncrasies of "Durassian" style. This chapter demonstrates how the film represents Durassian presence – despite the conspicuous absence of Duras in the film and her contentious relationship to its production – by means of a subtle weaving together of sound design, diegetic music, and the non-diegetic score by Franco-Lebanese composer, Gabriel Yared. Through close analysis of scenes, I show how the film takes a cue from the source novel's own purposive evocation of memory as a sonic and musical phenomenon and amplifies it through its medium-specific relationship to sound and to music.

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[96] "*Très vite dans ma vie il a été trop tard.*" Marguerite Duras, *L'Amant* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1984), 9.

The tricky question of media lies behind the focus of this chapter, and it is important to clear up a few questions from the outset. Many studies that focus on the novel itself. In this chapter, however, the novel is considered not as a work in its own right but rather as a "source' for the film. It is precisely because this chapter focuses on the film version that sound takes on a central role. It may be argued that this is not a necessary difference since, as will be demonstrated below, the novel already articulates an intimate relationality between film, sound, and memory. Unlike the novel, however, the film must find a way to actually create a sonic means by which to convey its representation of Durassian memory. It utilizes a film score as well diegetic source music. What the novel suggests by literary means the film is bound to concretize into particular sounds and musical works. It is this sonic actualization of Durassian tropes that interests me, and the original novel will be treated accordingly as a source of sonic possibilities.

There is another intertextual matter to consider. Duras would develop the narrative of *L'Amant* in her follow-up novel, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (*The North China Lover*). This second version of *L'Amant* is explicitly related to Duras' negative experience during the production of Annaud's film, one in which she was initially involved but with which she parted ways. As a consequence, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* has been analyzed as a reaction to the film as much as to the original novel. Although such considerations are beyond the purview of this chapter it is important to acknowledge that, in Duras scholarship, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is often considered in connection with both of the film and the novel, as well as to other works by Duras.[97]

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[97] See: Victoria Best, "Savoir, Discours et Corps Dans L'amant, L'amant de La Chine Du Nord et Moderato Cantabile," *Dalhousie French Studies* 50 (2000): 17–26; Yvonne Y. Hsieh, "L'évolution Du Discours (Anti-) Colonialiste Dans Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique, L'amant et L'amant de La Chine Du Nord de Marguerite Duras," *Dalhousie French Studies* 35 (1996): 55–65; Erica L. Johnson, "Reclaiming the Void: The Cinematographic Aesthetic of Marguerite Duras's Autobiographical Novels," in *Textual and Visual Selves*, ed. Natalie Edwards, Amy L. Hubbell, and Ann Miller, Photography, Film, and Comic Art in French Autobiography (University of Nebraska Press, 2011),

If the task of reconsidering the sonic resonances of *L'Amant* in light of its later rewriting must be left for another time, the question of the relationship between these two works nevertheless brings up a related, and relevant, consideration. It is a mainstay of Duras scholarship to point out that, despite its apparent variety, her oeuvre demonstrates an obsessional quality in its repetition and reworking of a few basic plots. In approaching the source novel and film in this chapter, therefore, it will be useful to first briefly consider them from the vantage point of their position within this broader Durassian perspective.

Kathleen Hulley summarizes the situation by dividing Duras' oeuvre into two basic "cycles," both indicative of an even more fundamental background plot. "Duras tells, over and over," Hulley writes, "stories of bourgeois characters paralyzed by their fascination with death and desire. Her two most well-known narrative instances are the *India Song* cycle and the Vietnam cycle, each of them obsessive explorations in novel, film, play, scenario." The way in which these Durassian cycles move between media informs the film adaptation of *L'Amant*, despite the author's distance from the production. This is because both are related to the "Vietnam cycle," which according to Hulley is characterized by "stories of the little French girl in Vietnam tacitly prostituted by her mad mother and disturbed brothers." She points to the inherent intertextuality of this cycle, "told over and over in *Les Impudents* (1943), *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *Des Journées Entières Dans Les Arbres* (1968), *L'Eden Cinéma* (1977), *Savannah Bay* (1982), *L'Amant* (1984), *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991)."[98]

115–38; Kate Ince and Janet Sayers, "Imaginary White Female: Myth, Race, and Colour in Duras's L'amant de La Chine Du Nord," in *Revisioning Duras*, ed. James S. Williams, DGO-Digital original, Film, Race, Sex (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 113–26; Winnie Fleur Ishimwe, "La transposition de l'ecrit a l'image: Une étude comparative entre deux romans L'Amant et L'Amant de la Chine du Nord de Marguerite Duras et le film L'Amant de Jean-Jacques Annaud" (MA Thesis, York University, November 2019), https://hdl.handle.net/10315/37461.

[98] Kathleen Hulley, "Contaminated Narratives: The Politics of Form and Subjectivity in Marguerite Duras's 'The Lover,'" *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992): 31–32.

This "obsessive" quality of Durassian intermediality is significant because it offers a broader perspective on the relationship of Annaud's film to the source novel, as well as to the follow-up novel. Rather than view the source novel as original and the film as derivative of it, through an anxiety-of-influence lens, we can see that in fact both the film and the novel are informed by the Durassian tropes of the "Vietnam cycle." They are thus in conversation with one another.

There is a second point of interest here specifically related to the film's participation in the colonial nostalgia moment of the early 1990s. As in any product informed by Duras' "Vietnam cycle," the memory evoked is specifically framed by the author's experience in French Indochina. Consequently, in the film, sonic phenomena function as echoes that traverse the implicit dividing line between colonial memory and its post-colonial articulation in the act of remembering and writing.

The novel itself was originally supposed to be titled "*L'Image absolue*" [*The Absolute Image*] and it demonstrates a near obsession with visuality, and in particular with photography. In 1991, months before the French film release date (in January 1992), Nina Hellerstein already described the novel's relationship with the "image" in ways that I have connected to sound, especially regarding its implicit connection to memory ("outside the flow of time") and autobiography:

The major function of the "image," as it is presented to us through the various points of view used in the novel, is as a projection of inner reality…the "image" solidifies and concretizes the appearance of the person at a moment in time, it allows the characters to see and to understand themselves outside the flow of time. The major form which this function of the "image" takes is

the photograph; the work was originally conceived as a collection of commentaries on photographs of important moments and things in Duras' life.[99]

Though focused intently on the "image," Hellerstein still notices moments of reciprocity between the novel's cinematic qualities and its use of sound. "Occasionally," she writes, "the photographic 'image' becomes a cinematic one, the figure begins to move, sound intervenes."[100]

If evocation of the cinematic moving image is associated with the novel's sonic "intervention" then the still photograph may reciprocally be connected to silence. Hellerstein quotes the narrator's observation that the old photograph that captures her image as a young girl (a central image in both the novel and the film) is "always there in the same silence."[101] Drawing on a sonic metaphor, she explains that the image "allows the narrator to measure the inner meaning of her life, by contemplating the echoes it has evoked in others."[102] This sonic language evokes questions. For example, how can the photograph's "silence" produce "echoes"? Whereas Hellerstein focuses on the visual, I read her recourse to figurative language linked to sound as a kind of subconscious gesture toward the sonic dimension embedded in the novel.

This visual line of interpretation is still present in current scholarship. Lajet Limam-Tnani has recently described *L'Amant* (the novel) as a "virtual film."[103] She notices that images "are deployed in the text according to principles that evoke techniques proper to cinema." All of the

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[99] Nina S. Hellerstein, "'Image' and Absence in Marguerite Duras' 'L'Amant,'" *Modern Language Studies* 21, no. 2 (1991), 48.

[100] Nina S. Hellerstein, "'Image' and Absence," 49.

[101] "*Elle est toujours là dans le même silence*." Duras, *L'Amant*, as quoted in: Nina S. Hellerstein, "'Image' and Absence," 45.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Najet Limam-Tnani, "*L'Amant* de Marguerite Duras: album de photos ou film virtuel?," *Littératures*, no. 78 (August 1, 2018): 123–33. See also: Najet Limam-Tnani, *Roman et Cinéma Chez Marguerite Duras - Une Poétique de La Spécularité* (Editions de la Méditerranée, 1996).

techniques she specifies, however, are related to the visual aspects of cinema, such as montage and framing. Sound is absent from these considerations. "The constant promotion of the visible in the text," she writes, "and the various solicitations of the reader's gaze foreground this cinematographic element of the work."[104]

Like Hellerstein, Limam-Tnani connects the cinematographic character of the novel to its relationship with memory and autobiography. "[I]n making the text a scene of remembrance of the lived [*la remémoration du vécu*]," she summarizes, "Duras made *L'Amant* a work in which the lived, literature, and cinema converge."[105] Though acknowledging the cinematic quality of the novel and its connection to memory, Limam-Tnani interprets it in an exclusively visual sense. In so doing, she leaves aside the explicitly sonic evocations of film in the novel.[106]

As valid as these visually focused analyses of Duras' work are in their own right, there are also good reasons to consider Duras a writer with a longstanding affinity for working with aurality and the sonic as primary materials. Jennifer Willging points to the presence of what she calls "Lefebvrian moments" as early as the *Cahiers de la Guerre*, a set of journals that Duras wrote in the 1940s, which were posthumously published in 2006.[107] The fragment of these journals that

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[104] "Ces images sont investies dans le texte selon des principes évoquant des techniques propres au cinéma, comme le montage, le cadrage et assimilant l'autobiographie à un film virtuel. La promotion constante du visible dans le texte et les sollicitations diverses du regard du lecteur font valoir cette composante cinématographique de l'oeuvre." Najet Limam-Tnani, "*L'Amant* de Marguerite," 124.

[105] "[E]n faisant du texte la scène de la remémoration du vécu, Duras fait de *L'Amant* une œuvre dans laquelle convergent le vécu, la littérature et le cinema." Ibid., 132.

[106] For further reading about the visual in Duras' films and novels, see: Alex Hughes and Janet Sayers, "Photography and Fetishism in *L'Amant*," in *Revisioning Duras*, ed. James S. Williams, DGO-Digital original, Film, Race, Sex (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 191–202; Erica L. Johnson, "Reclaiming the Void: The Cinematographic Aesthetic of Marguerite Duras's Autobiographical Novels," in *Textual and Visual Selves*, ed. Natalie Edwards, Amy L. Hubbell, and Ann Miller, Photography, Film, and Comic Art in French Autobiography (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 115–38.

[107] Jennifer Willging, "Lefebvrian 'Moments' in Marguerite Duras's *Cahiers de La Guerre*," *French Forum* 43, no. 3 (2018): 423–38.

Willging analyzes, from the year 1947, are early (and ultimately unused) drafts for the short story "Madame Dodin," part of *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* (itself part of the "Vietnam cycle"). Whereas the parts that were included describe Duras' childhood in Indochina and experience during the war, Willging's analysis focuses on descriptions of comparatively more banal, everyday moments.

In one journal entry, Duras recalls lounging in her room in Paris, listening attentively to the steps of workers on their morning walk to work:

> When I woke up, I didn't look at my alarm clock right away. I didn't open my eyes. But my window was open and I heard that someone was walking along the street, somebody that walked with a rapid, regular step. Then, when this person reached the end of the street, someone else entered it. While the steps of the first grew dimmer [*s'effaçait*], that of the second grew louder [*s'amplifiait*] until the moment he passed in front of my window and where in the open street – because at that very moment the other had left the street and he was alone – he stood out with an intense sonority.[108]

In a later intensification of this sentiment, Duras writes, in highly poetic terms, that the man's footsteps "pass over my body and incrust themselves, and fill with their sonority this shell that I am."[109] "Her aural attentiveness," Willging comments, "and the openness of her body to

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[108] "*Lorsque je me suis réveillée, je n'ai pas immédiatement regardé le réveil. Je n'ai pas ouvert les yeux. Mais ma fenêtre était ouverte et j'ai entendu que quelqu'un longeait la rue, quelqu'un qui marchait d'un pas rapide, régulier. Puis, tandis que ce quelqu'un était arrivé au bout de la rue, quelqu'un d'autre pénétra de nouveau dans la rue. Tandis que le pas du premier s'effaçait, le pas du second s'amplifiait jusqu'au moment où il est passé devant ma fenêtre et où, dans la rue vide, car à ce moment-là, l'autre avait quitté la rue et il était seul, il se détache avec une intense sonorité.*" Jennifer Willging, "Lefebvrian 'Moments,'" 423 – 424.

[109] *"…me passent sur le corps et s'incrustent, et emplissent de leur sonorité cette conque que je suis."* Ibid., 425.

receiving the sounds he is generating lend a meaning and import…to an act – an *ouvrier* going to work in the early morning – not normally considered to have much of either."[110] For Willging, the context of this passage in relation to Duras' communist milieu during the 1940s evokes Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, published the same year (1947).[111] Lefebvre's theory of "moments" is used to explain Duras' engagement with the everyday as a space of critique. Lefebvrian "moments" are simultaneously epiphanic and quotidian. "[D]uring a moment," Willging explains, "the normally invisible alienation from both ourselves and others in which we live in modern society becomes, though fleetingly and partially, apparent."[112]

Although Willging uses Lefebvre to discuss Duras' political engagement, the journal entry points equally to Duras' literary engagement with the sonic environment.[113] Alienation may be "invisible" but it is not inaudible. It is clear from the above citation that Duras uses a description of close listening to create a point of solidarity between two otherwise alienated people and break down the alienating visible border between self and other (between individuated bodies) by allowing the sound of another body to quite literally reverberate through the narrator's own. A sensuous description of an act of listening that appears narrowly focused on evoking externally produced sense impressions thus actually relates a great deal of significance about the positionality of the narrator.

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 426.

[112] Ibid., 429.

[113] The same might be said of the later work of Lefebvre, with its attentiveness to the "rhythms" observed in everyday life, formally theorized in his concept of *rythmanalyse* [rhythmanalysis]. See: Henri Lefebvre, *Eléments de rythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance des rythmes* (Editions Syllepse, 1996); Pascal Michon, *Problèmes de rythmanalyse : 2 vol.* (Paris: Rhuthmos, 2022).

The “aural attentiveness” that Willging finds in Duras’ early journals is still there, decades later, in *L’Amant*. In both cases, sonic description bridges the distance between the narrator’s subjective experience (represented by a room interior) and her objective engagement with the world outside. Moreover, in both cases it serves to locate the narrator in an urban setting by means of quotidian sonic details. In Paris, the Lefebvrian “moment” is revealed by the reverberating steps of a man walking to work in the morning. In Cholen, Saigon’s historic Chinatown district, it is revealed by the clanking of wooden clogs and the sound of a foreign language.[114]

The sound [*bruit*] of the city is very strong, in the memory it is the sound of a film turned up too high, it deafens. I remember well, the room is somber, we don’t talk, it is surrounded by the continuous racket of the city…There is no glass in the windows, there are blinds and shutters. On the blinds we see shadows of people that pass by on the sunlit sidewalk. The crowds are always huge. Their shadows are striped with regularity by the shutters’ rays. The clacking of wooden clogs strikes the head, the voices are strident, Chinese is a language that is shouted in the way I always imagined desert languages being, it’s an incredibly strange language.

It’s the end of the day outside, one can tell by the sound of the voices and the more and more numerous passings-by, more and more mixed. It is a pleasure town that’s in full swing at night. And the night begins now with the setting of the sun.

The bed is separated from the city by these slatted shutters, this cotton blind. No hard material separates us from other people. They themselves are unaware of our existence. As for us,

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[114] “Cholen” is the French transliteration of the Vietnamese name “Chợ Lớn”: from *chợ* (“market”) and *lớn* (“big”).

we perceive something of theirs, the totality of their voices, of their movements, like a siren that launches a broken shout, sad, without echo.[115]

In Annaud's film adaptation as well as in Duras' original novel, the Cholen room (*chambre* in French) represents a sonic space of memory. The rhythm of its returns resonates across other shared interior spaces, like the Parisian study, the childhood home in French Indochina, and the ocean liner. These disconnected interiors nevertheless circulate in the intermedial space between the film and the novel. Being resonant chambers, they echo the sonic impressions of the past that

Figure 9: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

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[115] "Le bruit de la ville est très fort, dans le souvenir il est le son d'un film mis trop haut, qui assourdit. Je me souviens bien, la chambre est sombre, on ne parle pas, elle est entourée du vacarme continu de la ville…Il n'y a pas de vitres aux fenêtres, il y a des stores et des persiennes. Sur les stores on voit les ombres des gens qui passent dans le soleil des trottoirs. Ces foules sont toujours énormes. Les ombres sont régulièrement striées par les raies des persiennes. Les claquements des sabots de bois cognent la tête, les voix sont stridentes, le chinois est une langue qui se crie comme j'imagine toujours les langues des déserts, c'est une langue incroyablement étrangère.

C'est la fin du jour dehors, on le sait au bruit des voix et à celui des pasages de plus en plus nombreux, de plus en plus mêlés. C'est une ville de plaisir qui bat son plein la nuit. Et la nuit commence maintenant avec le coucher du soleil.

Le lit est séparé de la ville par ces persiennes à claire-voie, ce store de coton. Aucun matériau dur ne nous sépare des autres gens. Eux, ils ignorent notre existence. Nous, nous percevons quelque chose de la leur, le total de leurs voix, de leurs mouvements, comme une sirène qui lancerait une clameur brisée, triste, sans écho." Duras, *L'Amant*, 50-51.

sustain the novel and in so doing reverberate through the memories of its Durassian narrator. Overlapping with the function of colonial nostalgia film, they bridge the distance between the post-colonial present and the colonial past and in so doing mediate between personal memory and (trans)national heritage.

The extended passage above opens with the literary equivalent of an establishing shot, one which invests as much attention to sonic as it does to visual description. We are told that, from within the room, the city gives off the overwhelming sonorous impression of a "film turned up too high." Meanwhile the narrator and her lover sit in silence in the "somber room" ("we didn't talk"), as if in a movie theater. Visually, the description of the quiet room interior is contrasted with the busy street scene outside, characterized by the shadows of people passing by, backlit by the sunlight, observed across the windowless blinds. This visual description recreates a cinematic situation: one in which moving negatives (shadows) are being projected (via sunlight) onto a screen (the blinds). Like film goers in a movie theater, the lovers cannot be observed by the crowds they observe moving across the "screen" of their room. This extended metaphor frames the narrator's evocation of memory as a sonorous cinematic chamber. Like a film at the cinema, memory can be replayed [Fig. 9].

In this Durassian space of cinematic memory, however, visual and aural impressions are not equal. While the visual evocation of the cityscape is represented in merely vague and negative terms, as a world of shadows, positive detail is added exclusively through the articulation of sounds. This dynamic demonstrates that sound is, after all, the more substantive element of this memory-space (the room in Cholen).

"The clacking of wooden clogs" is the first bit of local color that we are attuned to. The evocative rhythm and timbre of this sonic echo is uttered in the same sentence as the narrator's

exoticizing opinion about the “strident” quality of spoken Chinese. As in a colonial nostalgia film, non-European language is treated like a soundscape rather than a medium of communication. This notion is especially reinforced by the fact that both the sonic presence of traditional Chinese footwear and the sound of the Chinese language come to represent a single *mélange* of aural reference, testifying to the narrator’s *dépaysement*. Yet if we read against the grain of this passage, we can observe that, in foregrounding her intensely subjective reaction to her surroundings, the narrator is actually imbuing her narration with yet another kind of significance. What is being exoticized by the narrator’s comments is not Saigon itself or even Indochina but rather a specific diasporic enclave. The comment allows the narrator to locate, by negative inference, her own complex cultural and linguistic positionality. It also offers her a way to highlight the hybridity of her relationship and suggest something of its disorienting effect on her.

Like Duras herself, the narrator was born and raised in French Indochina and, like the author, grew up speaking Vietnamese as a primary language, alongside French. The narrator’s exoticization of Cholen does not assimilate her outright to a Eurocentric colonial outlook, as it may appear at first blush, but rather marks her difference as *une asiate*. This is the identity label that Madame Devries (Catherine Deneuve’s character) applies to herself in *Indochine* (see: Chapter 1), describing a French subject born and raised in Asia who may consider herself, at least in terms of culture and language (if not ethnicity) as Franco-Vietnamese, rather than strictly French. By evoking her exoticizing reaction to Cholen, the narrator not only defines her own liminal position within the colonial society of French Indochina she also frames her mixed relationship. Like many of the residents of Cholen, her lover is ethnically Chinese. Moreover, his family has a proprietary stake in the neighborhood, including the room itself which they own. The affair is largely contained within Cholen, the meeting place of their trysts. For the narrator and her lover,

Cholen becomes a liminal space defined by a disorienting, transporting, and unforgettable eroticism, which is both the subject matter and the style of the novel – its Durassian imprint.

In the film, the first tryst in Cholen is strongly marked by the soundscape suggested in the novel. The steady flow of sonic material from the exterior of the room into the interior seems to respond to both the subjectivity of the young girl and also to the time of day, both key components of the sonic evocation in the above passage. When she first enters the room the outside noise is minimal, reflecting the quiet time of day during the heat of the afternoon. Later as the city starts to come alive with the setting of the sun, the exterior soundscape takes on more prominence in the sound mix. During the initial moment of the lovers' sexual contact, a low drone is foregrounded, suggesting the intensity of the young girl's feeling. This general sound – more a noise than a note – continues throughout. Percussive hits are added as the level of intimacy progresses. Offsetting the extreme closeness of the moment is the voiceover narration, which adds a certain distance to the proceedings.

During their second sexual union, later in the day, the low resonating drone and the other musical accoutrements that accompanied their first time are no longer present. Instead, their growing desire is reflected in the Cholen soundscape, the volume of which increases until it pervades the senses, becoming erotic. Afterward, as the lovers lay in bed, they describe their shared experience as one of memory creation. "You see," he tells her, "you'll remember this afternoon all your life, even if you've forgotten my face, my name." After an interval allowing the outside soundscape to filter through, she responds, "Do you think I'll remember the room?"

While the first passage from *L'Amant*, analyzed above, is focused on evoking a soundscape, the second passage from the novel that I bring to the reader's attention describes the effect of listening to a musical performance. This musical performance becomes a major point of

connection between the novel and the film. The Chopin waltz that lies at the center of this literary description becomes a focal point for the movie, and for Yared's film score.

The passage takes place aboard an ocean liner taking the narrator from Indochina to France. Before relating this memory, the narrator tells the story of a passenger who, on a previous night, committed suicide by jumping into the sea. The music, a piece the narrator strongly identifies with, saves her from a similar fate by being "thrown across the sea" as if in her stead – like a form of sacrifice, or catharsis.

Another time, it was during the crossing of the same ocean, the night had already started, a Chopin waltz burst out in the grand salon of the main deck, a piece she knew in a secret and intimate way because she had tried learning it for months and had never managed to play it correctly, ever, because of which her mom had subsequently consented to her abandoning the piano. That night, lost among nights and nights, of this she was certain, the young girl had spent it on this boat and she had been there when it happened, this bursting [*éclatement*] of Chopin's music beneath the illumination of the shining sky. The wind didn't stir and the music reverberated throughout the black liner, like a judgment from heaven of which no one knew the meaning, like an order from God whose content was unknown. And the young girl arose as if she was going to commit suicide in turn, throw herself into the sea, and then she cried because she thought of that man of Cholen and she was suddenly not sure whether she had loved him with a love that she didn't see because it lost itself in history like water in sand and that she found only now at this instant of music thrown across the sea.[116]

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[116] "Et une autre fois, c'était encore au cours de ce même océan, la nuit de même était déjà commencée, il s'est produit dans le grand salon du pont principal l'éclatement d'une valse de Chopin qu'elle connaissait de façon secrète et intime parce qu'elle avait essayé de l'apprendre pendant des mois et qu'elle n'était jamais arrivée à la jouer correctement, jamais, ce qui avait fait qu'ensuite sa mère avait consenti à lui faire abandonner le piano. Cette nuit-là, perdue entre les nuits et les nuits, de cela elle était sûre, la jeune fille l'avait justement passée sur ce bateau et elle avait été là quand cette chose-là s'était produite, cet éclatement de la musique de Chopin sous le ciel illuminé de brillances. Il n'y avait

Once again, a room becomes a place associated with memory. In this case it is the grand salon of an ocean liner that transports the narrator back in time, and in so doing evokes the room in Cholen. Although this passage describes a musical performance, it is not the musical details of the Chopin waltz that are recounted but rather the sonic quality of its reverberation through the space of the ship, and beyond across the sea. The narrator's description of this musical reverberation creates a dialectic connection between interior and exterior space that brings the grand salon into relation with the open ocean, echoing the dialectic that obtains between the interior of the Cholen room and the external cityscape on the other side of the blinds. The ship salon and the Cholen room are brought into communication by way of memories rooted in sonic phenomena.

The musical reverberation is one that not only moves across space but also allows the narrator to traverse time in order to access the past. The Chopin waltz brings her back to her childhood days, when she practiced the piano, and in so doing evokes both her mother and, by implication, her childhood home in Indochina. The Chopin waltz is specifically the piece that ends her attempts at learning piano. As such it represents both an enigma, like a musical score that cannot be deciphered, and the sloughing off of childhood. Subsequently the music is connected with "that man of Cholen," a phrase that evokes both her lover and the Cholen room in which they spent time together.

Beyond eliciting memories of specific people, times, and places, the music threatens to bury the narrator in an oceanic feeling, signaled by her rhetorical inability to find a metaphysical

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pas un souffle de vent et la musique s'était répandue partout dans le paquebot noir, comme une injonction du ciel dont on ne savait pas à quoi elle avait trait, comme un ordre de Dieu dont on ignorait la teneur. Et la jeune fille s'était dressée comme pour aller à son tour se tuer, se jeter à son tour dans la mer et après elle avait pleuré parce qu'elle avait pensé à cet homme de Cholen et elle n'avait pas été sûre tout à coup de ne pas l'avoir aimé d'un amour qu'elle n'avait pas vu parce qu'il s'était perdu dans l'histoire comme l'eau dans le sable et qu'elle le retrouvait seulement maintenant à cet instant de la musique jetée à travers la mer." Duras, *L'Amant*, 137-138.

grounding in either "God," "history," or "love," all dizzily invoked in a sentence that threatens to run-on into oblivion before being recuperated by a return to "this instant of music," when the narrator once again finds herself. This moment of time regained by means of a piece of music recalls Proust's "Vinteuil Sonata," which Swann associates with his love for Odette, in the same way that the narrator associates Chopin's piece with her former lover. By specifying that the narrator's memory is activated by the music of Chopin, however, Duras connects the narrator to a celebrated composer, unlike Proust's quite fictional Vinteuil.

Chopin's piano works have a long association with "salon music" and he, personally, with both Parisian salons and (earlier in his life) salons in Warsaw, in his native Poland.[117] Besides naming an actual room, the "salon" represents a typically French form of sociability whose roots stretch back to the *ancien régime* but which developed in salient ways over the course of the 19th century.[118] As the eminent German musicologist Carl Dalhaus has written, putting the composer in historical context:

Chopin felt best understood, both as a pianist and as a composer, not in the concert halls where Liszt established his reputation, but rather in the aristocratic salons of Paris and London. We obscure the social character of Chopin's music when we feel an urge to defend it from the thoroughly appropriate term "salon music."…In the first half of the nineteenth century, the salon was on a par with the opera house and the concert hall as a crucial venue for the history of music

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[117] For more on Chopin's participation in salon culture, see: Jolanta T. Pekacz, "Deconstructing a 'National Composer': Chopin and Polish Exiles in Paris, 1831–49," *19th-Century Music* 24, no. 2 (2000): 161–72; Halina Goldberg, "Chopin in Literary Salons and Warsaw's Romantic Awakening," *The Polish Review* 45, no. 1 (2000): 53–64.

[118] For a cultural history of salons in France, see: Anne Martin-Fugier, *Les salons de la IIIe République art, littérature, politique* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).

…As music started to become (to stand Kant's dictum on its head) "more culture than delectation," it began to mirror the spirit of the philosophical and literary salon.[119]

Chopin's biography comes into the picture here because his solo piano works have come to be associated, more than that of any other composer, with the rarefied sociability of 19th century Parisian salons; both those for which he performed during his lifetime and later as these spaces have come to be represented on film. For example, Chopin is deployed diegetically several times in *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, a film contemporary to Annaud's *L'Amant* that responds to colonial nostalgia film in part by means of scenes featuring on and off-screen piano performances that represent Western pedagogy and Franco-Vietnamese transculturation (Chapter 3). The frequent use of Chopin's music in films already lends Duras' literary evocation of the composer in the novel a certain cinematic quality.

[119] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 147 – 148.

Michel Chion speculates that "[t]he music of Chopin is the easiest to introduce 'diegetically' in a film" because even an amateur performance by an actor can be effective. [120] As an example, he notes the touching moment in *Deer Hunter* (1979) when George Dzundza plays a Chopin nocturne at the bar, "spontaneously quieting his drunk and raucous friends that must soon part for Vietnam."[121] The connection between diegetic piano and amateur performance is also established in the both the novel and the film version of *L'Amant*, though in different ways. When she hears Chopin on that fateful ocean crossing, the young girl is leaving Indochina for France. The performance makes her recall playing the piece as an amateur, back in Indochina. In the film version, when she returns to Sadec, to her mother's house in the countryside, for the first time since the start of the affair, after the scene in which she is questioned about it by her mother and

Figure 10: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

older brother, her mother is shown playing a waltz on the piano [Fig. 10]. The house is being washed and is flooded with water in the process. The mother stops playing the piano to dance on the watery floor, setting up the subsequent association between diegetic piano music, amateur piano performance, and the ocean. Later in the film, when the young girl returns to the house again after the family has met her lover, her younger brother plays a waltz haltingly at the piano while, in another room, her older brother's interrogation over the affair takes a violent turn. In both

instances, the film establishes a painful association between a diegetic, amateur performance of a piano waltz (salon music) and intense, even violent feelings about the affair.

Like a sound bridge, the sound of her brother's diegetic performance in the later scene carries across the subsequent cut to a boat crossing the river, and to the young girl driving away in the lover's private car. This montage sequence issues in a dramatic scene of the mother standing on the dock in the pouring rain, watching as the huge ocean liner carries her oldest son back to France. The persistence of the piano music through this transition sequence is a foreshadowing of the dramatic piano scene during the young girl's own subsequent ocean crossing.

The choice of Chopin's music is significant not only because of specific qualities found in his music, but also because of the links it suggests that put into relation the protagonists of *L'Amant*, Duras herself, as well as the film composer, Gabriel Yared. A bit of biographical context pertaining to Chopin is required to bring this latent musical intertextuality to the surface. A canonic in music history, Chopin is known for his relationship with the writer George Sand. I will take a moment to explore the possibility of the existence of a latent connection, in the film, to both Sand and Chopin,

Figure 11: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

one that is never made explicit but that offers a series of striking historical precedents for particular aspects of the narrative related to gender and sexuality, a major topic of focus in *L'Amant*.

A special point is made, for example, in both the novel and film, of the girl's eccentricity in dress, and in particular of her donning a "man's hat" as part of her signature look. During a bus ride from Sadec to Saigon shown near the beginning of the film (starting around 11:40) the English language narration highlights the young girl's sartorial precocity [Fig. 11]. Its androgyny marks her off as different from all other women in the colonies, and even all other women period. It becomes the symbol of her individuation and even her very identity:

> I'm wearing my cabaret shoes, and my man's hat. No woman, no young girl wear's a man's fedora in that colony, in those days. No native woman either. That hat, I never leave it. I have that. This hat. That all by itself makes me whole. I'm never without it.

From its original association with Sarah Bernhardt, who donned a felt hat in Victorien Sardou's play *Fédora* (1882), to its adoption as a symbol of the "lesbian salon culture of Paris,"[122] the fedora has played a highly visible role in what has been labeled "Masculine of Center" fashion. Erin Rand defines the term "Masculine of Center," in its "most expansive sense," as a label for "a masculine-leaning aesthetic on a non-cis-male body, regardless of the identity of the wearer."[123]

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[122] "[T]he lesbian salon culture of Paris was epitomized by 'the cigarette, the monocle, the cropped short haircut, the tuxedo and the fedora hat.'" Citation from: Vicki Karaminas and Adam Geczy, *Queer Style* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 25; as quoted in: Erin J. Rand, "The Right to Be Handsome: The Queer Sartorial Objects of 'Masculine of Center' Fashion," *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 4, no. 3 (2017): 17

[123] Erin J. Rand, "The Right to Be Handsome: The Queer Sartorial Objects of 'Masculine of Center' Fashion," footnote 4. Also, see footnote 4 for the origin of, and contreversy regarding, the term.

When paired with George Sand's well-known propensity for donning men's fashion, the young girl's eclectic headpiece takes on powerful historical associations. And since the young girl of the novel (and film) is indeed a semi-autobiographical representation of Duras herself, we observe a significant triangulation between the character in the novel, the author of the novel, and the 19th-century author who first signed her male pen name with the novel *Indiana* (1832). *Indiana* offers certain resonances with *L'Amant*, in that it follows a female protagonist born on the French colony of Île Bourbon (today Réunion), takes place between France and the island colony, includes a mixed race affair (between Raymond de Ramière and Noun), and features "a complex fabric of images, motifs, and events associated with moving waters – a fabric which undergirds and informs the entire work."[124] Moreover, as authors, both Sand and Duras have an autobiographical streak, as evidenced by Sand's *Histoire de ma vie* (1855) and much of Duras' output, most conspicuously *L'Amant*.

In other ways too, Sand and Chopin's relationship seems to suggest reverberations in the novel. Though based in France, Chopin lived a life of exile, and his music was associated with a strong strain of nostalgia for his native Poland already during his lifetime. Ewelina Boczkowska summarizes the situation:

> Chopin's biographers have described many instances in which the composer's feelings of displacement and alienation triggered trauma and left him feeling haunted by his losses. Chopin complained frequently in his letters about being homesick and lonely without family and friends. As a Polish émigré in Paris, he

[124] James M. Vest, "Fluid Nomenclature, Imagery, and Themes in George Sand's 'Indiana,'" *South Atlantic Review* 46, no. 2 (1981): 46.

> also experienced horrific grief after the anti-Russian insurrection failed in early September 1831, resulting in the death of thousands of Poles and forcing many others into exile. Moreover, Chopin not only suffered from deplorable health throughout his life but also outlived his father, close friends, and pupils, whose deaths he mourned deeply. Finally, the end of his relationship with George Sand in 1847 stripped him of the stable family unit and home he had come to depend on. In a life marked by heartfelt absences and losses, ghosts of moments past, whether real or imagined, were bound to haunt the composer.[125]

For those familiar with these longstanding associations between Chopin and "ghosts of moments past," the use of his music in the novel and film to trigger an episode of an intense feeling of loss takes on particularly rich historical resonances, especially in light of his split with Sand late in life. This echoes the powerful strain of nostalgia present in the Durassian imaginary and its sonic manifestation in the film. There is also the issue of cultural hybridity: Chopin was half Polish and half French, and was marked by that transnational identity as an artist. This echoes the only partial identification of the protagonists of *L'Amant*, the young girl and her lover, with France. Moreover, the focus on Duras' childhood home in Indochina also resembles the importance Sand attached to her childhood home (and later residence) at Nohant, where a significant portion of her oeuvre was written, and in which Chopin composed several important musical pieces.

However intentional the connection between Chopin's biography and Duras' novel may or may not be – and it must be to a certain extent, given the explicit reference to the composer's music

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[125] Ewelina Boczkowska, "Chopin's Ghosts," *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 3 (2012): 205.

and its central place in the narrative – it remains tied to the medium of literature. In the film adaptation, however, the association with Chopin is not only consciously applied as a form of reference to the novel, it is also amplified by means of a subtle correspondence between the film's use of diegetic music and the (non-diegetic) film score.

Yared's music for *L'Amant* incorporates Chopinesque elements into its formal framework. Yared is not only a composer but also, like Chopin, a pianist. He recorded the piano part for the film and performs it still in live concerts of the film score. The piano is central both to the diegetic deployment of Chopin's music in the film (and the novel) and also to the score. The score, however, must also include the orchestra. Yared compromises between the orchestra and the piano by playing off of a dynamic familiar to concert audiences of classical music, that of a solo pianist engaged in a dialectic encounter with the orchestra. He does so in two primary ways: first, by evoking associations with the 19th-century piano concerto (Chopin wrote two piano concertos that are still in the repertoire) and second, by incorporating a highly ornamental piano gesture as a key leitmotif and thus alluding to the pianism of Chopin within the film score.

The entire narrative hinges on an intense burst of memory and emotion triggered by a diegetic performance of a seemingly spontaneous performance of Chopin on an ocean liner. As the boat is pulling away from harbor her lover's car is revealed, indicating that he is watching her departure. This moment of revelation is marked by a musical cue that features an ascending gesture in the piano. In this final moment of separation, the piano once again marks the presence of desire, but also that of memory. "He was there, that was him in the back," the narrator announces in past tense as a view of her lover's car unfurls before our eyes. She describes him as a "scarcely visible shape that made no movement." As in the description of the Cholen room, vision only partially renders human form. It is through sound that the true connection is made. In this case, it is the non-

diegetic sound of the film score, with its Chopinesque pianistic texture, rather than the Cholen soundscape, that represents memory. Both memories, however, are defined by a resonating "chamber," whether the room in Cholen or the interior of the automobile.

In terms of narrative, the Chopinesque piano music does even more than represent. It sets up the subsequent critical scene of the diegetic Chopin performance on the ship. The Chopin scene

Figure 12: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

is introduced by a dramatic cut of the ship cruising over the ocean – the Indian Ocean as the narrator specifies (evoking Duras' "India Song cycle") – from day to night. The moon is very bright and the young girl stands silently on the deck, contemplating the moonlight over the water. (The novel suggests a suicidal subcurrent to this scene.) Before the music starts, we hear the churning of the ship's engines, a steady low rumble reminiscent of the resonant drone from the scene of the first tryst in Cholen.

Here, the narrator evokes language from the book, specifying that the music had "burst" onto the scene and that its sound had come from the "main room" of the ship (called a "grand salon" in the novel). Once again, a resonating room defines a place of memory. As she nears the

room, and then enters, the sound of the diegetic performance of Chopin's waltz (Op. 69, No. 2), in the fateful key of B minor, comes to take on more sonic presence in the scene. Initially lit by the wan moonlight, she comes to be illuminated, if ever so slightly, by the warm light of the lamp sitting on the piano, which is reflected over her right shoulder on the polished surface of the grand salon [Fig. 12]. This subtle act of lighting connects even her visual presence on screen to the room interior, and to the pianistic performance that drew her into this dramatic décor. Obscured by shadow and camera angle, her face is suddenly revealed in a close up shot that displays her burst of emotion at the Chopin piano music. During the close up shot, her right ear is lit with the warm lamp light, a visual cue that connects her emotion to both the music and the diegetic space within which it emanates.

So far, we have analyzed the sonic content and intertextual associations of two film scenes: one of the soundscape from the Cholen room, and the other of the Chopin performance in the grand salon of the ocean liner. While the first scene represents the subtle use of sonic material in both the novel and film, the second scene considers the important role that music plays in this Durassian

Figure 13: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

narrative. Imitating the recursivity of Durassian narrative, the last scene I will analyze is the opening credits sequence. Although this is the first scene in the movie, because of its complex interweaving of sonic, musical, and vocal (narrative) material it is best saved for last. It is only in light of the proceeding analyses that focused either on preponderately sonic (Cholen) or specifically musical (Chopin) aspects of the film that an analysis of the opening scene, with its entanglement between all sonic categories, as well as its complex evocation of memory, can be fully appreciated.

The film opens with a representation of Duras in the act of writing the autobiographical novel on which the film is based. Necessarily, this involves the act of remembering. This meta-narrative opening credits scene bears a resemblance to the other major blockbuster released in 1992, *Indochine* (see: Chapter 1). It too features an opening sequence in which the film narrator's voice emerges from, and merges with, a musical theme. And it too features an iconic French star as its narrative voice: Catherine Deneuve. "Duras'" narration is voiced by Jeanne Moreau, who lends the voice-over part enough star power and artistic gravitas to make up for the lack of Duras' actual presence in the film. But there are important differences between these stars of the French screen. While Catherine Deneuve has been associated with big-budget, mainstream cinematic productions, Jeanne Moreau was more aligned the New Wave. Her star text, unlike that of Deneuve, was affiliated with more experimental productions. In one of her iconic scenes in Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (1958), she walks the Parisian streets to a film soundtrack improvised by Miles Davis. Like Duras, Moreau has a more subcultural appeal. Her voice in the film adds a much-needed patina of Durassian authenticity.[126] At the sonic level, the opening scene features the

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[126] On another note, the family servant in the film is played by Nguyễn Ánh Hoa, who also plays a house servant in Trần Anh Hùng's *L'Odeur* de la papaye verte. Thus, casting creates a link between two of the Colonial Nostalgia films covered by the dissertation. For more on *L'Odeur* and Nguyễn Ánh Hoa, see: Chapter 4.

emergence of the main leitmotif, presented initially as a rising flute line over the blank screen of the opening credits. The voiceover narration that eventually adds another sonic layer also demands that we listen before we look. The conspicuously tranquil and quiet sounds that emerge from the opening moments of the film, bordering on silence, pull the ear in, conditioning the audience to listen closely. At the visual level of cinematography and montage, the opening emerges from extreme closeups suggesting haptic contact with Duras "herself," including the whispered closeness of Moreau's voice. Shots of her skin and hair as well as close ups of her pen leaving written traces across the blank page represent the intimate relationality between artistic creation and memory [Fig. 14]. Entangled within a biographical whole that represents both Duras and her work, music, sound, and voice represent the emergence of memory as an acoustic sensorium.

There is an obvious psychologizing component to the way in which the acoustic sensorium

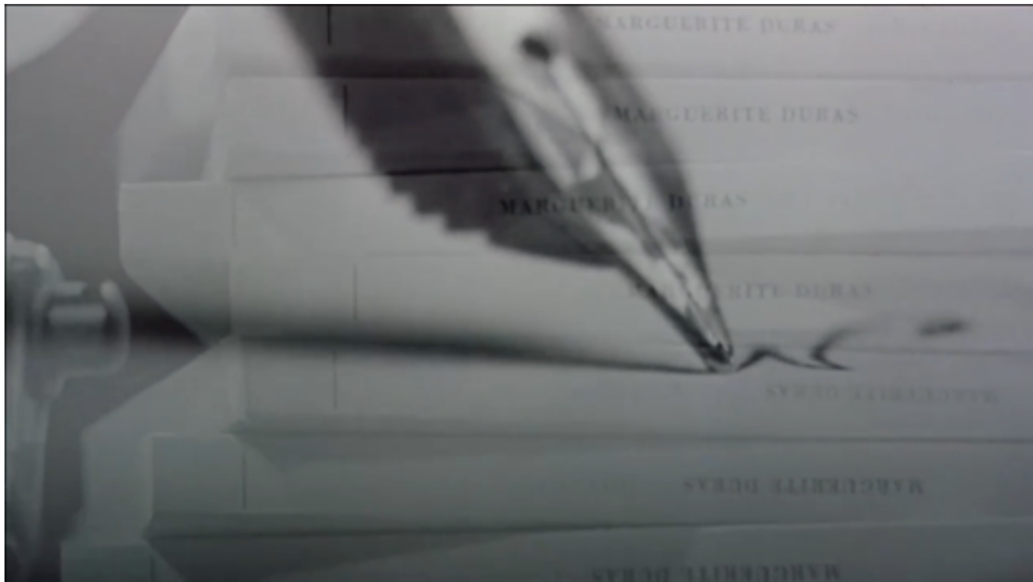

Figure 14: *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (AMLF, 1992).

is layered. Musical presences, at times pronounced, emerge unprompted out of the quiescent sonic backdrop, suggesting the spontaneous procession of memory from the subconscious (or forgetfulness) into the presence of consciousness (or remembering). These musical objects emerge

then fade, mimicking the dynamic psychological process involved in remembering and forgetting, or evoking memories as sounds that are then "quieted" by being written down.

Visually, the film starts in negative terms with opening titles over a black screen. The mood is first established by music that borders on sound. Over a hazy background of rolled percussion, more a sonic texture than a distinct musical layer, a flute line ascends. This sonic-musical gesture gives off a distinct resonance, as if within an echo chamber. A panning shot of a white fibrous texture – an extreme close-up later revealed to be the body of the author – is intoned by a single high note on the piano. The flute and the piano, whose timbres are sampled here in these opening gestures of the film, will structure the film score. Yet in these early moments, these main musical themes have not fully emerged. The score itself is undergoing an act of creation. There is no sense of rhythm or meter, but rather a fluid free-associative atmosphere from which various timbres emerge.

The amorphousness of the music is programmatic, as the abstract haptic close-ups of the head of "Duras" progressively reveal fugitive views of the author at work. The ascending flute line, which makes several conspicuous appearances throughout the opening scene, provides a musical through line to the disorienting opening shots. It imbues it with a sense of development, as each iteration is a slightly clearer articulation of what will become the score's main musical theme. A long, meandering variation of the rising flute theme prepares the entry of the voice-over narration, but its final cue is provided by an ornamental gesture in the piano, which balances the flute's ascending trajectory with a downward turn. Visually, this important sonic moment during which the voice emerges already intertwined with the piano is marked by a long shot of the photograph that forms a key point of contact between the film and the novel. The subtle growth and interaction between musical themes and voice suggest the complex process of the emergence of memory, first

in imperfect form, then developing into an articulate and clear theme which can be expressed not only through music but can also be projected through an interior monologue – a kind of externalized stream of consciousness that is located within the author's psychological interiority by means of its non-diegetic musical counterpoint. These intimate opening moments are supported by sonic elements through the sound of pen moving across page: the amplification of *écriture* and the sonic stamp of the film's Durassian character. In the opening scene, the instrumentation is only in part that of the traditional (Western) film orchestra. The timbre of the flute for example, suggests the kind of wooden instrument typical of East Asian musical traditions – known as the *sáo* in Vietnam – rather than the modern concert instrument; and there are other timbres suggestive of non-western music at play. The various percussive sounds that animate the opening scene, for example, are vaguely reminiscent of ancient Đong Sơn drums that have become a symbol of Vietnam.[127] In its reliance on percussion to establish a mood of implied exoticism, the opening of *L'Amant* is similar to that of Patrick Doyle's score for *Indochine*, released in the same year (see: Chapter 1). But the effect is more veiled here, less extroverted. This is an intimate and psychologized form of exoticism caught in the act of emerging from memory, not, as in Wargnier's film, a direct representation of grand, royal funerary ritual.

The intensely biographical framing of the film opening reflects the well-known autobiographical character of *L'Amant*, and Duras' oeuvre in general. It also adds a subtle biographical association with the film composer, Gabriel Yared. The multi-talented Franco-

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[127] "The term Dongson brings to mind the large bronze drums that have taken the name of Dongson drums. The typical drum…has become the symbol of Viet Nam and is displayed in many public places…For over 100 years from the first display of these drums at exhibitions in Europe, they were a mystery…Finally, in 1902, a book by Franz Heger located them as coming from Southeast Asia." Wilhelm G. Solheim, "A Brief History of the Dongson Concept," *Asian Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (1988): 23. See also: Xiaorong Han, "Who Invented the Bronze Drum? Nationalism, Politics, and a Sino-Vietnamese Archaeological Debate of the 1970s and 1980s," *Asian Perspectives* 43, no. 1 (2004): 7–33.

Lebanese composer, who had previously scored Bruno Nuytten's French heritage blockbuster, *Camille Claudel* (1989), is also a pianist. He personally performed the piano part for the recording of his score for *L'Amant*, and he has subsequently performed it in public performances of his film music. From this opening scene, the piano part comes to be associated with the voice-over narration in the film, and thus with Duras "herself." This connection is made even more apparent in the transitional moment between the opening scene (set in modern-day Paris) and the subsequent flashback that takes us back to colonial Indochina. During this brief interlude the screen goes black (again) so that only the voiceover remains, accompanied by Yared's piano. This non-diegetic moment of pianism thus subtly sets up the later narrative use of diegetic piano performance, when the young protagonist (representing Duras) experiences the dénouement of her character arc to the sound of a Chopin waltz. It also creates a subtle bond between the author of the narrative (Duras) and the author of the film score (Yared) that speaks to the central role of music in the film.

It also suggests an intertextual ambiguity that extends beyond the composer-author connection to encompass another composer-author pairing that is suggested already in the novel but is amplified in the film. One of the key points of this ambiguity in both the novel and the film is the Young Girl's dandyish decision to wear a (male) hat and belt, as featured in promotional material for *L'Amant*, including the soundtrack album. In the novel this sartorial quirk is treated as a symbol of the 15-year-old's precocity and independence. But the film version moves beyond this symbolization to invoke the author George Sand, Chopin's longtime romantic companion, as an autobiographical link. This link, made effective near the end of the film through a powerful moment of musical diegesis, is prepared for in the non-diegetic score by Yared, who creates significant leitmotivs out of Chopinesque gestures that amplify the music-historical association. The affiliation of Chopin's music with nostalgia for a Poland from which he was exiled in France

also has broader resonances with Duras' own story vis-à-vis French Indochina. Yared not only composed the film score with Chopinesque musical connections in mind but, as mentioned above, he personally performed the piano part for the soundtrack, creating a performative connection with Chopin, whose connection to the piano and an entire tradition of performance that has come to be known as "French pianism" is a canonic part of European cultural history.[128] Thus, themes of pianism, exile, and memory circulate in complex ways throughout the film, contributing intertextual layers that cannot be identified without reference to music, and specifically French music history.

The subtle deployment of music across the diegetic/non-diegetic divide is only one part of the sonic effectiveness of the film. Another non-musical sonic layer can be gleaned in the moments following the opening credit sequence. As the black screen fades to a wide landscape shot of the Mekong, a full orchestral texture marks the moment. The plenitude of its gratuitous harmonic effulgence is introduced just as soon as it is abandoned. The music, which had up to this point played the leading part, so to speak, now gives way to pure soundscape. Indeed, the ferry crossing scene is introduced by an intensely detailed rendering of sonic atmosphere – framed by a conspicuous absence of music. The lapping of the water and the dovetailed calls of various birds initially evoke the exuberant sense of space in the open marshland that characterizes the Mekong delta. Next, a chugging steamboat engine as well as the sounds of the boat's human clientele, and their animal cargo, come to the foreground. The dense tapestry of human voices speaking in Vietnamese is treated as background and not translated. Few words actually stick out, and they are imminently practical instructions having to do with the intense work of onloading and offloading

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[128] See: Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective*, second edition (Portland: Amadeus, 2003).

said cargo, including expressions such as "*từ từ thôi*" ["slow down"] and "*đưa xuống đi*" ["lower it"]. The sound of squealing pigs in particular adds a certain rural exoticism to the chaotic yet quotidian soundscape of the Mekong ferry.

Whatever may be said about Duras' novel, the film is not the book and its shortcomings have often been decried, not least by Duras herself. Siobhan Brownlie draws on Michael Riffaterre's intertextual notion of "ungrammaticality" in order to "rehabilitate" the film version of *L'Amant*, "dismissed as being conventional arty soft porn.[129] Brownlie uses Riffaterre's notion of the "ungrammatical" in rather broad terms to mean any "aspect that strikes the viewer as unusual or inexplicable." He contrasts the film's relative linearity in comparison to the book but also distinguishes the apparently straightforward filmic narrative with the "ungrammaticalities" of its narration/voiceover. These are revealed by the "discrepancy between the kind of language [utilized] in the characters' dialogues and in the voiceover narration and commentary." In contrast to the "simple and banal" dialogues "the voiceover is much more profound, providing insights into the characters and situations" and manifesting "a particular poetic quality with repetitions, and some unusual imagery and vocabulary."[130]

In this chapter, I analyzed the complex role of sound in the Durassian construction of memory evoked by Jean-Jacques Annaud's film, *L'Amant*. The memory evoked by the film is situated in a complex sonic positionality, in which the film's sound design tends to becomes musicalized and in which music itself is heard in intimate relationality to its sonic backdrop. Moreover, this close relationship between sound and music becomes intertwined with a layer of intertextual historical references.

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[129] Siobhan Brownlie, "Using Riffaterre to Rehabilitate 'The Lover,'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2008): 53.
[130] Ibid., 54.

In studies about Marguerite Duras,"Durassian" has become a well-worn adjective that purports to evoke essential properties of her oeuvre. What makes the descriptor particularly fascinating is that, situated between literature and film, it resists simple mediation. The impasse has typically been bridged, not least by Duras herself, by the idea that the primal source of her style (and therefore its intermedial unity) resides in her autobiography, the crux of which is her childhood in French Indochina. Whether referring to a writer, a screen writer, or a filmmaker, the term Durassian has come to symbolize, in France and abroad, not only an artistic style but also a particular kind of narrative.

One of the key characteristics of the "Durassian" is non-linear narrative. Not only chronology but even temporality become playfully embedded within formal structures that resemble musical form. One of the characteristics of "Durassian" form is repetition or recursion. In *L'Amant* this happens, among other places, in the frequent returns to the room in Cholen. We can see how Duras constructs her memory in literature by drawing on the metaphor of cinema, a medium given to repetition: to literaly being replayed. And this metaphor of cinema is itself substantialized by sonic means. It is the sonic that is the real presence in this memory while the visual is something shadow, insubstantial, marked by irreality and distortion.

As such, the Durassian moment of *L'Amant*, aligning with the other productions in the colonial nostalgia film genre treated in this dissertation, represents yet another attempt by the French culture industry in the early 1990s to recast the colonial past as a personal love story rather than a problematic political struggle. As in both *Indochine* (Chapter 1) and, in its own way, *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* (Chapter 4), the extreme intimacy and unrelenting subjectivity of the filmic representation in *L'Amant* sublimates the violence of colonial history into the Durassian

trope of transgressive eroticism between East and West.[131] It evokes these Durassian tropes, as we have seen and heard in this chapter, by representing Durassian memory as a series of resonating chambers that project echoes of the past.

[131] In this way it resembles the transgressive love affair between the wealthy Wetsernized composer Khuyen and the illiterate "native" Mui in Scent of Green Papaya. Both films hinge on the piano as an instrument of memory. See: Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

Echoes of Battle:

Schoendoerffer's Symphonic *Adieu* to Điện Biên Phủ

All the sounds have been reconstructed, reorchestrated to create this visual and auditory symphony which in the end the film is.[132]

In *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, the action hero and Vietnam War veteran, Rambo (named after Arthur Rimbaud), is given a piece of parting advice by his well-meaning commander before being dropped into post-war Vietnam on a P.O.W. rescue mission: "I want you to try to forget the war, remember the mission. The old Vietnam's dead." Rambo's cool retort embodies what a number of Vietnam veterans must have strongly felt when the film was released in 1985, a decade after the war's end: "If I'm alive it's still alive, ain't it?" Rambo's words reveal a painful sense of subjectivity, framed by a veteran's perspective of still living with memories of the war, a perspective amplified by Jerry Goldsmith's explosive film score.

The Vietnam War was known as "television's war" due to the medium's ability to broadcast on-location and in real-time. Following the war, however, it was film's turn to make

[132] "Tous les sons ont été reconstitués, réorchestrés pour créer cette symphonie visuelle et auditive qui est la finalité de ce film." Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu: de la bataille au film* (Paris: Fixot/Lincon, 1992), 128.

viewers relive wartime experience. Whereas television had humanized the war by literally "bringing it home," framing it within the domestic confines of a television set, film would project its (re)vision of the war onto the larger-than-life monumentality of the big screen. The main difference between representations of Vietnam on wartime television and in post-war film, however, is not merely one of scale. The difference is not visual at all, in fact, so much as it is audible; and more specifically, musical.

Post-war films have at their disposal a wide range of expressive and narrative means developed through the long tradition of classic film scoring practice, as described by Claudia Gorbman – an entire arsenal of musical techniques that television broadcasts usually cannot deploy to the same degree.[133] While the images in these films are necessarily bifurcated, flashing back between a present and a past divided into wartime and post-war periods, film music allows echoes of the past to continue to resonate into the present, bridging the two.

At times the resonance is very subtle. On the visual level, Peter Hyams' 1988 film *Presidio* takes place entirely in contemporary (post-war) San Francisco. Yet Bruce Broughton's score resonates with a more profound continuity that is echoed in the script, as we come to discover that a murder committed on a military base is both perpetrated and investigated by characters who are Vietnam War vets; and that therefore, in a sense, the war is not over but has merely returned home. During the opening credits, music establishes a palpable connection between the on-screen present and the off-screen past by the way in which the diegetic sound of a military marching band is framed by continuous and eerie non-diegetic underscoring, suggesting that military themes are not only present but that there is more to them than meets the eye.

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[133] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London/Indianapolis: BFI Publishing/Indiana University Press, 1987).

While the Vietnam War film has long been an institution in the US, in France there was a moratorium on films dealing directly with the aftermath of the First Indochina War, with rare exceptions. The mainstay director of the French "Vietnam" war film in the ensuing decades was Pierre Schoendoerffer. Rambo's line – "If I'm alive it's still alive, ain't it?" – could reasonably apply to this "veteran" filmmaker, himself a product of the First Indochina War. Schoendoerffer got his professional start as a filmmaker for the French army during the battle of Điện Biên Phủ. This early experience has lent Schoendoerffer's films an aura of authenticity. Unlike the films of some other veterans of the war, such as Claude Bernard-Aubert's pessimistic 1956 film *Patrouille de choc* (originally titled *Patrouille sans espoir*), of which more below, Schoendoerffer's films glorify the gritty heroism of French soldiers rather than critique the colonial project. Like the Rambo franchise, they tend to imply that the war could have been won had soldiers been better supported by the upper brass.

Schoendoerffer's 1992 blockbuster *Điện Biên Phủ* is a culmination of that nostalgic vision. Điện Biên Phủ is the site of the final battle of the First Indochina War. It took place between March 13th and May 7th, 1954 and reprents a spectacular French loss which resulted in the death and capture of thousands of colonial troops. The battle led directly to the end of French colonial presence in Southeast Asia, and can thus be thought of as a pivot between the colonial and the postcolnoial period in Vietnam. Music, more specifically symphonic music, plays a key role in the film's representational schema of the battle. And it does so by design. "When the screenplay was written," Schoendoerffer writes (he wrote the screenplay), "even before filming began, we recorded the music. Georges Delerue composed a concerto, the 'Concerto de l'adieu,' magnificent,

foretelling what would be the soul of the film."[134] It is important to mention here that Delerue had a close connection to the Vietnam War film genre through his work on Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), discussed later in this chapter.

Schoendoerffer defines the allegorical elements of Delerue's score, which is used both in a non-diegetic way (like a regular film score) and within the film's diegesis or narrative. Schoendoerffer praises not just the score but also the sound design, which are closely aligned. Then he takes the metaphor a step further and characterizes the entire film, both its visual and auditory aspects, as a "symphony":

A concerto is a dialogue between an instrument and an orchestra. In the film the instrument, a first violin, a woman, is the voice of France; the orchestra of Hanoi is Vietnam. Delerue's music, noble, rigorous, charged with restrained emotion, itself participates in a more vast concerto, a dialogue with the terrible percussion music that is the sound and fury of war. I know that the sound design is exceptional, unlike any other. All the sounds have been reconstructed, reorchestrated to create this visual and auditory symphony which in the end the film is.[135]

The idea that the film as a whole is a "symphony" is a loaded one. In this chapter, I account for and analyze the film's sonic and musical complexity by recontextualizing the score and sound design within the director's and composer's wider network of collaboration – connected to a common background of filmmakers impacted by military experience in Vietnam – and treating it

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[134] "Quand le scénario a été écrit, avant même de tourner, nous avons enregistré la musique. Georges Delerue a composé un concerto, le "Concerto de l'adieu," magnifique, prémonitoire de ce que devait être l'âme du film." Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu*, 127.

[135] "Un concerto est un dialogue entre un instrument et un orchestre. Dans le film l'instrument, un premier violon, une femme, est la voix de la France; l'orchestre de Hanoi est le Viêt-nam. La musique de Delerue, noble, rigoreuse, chargée d'émotion retenue, participe elle-même à un concerto plus vaste, dialogue avec la terrible musique de percussion que sont les bruits et les fureurs de la guerre. Je sais que la bande sonore du film est exceptionelle, à nulle autre pareille. Tous les sons ont été reconstitués, réorchestrés pour créer cette symphonie visuelle et auditive qui est la finalité de ce film." Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu*, 127 – 128.

as an aspect of their respective filmmaking/compositional styles. I then offer a historical contextualization of French symphonism that can add important layers of understanding to Schoendoerffer's fetishism of the "symphony" in regard to the film. Following this historical foray, I interrogate the music's actual role in the film through analysis of key scenes. Along the way, I offer a decentering reassessment of Schoendoerffer as the preeminent filmmaker of the First Indochina War and the ideological bias behind his supposedly objective representation of (filmic) memory.[136] Before delving into the score itself, we should start at the beginning, with the paratextual effect of the film's title, because it reveals the thin line between authenticity and inauthenticity that haunts Schoendoerffer's film. Its matter-of-fact title – *Điện Biên Phủ*, a Vietnamese place name and the name of the famous battle – evokes an aural sense of authenticity through its implied Vietnamese pronunciation. Unlike Wargnier's *Indochine*, one of the other nostaliga productions filmed in Vietnam at that time, Schoendoerffer's film is identified by a native place name – in Vietnamese, "Indochina" is called Đông Dương.

[136] For more on Schoendoerffer's status as the leading French filmmaker of the First Indochina War, see: Kathryn Edwards, "Missing in Action: The Indochina War and French Film," in *Contesting Indochina: French Remembrance between Decolonization and Cold War* (University of California Press, 2016), 167 – 207.

As echoed in the film's promotional material, the opening credits take pains to spell out the original Vietnamese place name of Điện Biên Phủ, including the Vietnamese diacritics, rather than use a French transliteration. The name means "heavenly land." During the title sequence the name appears superimposed over the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra, revealed through a slow fade in [Fig. 15]. But the film's titular gesture is more than just visually significant. At the sonic level it is overlayed with the orchestra tuning up, a diegetic gesture half-way between music

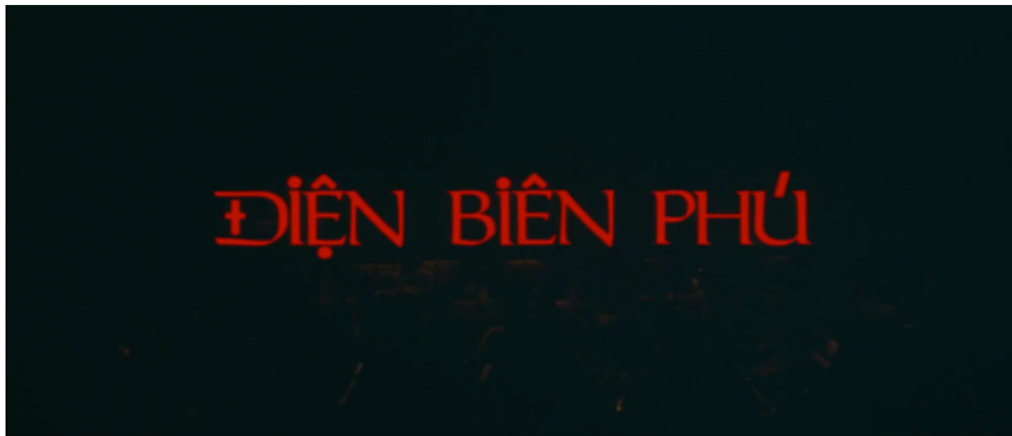

Figure 15: *Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

and sound design. Tuning also symbolizes the behind-the-scenes or "backstage" quality that the film tries to convey in regard to the battle: just as the film claims to represent not only the battle itself but also its "background," including the people betting on its outcome in Hanoi (itself symbolic of corrupt distant officials profiting from the war), so the orchestra is seen not only playing harmoniously in performance but is revealed in this pre-performance moment. Tuning up is also necessary for the players in an orchestra to be able to harmonize with each other and, in this case, with the soloist. Because the players in the film are Vietnamese and the soloist European, the process of tuning thus takes on a metaphorical aspect as a symbol of Franco-Vietnamese "harmony."

The film's "symphonic" quality is announced in this way together with its name. But there is a slight problem. Despite the presumably authentic gesture of trying to represent the Vietnamese language, one of the accent marks in the title shot is incorrect. Visually, the mistake may appear insignificant but its sonic difference sets the tone (so to speak) for the film's nostalgic distortion of the history that it purports authentically to recreate. The Vietnamese spelling of the place name is *Điện Biên Phủ*. The final word should have the *dấu hỏi* tone over it, the one that looks like a tiny question mark over the last letter (*ủ*), rather than the *dấu* sắc that looks like the *accent aigu* (*ú*) – which is what is displayed on the screen. The key difference between the two versions resides in the tonal character of the Vietnamese language, in which tone indicates not only a melodic movement in pitch but also corresponds to meaning. [137] The misplaced tone mark is like a wrong note in a musical score (or a wrong accent mark in French), one that will inevitably reproduce itself and affect each subsequent performance, or in this case each viewing of the film. The sonic and visual slippage between *Phủ* and *Phú* is underscored (quite literally) by a film that Schoendoerffer describes, once again, as "a visual and auditory symphony." The importance of titles to the film should not be underestimated. Delerue's concerto has no text apart from the title, *Concerto de l'adieu*.

The slippage between the ostensible authenticity of the film – associated with Schoendoerffer's personal experience of war plus the production being shot near the original scene of battle – and its audiovisual representation of Vietnam is often at odds. In *Phantasmic Indochina*, Panivong Norindr offers a sustained critique of the film's sentimentality, which is tied to Schoendoerffer's overreliance on the symphonic quality of the score. "[L]ike the music," he writes,

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[137] The Sino-Vietnamese word "phú" can mean "rich," though it is typically only used in this way as part of the compound "phú quý." When deployed in the place name Điện Biện Phủ, in lieu of the final word, it has no meaning. In this case it creates a similar impression that a misspelled place name would in English.

"Schoendoerffer only succeeds in evoking a sentimental war story."[138] Norindr understands the *Concerto de l'adieu* as a symptom of the film's anti-intellectual stance, noting that *Điện Biên Phủ* "fails to engage viewers…because of its filmic unself-consciousness, its inability to question its structuring vision, its will to contain the heterogenous and bind the subject." "It simply memorializes," he adds, "without addressing larger political issues"; noting, in passing, that this uncritical stance "also pervades Régis Wargnier's *Indochine*" and "Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Lover*."[139]

Norindr further critiques the French government's support for the production, seeing in it a form of influence that "transcends the realm of financial consideration" and extends into "the realm of affect."[140] He notes Schoendoerffer's participation in the historic visit of President Mitterrand to Vietnam in 1993 (the first by a Western head of state) during which the French delegation visited the site of Điện Biên Phủ. Days after his return from Vietnam, Mitterrand inaugurated the Mémorial des Guerres en Indochine.[141]

The significance of Schoendoerffer's presence, next to Mitterrand, should not be lost to the public. It confers a certain (political) prestige upon Schoendoerffer's movie. Furthermore, the invitation to join the presidential party at the site of the battle bestows an official stamp of

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[138] Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997), 146.

[139] Ibid., 149.

[140] Ibid., 150.

[141] The Mémorial des Guerres en Indochine is a military cemetary and monument dedicated to the memory of those who "died for France" mostly during the First Indochina war. It is located in Fréjus, France, on a site that once housed members Indochinese troops that fought on behalf of France during the First World War. It was inaugurated on February 16, 1993 by François Mitterrand.

authenticity on the movie, sanctioning its legitimacy. Dien Bien Phu, then, appears to be a fitting tribute, a filmic memorial to a traumatic historical past.[142]

Norindr points to the various terms that have been used to characterize the documentary qualities of the film, including "docudrama," "film-vérité," and "fresque historique,"[143] but he thinks that the apparent realism of the film is belied by the director's "totalizing ambition," noting that Schoendoerffer "wrote the screenplay, the dialogue, and the commentary," besides which he "also narrates the voice-over."[144] Norindr ultimately considers Schoendoerffer's approach "clichéd" and denounces the film's "monologic perspective."[145]

In my view, it is precisely the centrality of the film score, in its intimate relationality to the mise en bande, that offers an overture to other "voices" besides Schoendorffer's own, starting with that of Delerue. While I agree with Norindr that, at a certain basic level, the score is "sentimental," I also think more can be said about the complex role of that musical sentimentality within the film considered as an audiovisual "symphony."

Schoendoerffer's first meeting with Delerue is related to his previous film, *Le Crabe-Tambour* (1977), for which Delerue's wife, Colette Landoz, was an editor.[146] *Le Crabe-Tambour* itself cuts often between various places and time periods, including Indochina, so that the role of Delerue's score in suturing the juxtaposed montage in *Điện Biên Phủ* may be thought of as informed by this earlier collaboration. At the very least, Delerue could not have been a stranger to

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid., 145.

[144] Ibid., 147.

[145] Ibid.

[146] "[Schoendoerffer:] Je l'avais rencontré au moment du *Crabe-Tambour* où sa femme Colette était monteuse." [I met him during *Crabe-Tambour* for which his wife Colette was an editor.] As quoted in: Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, *Georges Delerue: Une Vie*, 92.

Schoendoerffer's way of using music to provide continuity for montage given Philippe Sarde's César nominated score for *Le Crabe-Tambour*.

Another "veteran" filmmaker, the cinematographer Raoul Coutard, participated in the production of *Le Crabe-Tambour*. As mentioned in the Introduction, Coutard is closely affiliated with the improvisatory visual style of French New Wave but he also shares with Schoendoerffer a common background in French Indochina.[147] Before becoming affiliated with the New Wave he spent over a decade as a photojournalist in Vietnam and started his cinematography career with Schoendoerffer's *Le Passe du Diable* (1958). The collaboration between Coutard and Schoendoerffer hints at the presence of a broader network of filmmakers connected by their experience in Indochina as well as the French New Wave, with which Delerue was himself associated as a film composer. But Delerue also had experience writing for soundtracks that frame memory of the Vietnam War from a veteran's perspective.

Several years before working on *Điện Biên Phủ*, Delerue scored Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), a film that was itself based on the director's experiences during the Vietnam War, and for which he earned the 1987 Oscar for Best Director. The film also garnered an Oscar for Best Sound. Like Schoendoerffer, Stone not only directed but also wrote the screenplay for his film. Delerue's experience working with Stone prefigured his work on *Điện Biên Phủ*, especially the importance of writing a score with gravitas, which went against the grain of Delerue's usual association with

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[147] Schoendoerffer got his start as a filmmaker as a cameraman for the French army during the First Indochina War. He spent 1952-1954 in Indochina, including a significant period of time in the battle of Điện Biên Phủ. For more on Schoendoerffer's background experience in Indochina, see: Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu: de la bataille au film* (Paris: Fixot/Lincon, 1992); Kathryn Edwards, "Missing in Action: The Indochina War and French Film," 167 – 207.

a lighthearted musical style, such as for Truffaut's *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960), *Jules et Jim* (1962), and Philippe de Broca's *L'Homme de Rio* (1964).[148]

In Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), for example, Delerue was called on to write only the lilting *Valse du café du fleuve* and did not (contrary to what is sometimes said) contribute to the astringent modernist score by the Italian composer Giovanni Fusco (frequent collaborator of Michelangelo Antonioni). He did, however, direct the recording session – as he had done for all of Resnais' films from 1955.[149] *Hiroshima mon amour* also reveals another early connection between Delerue and Indochina, because it is an early cinematic triumph for Marguerite Duras, who wrote the screenplay. Delerue thus early on in his career collaborated with one of the other key voices of French national memory of Indochina (besides Schoendoerffer).

Schoendoerffer's reputation as *the* filmographer of French military memory in Indochina comes from the 1960s, with the release of *La 317ème section*, which garnered the best screenplay prize at Cannes in 1965, and was reinforced by his Best Documentary Oscar win for *Anderson's Platoon* in 1968.[150] Kathryn Edwards specifies that the earlier film "catapulted its director to a position of authority on the war" thus exalting him above the competition of other "veteran" *auteurs*. It was against the background of Schoendoerffer's longstanding authority (garnered in the 1960s and developed through his subsequent oevure) that *Điện Biên Phủ* was produced. By the

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[148] On this association, see: Jean-Pierre Bleys, "Entretien avec Georges Delerue: Une prédilection pour la valse, la mélodie..." *Positif*, July-August 1993, 140-147.

[149] Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, *Georges Delerue: Une Vie* (Paris: Editions Jean Curutchet, 1998), 42.

[150] Both films were shot in the former territory of French Indcochina. The former, *La 317ème section*, based on a novel by Schoendoerffer, takes place (and was shot) in Cambodia, with a platoon comprised of French and Montagnard forces (including a former member of the German Wehrmacht). *Anderson's Platoon* is the result of Schoendoerffer being embeded with an American military until during the Vietnam War, also called the Second Indochina War, thus "reprising" his role as a military cameraman in the context of a military confilct that was itself seen as a continuation of the colonial confilct waged by the French. Although *La 317ème section* is not a documentary it is filmed as if it were a documentary. Both films thus presage the "docu-drama" quality (as Schoendoerffer called it) of *Điện Biên Phủ*.

1990s, Schoendoerffer had long become a symbol of national heritage and one of the prime shapers in France of its colonial nostalgia, particular when it came to military themed films.

Surprisingly, there are still some who argue, following Schoendoerffer's lead, that his oeuvre is not in the least ideological or political. In his biography of Delerue, Curuchet points to the "musical" quality of *Điện Biên Phu* and its importance in depicting the battle as a "tragic" event. Seemingly unaware of the implied contradiction, he then also asserts that the film is without bias:

> *Diên Biên Phú* is a musical film…[Schoendoerffer] wanted to give the rout the aspect of a tragic symphony. Thus, effectively handling parallel montage, he organizes his film between the calm rehearsals of a concert at the Grand-Theater of Hanoi (where a Parisian violinist will come to give a recital before the diplomatic community) and the growing cruelty of combat at the front, some hundreds of kilometers away. A settling of scores? Not really. Schoendoerffer tends to say that he did not want to make a militant, engaged film, still less a film drowned in any bias whatsoever.[151]

On the contrary. Schoendoerffer's approach to filmmaking as memory can be characterized as not only informed but also singularly motivated by ideological and political concerns. As such

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[151] "*Diên Biên Phú* est un film musical. Schoendoerffer…a voulu donner à la reconstitution de la déroute l'aspect d'une symphonie tragique. Ainsi, maniant efficacement le montage parallèle, il organise son film entre les calmes préparatifs d'un concert au Grand-Théatre de Hanoï (où une violoniste parisienne viendra donner un récital devant la communauté diplomatique) et la cruauté grandissante des combats, au front, à quelques centaines de kilomètres de là. Règlements de comptes? Pas vraiment. Schoendoerffer tend à expliquer qu'il n'a pas voulu tourner un film militant, engagé, encore moins noyé dans des partis pris quelconques." Ibid., 92.

it is better understood within the paradigm of the Cold War dialectic. The sense of rapprochement invoked by *Điện Biên Phủ* being shot on location in Vietnam – necessitating active collaboration between the French and Vietnamese governments – may seem to undermine this view; but it can be understood to embody the "post-Socialist" order in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and Vietnam's own economic liberalization policy of "Renovation," *Đổi Mới*, instituted in 1986.[152]

Nevertheless, despite certain overtures to rapprochement diplomatically signaled by the film, it should be understood in counterpoint to Schoendoerffer's well-attested ideological stance, which was motivated by what the director called a "*devoir de mémoire*" [duty to remember]. Kathryn Edwards, a specialist in French historical remembrance, reminds us that "Schoendoerffer played a key role in defining the anticommunist narrative through his novels, films, and public commentary." Like the director himself, she traces the origin of both his ideological position and his filmmaking style in his personal experience of war:

> Schoendoerffer volunteered as a cinematographer with the French forces (the Service presse information) and was taken prisoner at Dien Bien Phu. Although he had filmed combat during the siege, he had destroyed his reels rather than allow them to fall into the hands of the Viet Minh. He remained in captivity for four

[152] Đổi Mới introduced free-market reforms that have had a major, long-term impact on the Vietnamese economy. It coincides with diplomatic efforts to normalize relations with Western countries, including France (normalized in 1993) and the US (1994). For an account of the early years of the implementation of Đổi Mới and its specific policies, see: Brian Van Arkadie and Raymond Mallon, "The Introduction of Doi Moi" in *Viet Nam — a Transition Tiger?* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2004), 65–78; for the impact of Đổi Mới on the film industry in Vietnam and gender representation, see: Annette Hamilton, "Renovated: Gender and Cinema in Contemporary Vietnam," *Visual Anthropology* 22, no. 2–3 (March 30, 2009): 141–54.

months and after his release stayed on as a press correspondent. His wartime experiences strongly colored his subsequent filmmaking.[153]

It should come as no surprise that Schoendoerffer's anti-communist sentiment and its relationship to his wartime experience is a key part of the narrative of *Điện Bien Phủ*. But we can gain a deeper appreciation of this angle if we consider the film's ideological stance as part of Schoendoerffer's insistence that the film is a "symphony." One of the obvious consequences of treating the totality of the film as a symphony is that non-Western music, for example Vietnamese music is left out – which is not the case in any of the other nostalgia films discussed in this dissertation. Shoendoerffer's obsessive idea of the "symphony" has repercussions beyond the overtly ideological function of framing the battle of Điện Biên Phủ as a tragic loss.

In order to interrogate these repercussions, I offer a broad outline of the historical development of symphonism in the French context, a view that includes early French encounters with Vietnamese musical tradition, and also overlaps with the early history of film music. In brief, the composer of the very first film score in history, for the 1908 historical drama, *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*, as well as the very first successful French symphony, the so-called "Organ" Symphony, is one and the same: Camille Saint-Saëns. This globe-trotting composer, who died in Algiers in 1921, also traveled to Indochina (specifically Vietnam) where he not only witnessed at least one performance of traditional Vietnamese music but also incorporated Vietnamese instruments into an opera he orchestrated while there. I unpack this nexus of historical influences

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[153] Edwards, "Missing in Action: The Indochina War and French Film," 175.

in order to unveil a richer understanding of the ideological background at play in Schoendoerffer's eager embrace of the symphony as a model for historical representation.

The rise of the French symphony is linked to the rise of a particularly chauvinistic form of French nationalism. From the 1880's on, French composers began focusing on writing symphonies. This was unusual because of the relative neglect of that genre in France compared to the attention that was lavished on opera. Camille Saint-Saëns completed his "Organ" Symphony in 1886. That same year Lalo and d'Indy finished symphonies of their own. 1888 saw the completion of Cesar Franck's Symphony in D minor. Ernest Chausson finished his Symphony in B flat in 1890, and Paul Dukas completed his Symphony in C in 1896.[154] This sudden proliferation of symphonic output by French composers was unprecedented. It is not that French symphonies did not exist before this but they were not successful and the symphony had come to be thought of as a distinctly German genre. In fact the symphony only receives popular support in France when it comes to be understood as a form of cultural competition against German dominance.

This comes about in reaction to the Franco-Prussian War, the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, and the related advent of the Paris Commune, all of which took place during the brief two-year span, 1870 – 1871. An upsurge of nationalist sentiment was the result of these events, encapsulated by the idea of revenge [*revanche*] against the new nation of Germany. [155] Delegations were sent to Prussia to study the schooling system so that its benefits might be adopted in France and during this frenzy to learn from German models Republican leadership itself looked to the

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[154]Andrew Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle: Style, Culture, and the Symphonic Tradition* (PhD diss., McGill University, 2008): 6-19.
[155]Jean-Yves Mollier and Jocelyne George, *La plus longue des républiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 8-224. René *Bidouze, La Commune de Paris telle qu'en elle-même: Une révolution sociale aux avant-postes de la République (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 2004). Raoul Girardet, Le Nationalisme Français (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966).*

symphony as the German musical genre *par excellence*, in a process Michael Strasser has dubbed the "Musical Politics of *L'invasion germanique*."[156]

Another factor contributed a fertile ground for the promotion of French symphonies, namely the proliferation of orchestral concerts in Paris. Until 1861, Paris had only one concert series where symphonies could be heard in full on a regular basis, the Concerts du Conservatoire. Founded in 1828 (auspiciously in the wake of Beethoven's death), the Concerts du Conservatoire became synonymous with the German classics (symphonies). But there was a problem of access. Tickets were prohibitively expensive and sold exclusively by the season. Before the mid-century not many people in Paris had regular access to orchestral music concerts. In 1861, however, the first of a string of orchestral concert series marketing to a broad clientele came into existence: the Concerts Pasdeloup (1861), followed by the Concerts Colonne (1873) and Concerts Lamoureux (1881).[157]

French enthusiasm for the music of Richard Wagner, or *Wagnérisme*, also had a hand in the new surge of French symphonic composition. Following his death in 1883, Wagner's music was taken to be the model of musical "progress" by Republican idealogues in France, "to the extent that his music [exhibited][...][a] high-minded tone, extreme chromaticism, and innovative dramatic form."[158] Wagner was a German import. Informed by this newfound attitude of respect for the genre, French symphonists of the late 19th century drew avidly on Wagnerian techniques, adapted from his music dramas. Gerald Turbow considers the 1880s as the high point of

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[156] Michael Strasser, "The Société Nationale and Its Adversaries: The Musical Politics of *L'Invasion germanique* in the 1870s," *19th-Century Music vol. 24, no. 3* (Spring, 2001): 225-251.
[157] Andrew Deruchie, *The French Symphony*, 8-12.
[158] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2009), 509.

Wagnerism in France – and not only for music.[159] The *Revue wagnérienne,* as much a literary as a musical journal, was published in the middle of the decade.[160]

Republican leaders began to insist that "art should aspire to universal significance" and that the symphony was the perfect vehicle for this aspiration because it was "the purest and most abstract form of music."[161] Unlike opera, the content of a symphony could not be revealed by its text, because it had no text, hence its perceived *universalisme*. The French government went so far as to sponsor a competition for the best French symphony.[162] Ironically, the first truly successful French symphony that fulfilled the hopes and dreams of French composers and government administrators in the later part of the 19th century, and that lives on in the standard symphonic repertoire (and film soundtracks) to this day, was commissioned not by any French organization but by the Philharmonic Society of London.

In 1885, the directors of the London Philharmonic Society decided to invite a French composer to participate in the following season. Saint-Saëns was their fourth choice.[163] The commission did not specifically request the composition of a symphony. The directors of the Philharmonic Society wanted the composer to play one of his own concertos (new or old). But Saint-Saëns saw this as an opportunity to secure a symphonic commission. Though it received a lukewarm response in London, where the premiere took place on May 19, 1886, Saint-Saëns' "Organ" Symphony was enthusiastically received at its Paris premiere, by the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*, eight months later.[164] Such was the French demand for the work that a third

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[159]Gerald D. Turbow, "Art and Politics: Wagnerism in France," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics,* ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 134-166.
[160]Ibid., 160.
[161]Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 520.
[162]Ibid.
[163]Deruchie, *The French Symphony*, 36.
[164]Ibid., 42.

performance was added after the scheduled two.[165] The critical and commercial success of Saint-Saëns' symphony was a cue to other French composers to try their hand at the genre, which resulted in a renaissance of French symphonic composition.

The same years that witnessed the commission and premiere of Saint-Saëns' "Organ" Symphony witnessed the unprecedented rise in France's prestige on the international stage. For the first time since before the Franco-Prussian War, France was in a position of power. Its colonial expansion was proceeding at such a pace that, around 1886, the reach of the French empire was second only to that of the British empire, and it was experiencing a degree of political stability not seen since the Second Empire. These two factors contributed towards the crafting of a new, more chauvinistic and more frankly racist nationalism than seen in previous decades. As Jean-Yves Mollier describes it:

France of 1885-1887 occupied an important place in Europe. Respected and in the process of possessing a colonial empire comparable to that of England, it was proceeding with adjustments that would revenge the defeat of 1870[...]This reestablishment as (colonial) expansion of territory contributed towards the welding together of the French people despite their differences. The nationalism which evolved in these years[...]created new ideologies, more or less racist, chauvinist, and above all ultra-patriotic, for those with susceptible mentalities.[166]

Given these historical associations, Schoendoerffer's symphonic metaphor for *Điện Biên Phủ* takes on a deeply problematic turn. It would be hard to impute intentionality on the part of the director in terms of the symphonic associations outlined above or, as we will shortly see, to the composer. After all, films that rely on symphonic scores are nothing new. This is simply in line

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[165]Ibid., 44.
[166]Jean-Yves Mollier and Jocelyne George, *La plus longue des républiques*, 117-118.

with classical Hollywood practice. Yet it is not insignificant, in the case of the obsessional nature of Schoendoerffer's insistence on the symphonic quality of the film, and the prominent role of symphonic music in its narrative, that the symphony can also be associated with nostalgia for a specific period of French colonial expansionism in the late 19th century, the very period during which the French military was making inroads into the territory of present-day Vietnam, often justifying its intrusion in terms of the *mission civilisatrice*.

It is significant, in light of these connections, that Saint-Saëns actually visited and even composed music in Indochina in 1895. He even spent time on the island of Côn Sơn, infamous for its prison colony. This is in fact the same prison in which Camille does time in *Indochine*. Except this Camille (Saint-Saëns) was not there to do hard time. Rather, the fêted French composer and academician completed a personal work of memorial for the late Ernest Guiraud (teacher of Claude Debussy and collaborator with Georges Bizet on *Carmen*) by finishing his opera, *Frédégonde*, then still bearing the Wangerian title, *Brunhilda*. Hugh Macdonald recounts:

> By the time he reached Saigon […] he had completed the draft. A month later, during which he attended a spectacular Chinese festival, the new governor-general of Indo-China arrived in Saigon, Armand Rousseau, who had been Saint-Saëns's neighbour[...]The two immediately left for the island of Côn Sơn […] notorious for the prison of Poulo-Condor, but celebrated also for its rare vegetation and strange fauna, which interested the composer greatly […] This was where the orchestration of *Brunhilda* was mostly done, to be finished on the journey home.[167]

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[167] Hugh Macdonald, *Saint-Saëns and the Stage: Operas, Plays, Pageants, a Ballet and a Film* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 250.

As a souvenir of his travels, Saint-Saëns included in his orchestration of *Frédégonde* two Sino-Vietnamese instruments, a gong and a *kèn bầu*, a reedy gourd-shaped woodwind. He also left behind a lingering trace of his presence there, which resurged into public light in 2017, when *Frédégonde* was resurrected as a Franco-Vietnamese co-production at the Ho Chi Minh Municipal Theater after a century of silence, since its initial run at the *Palais Garnier*. The house where Saint-Saëns stayed, the nhà Công Quán, has become a museum.

Delerue's symphoic "*adieu"* is fundamentally ambiguous: does it represent Vietnam through the lens of nostalgia for empire or does it stand in for an individual memory (from Schoendoerffer's youth) that is less political than it is personal? The score's ambiguity allows the film to collapse the difference between Schoendoerffer's personal memory and the film's positing of a national memorial, and the ways in which the two are woven into the narrative gives us a more nuanced perspective of the film's lurking problem of ideology. It also highlights other aspects of the film besides the music – but not outside the "symphony," which encompasses every aspect of the film. Schoendoerffer cast his own son, Ludovic, as himself in the film: a character known simply as the "Cameraman." In one of the last scenes, as the Viet Minh close in on the final French position at Điện Biên Phủ, the Cameraman is seen exposing his reel so as not to hand it over enemy forces. The film thus recapitulates an episode from Schoendoerffer's war experience in 1954. In doing so, it recreates the origins of the director's style through a retrospective lens, linking a national loss (from the French perspective) to his personal memory.

Another scene in the movie appears to sublimate a revealing anecdote from Schoendoerffer's war-time experience, one that further reveals Schoendoerffer's ideological stance – even as it softens his position at a personal level. In the immediate aftermath of Điện Biên

Phủ, the Soviet filmmaker Roman Karmen was called to memorialize (and recreate) scenes from the battle. These were included in his "documentary" film, *Вьетнам* [Vietnam] (1955), which was scored by the Soviet-Azerbaijani composer, Gara Garajev. Interestingly, the film credits announce that Garajev based his film score on melodies provided by Vietnamese composers, offering a transcultural counterexample of Schoendoerffer's use of classical music as a "universal" medium. This musical gesture towards collaboration reflects the fact that, unlike Schoendoerffer, Karmen treats the battle as a heroic victory for Vietnam and for Communism.

Schoendoerffer interacted with Karmen as a war prisoner. Some years later, the two met in Moscow and later still in Paris. Schoendoerffer's anecdote about this meeting touches on the great ideological distance between the two directors, bridged by their camaraderie and common sense of *métier*, as well as their long acquaintance stemming from the aftermath of Điện Biên Phủ:

> There was an homage to Karmen at the Cinémathèque and I was the only person Karmen demanded to see in Paris…On stage at the Cinémathèque he kissed me *à la russe*, on the mouth, before a full house that was startled that a "fasho" like me would be embraced by a "coco" like him.[168]

Schoendoerffer evokes the far-right label "fasho" in a half ironic way, but it nevertheless gives us some idea of the implicit ideological bias with which he was associated. This anecdote seems to be echoed in the film. During the very first time that the protagonist, Howard Simpson (Donald Pleasence), enters Normandie Chez Betty, a Hanoi club frequented by military personnel,

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[168] "Il y avait un hommage à Karmen, à la Cinémathèque et j'étais la seule personne que Karmen avait demandée à voir à Paris…Sur la scène de la Cinémathèque, il m'a embrassé à la russe, sur la bouche, devant une salle comble qui était effarée qu'un "facho" comme moi se fasse embrasser par un "coco" come lui." Schoendoerffer, 124.

he is introduced to some of the film's main characters, including the violin soloist and the Cameraman character who represens the young Shoendoerffer (and is played by his son, Ludovic). Another figure sticks out on this occasion, with a more than cordial greeting: Lieutenant Duroc. He lands Simpson a warm kiss on the lips. Duroc is introduced as a Russian. His unexpected greeting "*à la russe*" appears as a sublimated version of Schoendoerffer's own anecdote about Karmen's kiss at the Cinémathèque. Another common detail is that both venues are full, the Cinématèque in Schoendoerffer's memory and Normandie Chez Betty in the film. Though some of the details have been displaced – the Russian director has become an aviator, and his kiss has gone from being directed at Schoendoerffer to the film's protagonist (with "Schoendoerffer" present in the form of the Cameraman) – the public setting remains. Significantly, the character of Lieutenant Duroc is played by Patrick Chauvel, a prominent French war photographer and documentarian, and also nephew of the director. Chauvel had previously played a role in Schoendoerffer's 1982 film, *L'honneur d'un capitaine*. Thus the element of common *métier* remains, though subliminally, as in the original anecdote, strengthened by the background family tie. In highlighting seemingly "documentary" representations from the director's biography, such as the anecdote of Karmen's kiss, *Điện Bien Phủ* props up Schoendoerffer's individual memory as a form of national heritage connected to the "loss" of Indochina.

The problem of defining Schoendoerffer's peculiar style, or genre, takes on important overtones in this dissertation because *Điện Biên Phủ* is itself inherently related to questions of musical genre: the concerto, for example. The film's hybridity between nostalgia and documentary is framed by a juxtaposition in the montage, which moves between battleground scenes shot in a gritty realist mode and scenes of Hanoi that reconstruct a more wistful sense of cityscape, and use a different, less ostensibly "improvisatory" kind of camerawork. It is mainly Delerue's film score,

especially the transdiegetic performances of his *Concerto de l'adieu*, that connects the two, aided by a certain subtlety of sonic montage. Schoendoerffer himself propped up the excellent quality of the film's sound design, describing it as "exceptional" and "unlike any other."[169] Yet another background family connection might be seen to lie behind the statement. Schoendoerffer's son, Ludovic, the same one who plays the Cameraman on screen, was also in charge of the film's "sound montage" [*montage son*], alongside the mixing of William Flageollet and the work of sound engineer Michel Laurent. One imagines that Ludovic "collaborated" closely with his father on the film's sonic montage and that it provided Schoendoerffer with a means of being intimately involved in crafting the film's sound design.

Having reviewed the background of Schoendoerffer's and Delerue's careers and the plethora of common associations that inform their work on *Điện Biên Phủ*, I now turn to the analysis section in which I break down the interaction between music and sound design in key scenes, as well as offer a contextualization of its basic sonic and musical characteristics. We start by returning to the opening credits over the sounds of the Vietnam National Orchestra and Delerue's *Concerto de l'adieu*. On the back of the stage, framing the performance, stands a mural

Figure 16: *Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

[169] See opening quote.

that allegorizes “French Empire” done “in the style of the colonial exposition of 1931” and clearly inspired by the famous figure of *La Liberté guidant le peuple* by Eugène Delacroix.[170] Delerue’s name appears over the conductor’s silhouette, as if in homage to the composer’s lifetime of directing film scores. The autumnal minor-key introduction evokes the tragic tone of French revolutionary funeral marches, which are still associated with French military and state funerals, an association made more poignant by the fact that Delerue passed away weeks after the film’s release. Interestingly, Schoendoerffer’s own name appears over the entry of the violin soloist, suggesting a metaphorical concerto-like dialectic between soloist (director), who also represents France, and orchestra, which represents Vietnam [Fig. 16]. These opening measures introduce us to the elegiac mood of the *Concerto de l’adieu* which functions like an *idée fixe* to which the film returns time and again, its appearances punctuated by intervals of scenes of battle.

Subsequently, the scene that shows artillery erupting on the battlefield for the first time cuts to the concert rehearsal whose diegetic performance continues to resonate in a trans-diegetic way over the Hanoi cityscape. The rehearsal venue is the Hanoi Opera House and the slice of the city to which we cut is in its immediate vicinity. It is not a cut “away” so much as a widening of the field that questions the diegetic/non-diegetic divide and introduces an element of simultaneity anchored by a sonic layer of traffic over the musical unfolding of the score. This is a “rehearsal” for both of the film’s “spectacles.”

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[170] “Dans le Grand Théâtre de Hanoi, réplique du Palais Garnier construite par la France en 1911, une fresque allégorique de ‘l’Empire Français,’ dans le style de l’exposition coloniale de 1931, a été tendue. ‘La République’ est inspirée de ‘La liberté’ des ‘Trois glorieuses’ de Delacroix.” Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu: de la bataille au film* (Paris: Fixot/Lincon, 1992), 131.

Another sonically and musically rich moment is the juxtaposition of Catholic mass in Hanoi's St. Joseph's Cathedral and the plein air mass at Điện Biên Phủ. At around 32 minutes, the film cuts to the Cathedral from a battlefield scene, contrasting the booming violent sonic effects

Figure 17: *Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

of shelling with a vocalist intoning sacred Latin text accompanied by the effulgent texture of the organ. The contrast is doubled by a cut back to the soldier's mass on the field of battle, exposed to the sound of shelling that bursts through charged moments of silence. "What are you afraid of?" the priest demands over a momentarily quiet battlefield, before artillery fire from guns positioned right next to the Mass reminds them, viscerally, of the source of their present fear [Fig. 17].

This loaded silence was a conscious element of Schoendoerffer's memory of the battlefield. He names it the "silence of death." "At Diên Biên Phu," he recalls, "this literary cliché became a truth, a premonition, because the last soldiers of the last battle would still have to face death."[171]

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[171] "Un silence de mort![...]A Diên Biên Phu…ce cliché littéraire fut une vérité, une impression prémonitoire, car les derniers soldats de la dernière bataille allaient encore devoir affronter la mort." Pierre Schoendoerffer, *Dien Bien Phu: de la bataille au film* (Paris: Fixot/Lincon, 1992), 148.

As the film progresses the cuts between battlefield and concert hall become increasingly dovetailed. Around the 35-minute mark, an injured soldier is seen straggling behind a plane that is taking off [Fig. 18]. Missing his chance to escape the battlefield he folds to the ground in a gesture of exasperation as an artillery shell bursts in his vicinity. This moment is dovetailed with the solo violinist's practice, without orchestra. The compounded effect of alienation evoked by the lone soldier and lone soloist is amplified by the unaccompanied violin music, which begins before the camera cuts to the concert hall, as the sound of the receding plane sounds fades into the distance. We will shortly consider the importance of airplane sounds in the film from a historical angle, but it should be observed that the gesture of pairing airplane sounds with music had, by this point in the film, been prepared through a carefully planned association with (Breton) bagpipes. The reference to a specifically Breton rather than simply a French instrument – evokes regionalism: Bagpipes are a traditional instrument in Brittany. A comment about Breton bagpipes is the first on-screen dialogue in the film, and the French soldier who recognizes the sound is placed in the frame next to two montagnard soldiers – ethnic minority soldiers who (sometimes) fought

Figure 18: *Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

alongside the French during the First Indochina War.[172] This regionalism (that is evoked through music) implies that the military conflict is more comlex than simply that of two nations. It depicts the French forces as translocal and transnational and thus creates the impression that the French empire was responsive to regional differences (rather than merely opportunistic). In conjunction with the bagpipes heard during battlefield scenes, the airplane sound must be thought of as part of the film's "orchestration." As in the symphonic theme, airplane sounds are "doubled" by different instruments through subsequent appearances. Indeed, Schoendoerffer's contention that "All the sounds have been reconstructed, reorchestrated to create this visual and auditory symphony which in the end the film is" can be better understood in this "auditory" space that subtly synthesizes music and sound while allowing each to retain its specific identity.

The prominent role of aviation in the film and its accompanying airplane sounds characterize much of the mise en bande. Indeed, as we have mentioned, the very first shot of the battlefield features an airplane paired with the sound of bagpipes, a sonic tableau that is repeated throughout the film and effectively "musicalizes" the sound of airplanes. The prominence of this sound, as researcher Delphine Robic-Diaz, author of *La guerre d'Indochine dans le cinéma français*,[173] describes it, is tied to memory, being part of the background of Schoendoerffer's own war-time experience. She compares the sonic significance of airplane sounds in *Diện Biên Phủ* (specifically the historical reconstruction of authentic Dakota airplanes that were used in the original battle) to the iconic pairing of helicopters and Wagner's music in *Apocalypse Now*:

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[172] For more on Montagnard identity and militarism during the French colonial period, see: Oscar Salemink, "Primitive Partisans: French Strategy and the Construction of a Montagnard Ethnic Identity in Indochina 1," in *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism 1930-1957* (Routledge, 1995), 261–93.

[173] Delphine Robic-Diaz and Pierre Schoendoerffer, *La guerre d'Indochine dans le cinéma français: Images d'un trou de mémoire* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

> The Dakotas are thus also emblematic of this battle as the American helicopters were for the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, if the action of these latter has been sublimated by Francis Ford Coppola and the *Ride of the Valkyries* of Richard Wagner in *Apocalypse Now* (1979)…the First Indochina War itself was represented by an almost derisory cinematographic output (a dozen films of the French war "against" several hundred for the United States), justifying the quasi-absence of Dakotas on the big screen and the total absence of pilots as characters in Indochinese fictions […] The plane engines are the background noise [*bruit de fond*] of many shots of the entrenched camp, a particularly realistic sound reconstruction since Pierre Schoendoerffer had three Dakotas "purchased in the United States" transported to Vietnam especially for the filming.[174]

The Dakotas are not only heard over the battle scenes but they play a prominent role in Hanoi too. Many key scenes take place at the airport, including the violin soloist's departure. It is a recurring zone that mediates between the cosmopolitan city and the mountainous warzone and in that way functions much like the *Concerto de l'adieu*.

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[174] "Les Dakotas sont donc aussi emblématiques de cette bataille que les hélicoptères américains le seront pour la guerre du Vietnam. Pourtant, si l'action de ces derniers a été sublimée par Francis Ford Coppola et la *Chevauchée des Walkyries* de Richard Wagner dans *Apocalypse Now* (1979)…la première guerre d'Indochine ne bénéficie, elle, que d'une représentation cinématographique presque dérisoire (une dizaine de films de guerre français "contre" plusieurs centaines pour les États-Unis), justifiant la quasi-absence des Dakotas des écrans et l'absence totale des pilotes en tant que personnages des fictions indochinoises…Les moteurs des avoins sont le bruit de fond de nombreux plans du camp retranché, reconstitution sonore particulièrement réaliste puisque Pierre Schoendoerffer a fait venir au Vietnam, spécialement pout le tournage, trois Dakotas "achetés aux États-Unis." Delphine Robic-Diaz, "Diên Biên Phû: Portraits de Combattants sans Images," *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 211 (2003): 107 – 109.

The musical and narrative dénouement of the film takes place during the concert of the *Concerto de l'adeiu* at the Hanoi Opera House, where all the key characters in the film find themselves. It is as if the film starts over again with this performance of the concerto, as at the beginning, except that this should be thought of in symphonic terms, not as a restart but as a

Figure 19*: Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

"recapitulation": the final section of a symphonic movement that restates the main theme(s) following its development, now carrying on the added weight of associations from its antecedent transformations. When we first heard the concerto theme the battle had not yet begun. Now the soloist's entry is juxtaposed (yet again) with the accumulated "tragedy" of battle. Schoendoerffer's voice-over narration, which is layered over the concerto that now frames images of battle, emphasizes the demoralized nature of the troops, shown retreating.

Here the film's "sound montage," so praised by Schoendoerffer, has its most critical moment. By means of a careful calibration between visual and "sound montage," the performance comes to not only participate in the dramatic battle but it also serves to relay back the sounds of battle, reorchestrated in musical form, into the concert hall.

At the start of the scene the constant explosions, whose spectacular effect is exacerbated by the nighttime setting, are silenced in the audio mix along with all other diegetic sounds. At this stage only the sound of the concert hall comes through. Then the sounds of the soldiers' voices

start emerging. "*C'est foutu*" [it's lost] is distinctly heard several times. The tragic phrase that marks loss is thus programmatically linked to the funereal character of the concerto. Eventually the soundscape of the battle reemerges layered with the "diegetic" concerto from the concert hall still lingering in the background. The layering creates the effect of the battle as a musical "score," that can be performed again, replayed in the echoing memory [Fig. 19].

Near the end of the scene, the visual montage fades back into the concert hall. But before it does so the battlefield sounds are once again reduced to silence, leaving only the sound of the concerto, thus preparing the visual return with a more fundamental sonic recapitulation. When we fade back into the concert hall, the camera is no longer focused on the soloist but rather centered on the large drum heads of the tympani, whose booming strikes now create the distinct impression of artillery strikes. Through the operation of montage and the elision of sound design and music, the metaphorical relationship between percussion and artillery, between the concert and the theater of war, is made concrete. From here, the juxtaposition between the concert hall and the battlefield continues.

In the aftermath of the performance the film focuses on the slow attrition of French forces on the battlefield. In a symbolic gesture linking music with visuals, the Cameraman is offered a goodbye kiss by the violinist as he heads to the scene of battle. This also reflects Schoendoeffer's voluntary return to Điện Biên Phủ after he had initially been airlifted out upon sustaining an injury. The autobiographical angle is sustained by many subsequent shots in which the Cameraman is seen taking footage during fighting, sometimes literally "in the trenches."

At this point some of the battleground scenes offer a complex sonic tapestry of languages. At one point a group of soldiers mostly wearing the iconic Vietnamese headwear, *nón lá*, gather around an injured French comrade in arms. Scrutinizing his serious wounds, one of them declares

"*Lui bientôt chết*," mixing French [he soon] and Vietnamese [dead]. This linguistic variety does not emerge earlier in the battleground scenes. It is as if the heavy psychological toll of weeks spent slugging away in the trenches is reflected in the loss of authority of the French language, or its military command, as it (metaphorically) dies away from this piece of Vietnamese territory.

Other musical and sonic signifiers of French identity are heard to take a tragic last stand. The sound of soldiers singing the Marseillaise is heard emerging from artillery explosions and rifle fire. Soon bagpipes (still unseen) are heard over Điện Biên Phủ for the final time, even as soldiers are breaking down their equipment in anticipation of imminent capture. After even these final markers of French identity have made their sonic mark silence reigns, the "silence of death" as soldiers wait for the inevitable. Of course Schoendoerffer's narration recuperates even this silence on behalf of a singularly French perspective. "They immediately separated us from our Vietnamese comrades in combat," he declares.[175] And at this point, as the Viet Minh are seen to overtake Điện Biên Phủ, the *Concerto de l'adieu* returns, from the top.

Placing Schoendoerffer's legacy in its historical context, Edwards reminds us that Claude Bernard-Aubert, director of the early war film, *Patrouille de choc* (1957), "has much in common with Pierre Schoendoerffer, who has become synonymous with the cinema of the Indochina War." Edwards offers an enlightening comparison of the two directors that allows us to get a better picture, by contrast, of the particularity of Schoendoerffer's filmic vision against those of one of his main early rivals in the Indochina War film sub-genre:

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[175] "Ils nous ont immediatement separées de nos camarades de combat Vietnamiens"

> Both experienced the war as young cameramen in the French forces, through Bernard-Aubert was there for considerably longer (1949 to 1954, as opposed to Schoendoerffer's tour from 1952 to 1954). Beyond the obvious impact that this experience has had on their respective choices of subject matter, they have both sought to maintain a focus on the experience of the average soldier, avoiding the broader subjects of political and military leadership and decision making. Bernard-Aubert experienced some success with *Patrouille de choc*, the first of his three films set during the war, but his later films would be plagued by constant and frequently unfavorable comparisons to Schoendoerffer.[176]

The reason for these "unfavorable comparisons" is revealing: "Where Bernard-Aubert differs sharply from Schoendoerffer and indeed from many veterans is in his depiction of France's civilizing mission."[177] Schoendoerffer's nostalgia for the *mission civilisatrice* is intimately tied to

Figure 20: *Điện Biên Phủ*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (AMLF, 1992).

[176] Kathryn Edwards, "Missing in Action: The Indochina War and French Film," in *Contesting Indochina: French Remembrance between Decolonization and Cold War* (University of California Press, 2016), 170 – 171.

[177] Ibid.

the film's reliance on Delerue's concerto and its metaphorical use throughout the film, as wall as the way in which it covers other non-musical sounds in the film with a symphonic patina. This theme is explicitly evoked in the dialogue of an early establishing scene that depicts a conversation between a journalist and an editor. Inside the Hanoi newspaper press, Howard Simpson (Donald Pleasence), a Pulitzer winning British-born columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, the film's cynical but scrupulous protagonist, is talking to the journal's editor, Monsieur Vinh (Nguyễn Khắc Long) an educated Vietnamese bourgeois who appreciates European culture – but only up to a point. Their discussion is sparked by a photo of Béatrice Vergnes (Ludmila Mikaël) on the front page of the latest edition. [Fig. 20] "First Prize in violin from the Paris Conservatory," M. Vinh explains. "A great artist! She's on tour in South-East Asia, coming from Singapore. She will be giving a concert with the municipal orchestra…It's a cultural event."[178]

This prompts a retort from the avuncular Simpson, who speaks passable French and has some familiarity with Vietnamese, though clearly not enough to understand the position of M. Vinh, who feels at home in both. "You have an interest in Western music?" Simpson utters the question in an unabashedly surprised tone.[179] M. Vinh's eloquent but ambiguous reply provides a half-veiled critique of the limits of the *mission civilisatrice*, but it also betrays an apologetic strain of argumentation that reflects something of the film's deep-seated nostalgia. Speaking for the class of Vietnamese intellectuals to which he belongs, he corrects his interlocutor's implication:

[178] "Premier Prix de violon de Conservatoire de Paris. Une grande artiste! Elle est en tourné de sud-est Asiatique. Elle vient d'arriver de Singapour. Elle va donner un conert avec l'orchestre municipal…C'est un évènement culturel."

[179] "Vous vous interresez à la musique Occidentale?"

> You know, Mr. Simpson, our fight for national independence is not a form of resistance to French culture. Just as our longtime struggle against China did not imply a rejection of either Taoism or Buddhism. I love the French philosopher Victor Hugo, and I love drinking red wine too. And for all that I spent five years in French prison.[180]

Although they have been criticized for their unexamined nostalgia, Schoendoerffer's films do offer exposure to historical figures who have not otherwise, especially in the French context, received much attention – and in some cases any attention at all. Unlike the plethora of Hollywood films about the Vietnam War, there have been significantly fewer French films made about the First Indochina War. Drawing on this context, Delphine Robic-Diaz situates Schoendoerffer as "a filmmaker of memory whose films escape the straightjacket on diffusion of discourse about the Indochina War." "Diên Biên Phû (1992), in particular," she goes on to say, "breaks with a French cinematographic tradition according to which all military defeat is a taboo subject that is almost sacrilege to represent." She writes of several of the characters depicted in the film, including lieutenant Ky, "an Indochinese officer allied with the French," that: "it should be noted that before *Diên Biên Phû* no film had brought such characters to the screen."[181]

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[180] "Savez M. Simpson, notre lutte pour l'indépendance nationale n'est point une résistance à la culture française. Pas plus qu'autrefois notre lutte millénaire contre la Chine n'a impliqué un rejet du Taoïsme ou du Bouddhisme. J'aime Victor Hugo le philosophe français, et j'aime aussi boire du vin rouge. Et pourtant, j'ai passé cinq ans dans le bagne français." Later in the film, he declares: "J'aime la France, pas forcement les français."

[181] "Pierre Schoendoerffer apparaît ainsi comme un cinéaste de la mémoire dont les films échappent au carcan de la diffusion de discours sur la guerre d'Indochine. Diên Biên Phû (1992), en particulier, rompt avec une tradition cinématographique française selon laquelle toute défaite militaire est un sujet tabou, qu'il est presque sacrilège de représenter.

Whatever may be current critical discourses about Schoendoerffer, it was long before the 1990s that his oeuvre had acquired the reputation as the semi-official style of filmic representation of French military presence in Indochina. It may be argued that Schoendoerffer's particular take on the war found both broad resonance with the French public and direct support from the French government because it was compatible with Cold War era alignments. Nevertheless, because of the film script's polyphony of voices, critical views that might align with Schoendoerffer's own, as one of the soldiers who felt abandoned by his own administration at Điện Biên Phủ, can be found – if one knows where to listen. Later in the film, leaving Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi, M. Vinh is bold enough to tell Simpson what he meant to say earlier, this time with less prevarication: "I love France, not necessarily the French."

I started the chapter by comparing Schoendoerffer's films to Hollywood Vietnam War films. It would be negligent not to mention, before chapter's end, the most influential Vietnam War film of them all: Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. An unfinished version of the film premiered in France, at the Cannes Film Festival, in 1979, winning the Palme d'Or.

The music for Apocalypse Now was co-written by Coppola himself and his father, the composer and conductor Carmine Coppola. Bypassing the Wagnerian influence of symphonic scores, as discussed earlier, Coppola notoriously incorporates the real thing: a direct Wagner quotation during the helicopter scene. He also starts the film with a montage sequence set to "The

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Ainsi Pierre Schoendoerffer choisit-il de consacrer un film fleuve de 2 h 20 à cette grande bataille perdue et aux hommes qui y ont combattu. L'aviation, les parachutistes et la Légion y sont incarnés par des héros inconnus, figures fictives composées à partir d'un assemblage d'épisodes vécus et de souvenirs de disparus: le lieutenant Duroc, pilote de DC3 et le lieutenant Ky, officier indochinois rallié aux Français, affecté au 5e bataillon de parachutistes vietnamiens (il est à noter qu'avant *Diên Biên Phû* aucun film n'avait porté à l'écran de tels personnages)." Delphine Robic-Diaz, "Diên Biên Phû," 107.

End” by The Doors. The film took years to edit, with much of the work occupied by Walter Murch’s revolutionary sound design. Although Schoendoerffer certainly did not compose his own music, it is hard to think of his persistent emphasis on the unity of the film score and the sound design in *Điện Biên Phủ*, and the latter being entrusted to his son, as an unspoken nod to the influence of this pioneering film.

Although Coppola’s Conradian classic focuses on American involvement in Vietnam, it demonstrates a broader interest in the *longue durée* of European colonialism, not least through its overt homage to the *Heart of Darkness*. In Coppola’s film, Captain Willard, who corresponds to Conrad’s Marlow, encounters a forgotten French colony up the Mekong that appears through the mist. The so-called French plantation scene was cut from the film’s original release. Partial footage from the scene was first revealed to the general public in the 1991 documentary about the film, *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse*. The full scene would not be made available until 2001, when Coppola and Walter Murch decided to re-edit and re-release the entire film, including the French plantation scene, as *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

The scene starts out of the fog of time, as it were, as Captain Willard’s boat approaches a misty embankment, soon revealing the presence a French faction deep in the jungle. During the ensuing dinner scene, Willard has a conversation with his French hosts, led by Philippe de Marais. Their conversation is accompanied by the occasional interjection of an accordion player. Asked why they don’t simply go “home” to France, de Marais explains to his American interlocutor that he does not understand the “French officer mentality.” “In Dien Bien Phu,” de Marais says bitterly, “we lose. In Algeria, we lose. In Indochina, we lose. But here, we don’t lose! This piece of earth, we keep it! We will never lose it! Never!” The rest of the conversation devolves into a history lesson, specifically about the loss at Điện Biên Phủ. The military loss is placed onto the shoulders

of two specific groups: "politicians" and "Communist traitors." I quote de Marais' declaration of political sabotage because I think it reflects the views that lurk behind the textless symphonism of Schoendoerffer's film:

> The French army was sacrificed. Sacrificed by the politicians safe at home. They put the army in an impossible situation where they couldn't win! The students are marching in Paris, protesting! Demonstrating! They stab the soldiers in the back. The soldier would open the grenade…it wouldn't work! A piece of paper would fall. "Union des femmes françaises…we are for the Viets." Traitors! Communist traitors at home!

The spectral apparition of a recalcitrant faction of French colons, still coveting their antiquated territorial claims in the middle of the jungle, has a strangely edifying effect in the context of the film, so rooted in the immediate reality (or rather surrealism) of war. This scene allows viewers to zoom out, as it were, and behold a historical perspective that puts America in its place: as a nation habitually repeating the past of which it is, with the exception of brief glimpses through the fog, unaware. But it also puts France in its place, which is the place of nostalgia, of living irremediably in the past. Schoendoerffer's *Điện Biên Phủ* seems the very embodiment of this notion, in part because there is no equivalent scene that lends perspective to the whole. There is no outside of the "symphony." Rather, the entire film is like the French plantation scene, a nostalgic recapitulation of the "French officer mentality," which means to never cede to the reality of history. Through Schoendoerffer's *Điện Biên Phủ*, long after the end of the war, the dubious battle echoes on.

Chapter 4

A Sentimental Reeducation:

Music as (Post)Colonial Pedagogy in *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*

In this chapter I describe how the French-Vietnamese filmmaker Trần Anh Hùng's first full-length film, *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* (1993), represents Franco-Vietnamese transculturation through music. Through analysis of key scenes, I demonstrate the ways in which music, within its sonic framework, plays a key role in the filmic narrative, accomplishing several key tasks. First, it sutures the linguistic divide between the Vietnamese language, deployed in the film exclusively, and its intended Francophone and diasporic audience. Second, it contributes an autobiographical tie-in with the film's composer, Tôn-Thất Tiết; a connection that is itself suggestive of an act of homage to earlier generations of diasporic Vietnamese composers and filmmakers in France.[182] Third, it redirects the historical nostalgia typical of early '90s French filmic representations of colonial Vietnam by turning away from a strictly national definition of "heritage," either French or Vietnamese. Instead, it posits an image – and a sound – representative of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation. I demonstrate the ways in which music is woven into the narrative of the film

[182] "[Trần Anh Hùng] immigrated with his family to the suburbs of Paris in 1975 and began training as a filmmaker in the mid 1980s after seeing *Poussière de l'empire* [Dust of Empire] (1983) by fellow Vietnamese director Lam Lê." Leslie Barnes, "Cinema as Cultural Translation: The Production of Vietnam in Trần Anh Hùng's Cyclo," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5, no. 3 (2010): 106. *Poussière d'empire* features an avant-garde soundtrack by Nguyễn Thiên Đạo.

reflects a hybrid view of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation and a nostalgic revision of (post)colonial Vietnam that is grounded in diasporic positionality.

Throughout this chapter, I deploy the concept of "transculturation" to interpret the film's representational import and contextualize its musical content. The word transculturation is a neologism coined by the Cuban ethnologist and ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz in his 1940 book, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*] in order to discuss the complex layers of contact between indigenous, Afro-Diasporic, and European cultures in Cuba.[183] Ortiz describes transculturation as a "process of transition from one culture to another" that involves both the acquisition (*acculturation*) and loss (*deculturation*) of existing cultural elements as well as the creation of "new cultural phenomena" (*neoculturation*).[184] His serendipitous use of the term "counterpoint" – a musical metaphor – to represent the concept of transculturation resonates with my work in this chapter: both in terms of my focus on the interplay of two cultures within the film's narrative framework and the key role played by music in its representation. I also draw on more recent discussions around transculturation that theorize its diasporic hybridity, its connection to postcoloniality, and its impact on film, by scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Mary Louise Pratt, Lan P. Duong, and Panivong Norindr, among others.[185] Pratt

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[183] Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (orig. 1940; New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

[184] "I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation." Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 102-103.

[185] See: Leslie Barnes, "Cinema as Cultural Translation: The Production of Vietnam in Trần Anh Hùng's Cyclo," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5, no. 3 (2010): 106–28; Afef Benessaieh, *Amériques Transculturelles - Transcultural Americas* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010); Sylvie Blum-Reid, *East-West Encounters* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003); Laurent Dubreuil, "Toward Transcultural Theory," *Comparative Literature Studies* 55, no. 4 (December 31, 2018): 892–96; Edward Campbell, "East Meets West in France: Catching the Musical Scent," in *Aberrant*

questions the center-periphery binary that has often attended discussions of transculturation in ethnography, pointing specifically to the metropole's "modes of representation" in relation to its unacknowledged influence from the periphery:

> While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis—beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself.[186]

L'Odeur de la papaye verte presents an interesting case of representation that questions the difference between periphery and metropolis. Because of its diasporic hybridity it represents neither the French nor the Vietnamese perspective. Rather it develops a new, transcultural Franco-Vietnamese vision. The film is set in mid-century Saigon and divided into two parts which take place, as the film establishes, in 1951 and 1961. The interval of time between the film's release in 1993 and its historical setting indicates an autobiographical element, that of Trần looking back to

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Nuptials, ed. Paulo de Assis and Paolo Giudici, Deleuze and Artistic Research (Leuven University Press, 2019), 73–82; Lan P. Duong, *Treacherous Subjects: Gender, Culture, and Trans-Vietnamese Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français* (Paris: Cerf - Corlet, 2006); Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997); Mark Millington, "Transculturation: Contrapuntal Notes to Critical Orthodoxy," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no. 2 (April 2007): 256–68, Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Cinema-Interval* (New York London: Routledge, 1999); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (orig. 1992; London: Routledge, 2003); Diana Taylor, "Transculturating Transculturation," *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (May 1991): 90-104.

[186] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2007), 6.

the Vietnam he left in 1975 when he immigrated to France. The director was born in 1962, one year after the film narrative ends, suggesting that its periodization stands not only for his childhood (though it is certainly suggestive of that general timeframe) but more specifically the period preceding his birth. Trần has often commented on the importance of his mother as a prototype for the women in the film,[187] and the film ends with the main character Mùi becoming pregnant: as if, in a reversal of roles, the film gives birth to its writer-director. The fact that he married the actress who plays Mùi as an adult in the film, Trần Nữ Yên Khe, also contributes to its (auto)biographical context. Richard Derderian elaborates on the convergence of autobiography and the film's rich visual and sonic palate, as well as the writer-director's depiction of his Vietnamese childhood as a time of "harmony," a metaphor that resonates with the film's exceptional reliance on music:

Uprooted by decades of conflict stretching back to the French war in Indochina, it is not surprising that many Vietnamese who settled in France harbor sentiments of loss and a desire to recover elements of their personal or collective past. The yearning for the distant fragments of childhood is particularly strong in the work of movie director Tran Anh Hung. The visual attention devoted to insects, lizards, and the seeds of the green papaya outside the 1950s Saigon home in his debut film, Scent of the Green Papaya (1993), echoes the memories which continue to resonate most powerfully for the director. Although he left his childhood town of Danang at the age of four, Tran still recalls ''the smell of fruit coming in through the window, a woman's voice singing on

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[187] "Lawrence Chua: What was your emotional attachment to the story of "The Scent of Green Papaya"? Tran Anh Hung: …what I talk about in the film is what I know: my life with my mother. The emotional charge transferred to the film is a function of my description of women who have led similar lives to my mother." Lawrence Chua and Tran Anh Hung, "Tran Anh Hung," BOMB, no. 46 (1994): 6. See also: "Cineaste : The women are particularly vivid in the film, much more so than any of the men. Tran: The richness of women in the film really comes from my mother, specifically my astonishment at the gentleness and sweetness of all her gestures that she managed to maintain after so many years of servitude. A lot of very emotional things, too, came from my childhood. For example, when I would do something stupid and my father would punish me by making me go without dinner, my mother would sneak up and bring me a handful of rice with meat. These are things you never forget." Tran Anh Hung and Alice Cross, "Portraying the Rhythm of the Vietnamese Soul: An Interview with Tran Anh Hung," *Cinéaste* 20, no. 3 (1994): 35.

the radio.'' He remembers this past as a magical moment in his life. ''If I've ever experienced harmony in my life it was then."[188]

The wistfulness of Trần's depiction of the past is characterized not only by the presence of such personal, autobiographical elements but also the conspicuous absence of key historical realities. Trần's film foregoes all mention of the First Indochina War (1946 – 1954) and the Vietnam War (1955 – 1975), also known as the Second Indochina War, even though they both take place within the timespan represented by the film. The only signs of war allowed to penetrate Trần's carefully sealed-off private world are sonic cues: the curfew sirens and airplanes that occasionally invade the film's soundscape. As Trần admits, these sounds are the only holdovers of what might have been a more robust set of narrative, visual, and sonic references to military conflict:

> At first I thought, well, I can't not talk about the war; hence the airplanes and the curfew and all that. I could have included certain things like news on the radio, a neighbor whose son is doing his military service, another who lost his son in the war, perhaps seeing military people come into a home. It did occur to me, but all that had nothing to do with the poem I wished to create. I was just not capable of having such external historical details enter into the poetic whole of my effort.[189]

The conspicuous absence of the historical (as opposed to the constant presence of the personal and quotidian) is further demonstrated by the total lack of French characters or the sonic presence of the French language within the film, despite the fact that it was shot on a soundstage outside Paris.

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[188] Richard L. Derderian, "Urban Space in the French Imperial Past and the Postcolonial Present," *Asia Europe Journal* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2003), 77.

[189] Tran Anh Hung and Alice Cross, "Portraying the Rhythm of the Vietnamese Soul: An Interview with Tran Anh Hung," *Cinéaste* 20, no. 3 (1994): 37.

This often cited fact should be nuanced, however. All but one of the characters in Trần's film are in fact French-Vietnamese actors, including both Lư Mẫn San and Trần Nữ Yên Khe who portray Mùi at 10 and 20 years old, respectively, and Vương Hoa Hội who plays the composer, Khuyến. Only Nguyễn Ánh Hoa, veteran performer of the Vietnamese musical theater genre *cải lương*, was brought in from Vietnam for the production. She plays the old servant Tí who teaches the young Mùi how to work for a Vietnamese household, suggesting a handing down of traditional knowledge.

Although the actors are themselves for the most part French-Vietnamese, it is true that no French characters appear within the film's diegesis. In an interview conducted by Lawrence Chua in BOMB magazine around the time of the film's release Trần defends his decision not to include any French characters as being rooted in his desire to avoid evoking nostalgia in the audience:

> I thought of showing a few French people in the film, dressed in the kinds of clothing that they would have been wearing at that time. But I felt that as soon as the French people saw the film that nostalgia would have been provoked in them. That's not what I wanted to do. I wanted to create an atmosphere that would exist in the present for them. For everybody.[190]

The goal of avoiding nostalgia must be understood within the context of the wave of early '90s French "nostalgia films" that depicted the French colonial period in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (former Indochina) and in which Vietnamese characters and Vietnam itself are treated

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[190] Lawrence Chua and Tran Anh Hung, "Tran Anh Hung," *BOMB*, no. 46 (1994): 6.

as an exotic background rather than a meaningful part of the narrative. Trần's film is a response to this French filmic nostalgia for the colonial past in which (French) Indochina is represented within the parameters of a (French) national "heritage." Hence, as brought up in the Introduction, these films have been discussed by scholars both under the genre labels "nostalgia film" and "heritage film."

Trần responds to the nostalgia/heritage film genre by positing a Franco-Vietnamese heritage that is implicitly rendered in the film through musical transculturation. This is most evident in the second half of the film, which takes place in the home of Khuyến, a French educated Vietnamese composer who spends much of his time at the piano, composing or playing the works of 19th century French composers. At a key moment [1:12:50], as Khuyến plays the final notes of *Clair de Lune* [Moonlight], an anthology piano piece by Claude Debussy, the camera pauses on a close-up shot of a certificate from the Paris Conservatory, positioned prominently on his bookshelf, framed by two Buddhist statues [Fig. 21]. The document reads: "Premier Prix de Composition" [First Prize in Composition]. It is dated July 7, 1959, which fits within the film's own historical timeframe. Below this information, Khuyến's full name – which never appears in the dialogue – is (silently) revealed: "Tôn Thât Khuyên." This shot furnishes clear evidence that the character Khuyến is not only a composer in the film world but that he represents the actual film composer, Tôn-Thất Tiết, with whom he shares the distinctive two-part family name (Tôn-Thất).

Khuyến's dates of study at the Paris Conservatory roughly match Tiết's own. The composer himself emigrated from Vietnam in 1958 in order to study at the Paris Conservatory; though he could not have received a certificate from that institution in 1959, as the film suggests, because he first spent a few years preparing for entry by taking courses at the École Normale de

Figure 21: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

Musique. Khuyến's period abroad in Paris is, however, timed to coincide with Tôn-Thất's initial period of emigration. Just as Trần included autobiographical resonances in the film that suggest his imminent birth, so he put Tôn-Thất in the position of writing a musical score that reflects his own "birth" as a composer. One important distinction is that, in the film narrative, after studying in France the composer actually returns to Vietnam. Yet even this revision could be said to represent a real historical trajectory, if not of Tôn-Thất himself (who remained in France and eventually took French citizenship) then certainly of his musical language, in which he consciously sought to harmonize Asian and European influences, thus "returning" to Vietnam in a metaphorical sense:

When I started to study composition in the early 1960s, I was attracted by serial music and started studying it by myself. At the time, many of my fellow students were composing in that

idiom. However, my teacher Jean Rivier advised me to give it up. One day he said to me: "Go back to Asia and try to find your own way." He encouraged me to go deper into my knowledge of Asian traditional music and to study Oriental philosophy. Andre Jolivet, who took over from him, was also a considerable influence on me in that respect. Rediscovering Oriental thinking was an important step, because it created a mental universe which enabled me to find my own personal style.[191]

The film has Tôn-Thất take his French teachers' advice quite literally, as it were, and actually "go back." In reality, the composer "went back to Asia" not by returning to Vietnam but rather by drawing on resources available to him in Paris; specifically the Musée Guimet, which he recounts "has a collection of recordings of Vietnamese music and used to hold concerts of Oriental music. The musicologist Trần Văn Khê, who worked there, introduced me to Buddhist music."

While studying in France, Tôn-Thất turned to Parisian cultural institutions and the Vietnamese disporic community in order to create a hybrid vision of Franco-Vietnamese musical style. A number of his works (some of which are serialized, so that they count as more than one piece) – including "Ba Đoản Khúc," "Tứ Đại Cảnh," "Hy Vọng," and "Ngũ Hành"– bear programmatic associations suggested only by their Vietnamese titles. Others, such as "Prajna Paramita," "Le chemin du Bouddha," and "Les Sourires de Bouddha," are in French but explicitly engage with aspects of Buddhism, which could be interpreted as representative of his Vietnamese background. The influence of French-Vietnamese musicologist Trần Văn Khê is significant in this regard because his French-language dissertation, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle* [Traditional Vietnamese Music] published in 1961 – the year in which part two of *L'Odeur* takes

[191] Trần Anh Hùng interview with Isabelle Leymarie, Published in UNESCO Courier, Mar 1998.

place – is another possible source of influence for the music of both the on-screen and the off-screen composer(s).[192]

In the second half of the film Khuyến's narrative arc makes the paratextual connection to Tôn-Thất most apparent. Yet Tôn-Thất's score is not merely deployed in the second half of *L'Odeur*. It frames the whole film. And it is the whole film that my musical/sonic analysis takes into consideration. It is only by paying close attention to the ways in which music, both diegetic and non-diegetic, is distributed throughout the entire film and woven into its sound design at various critical nodes that a meaningful account of its role in and beyond the narrative can be spelled out.

Considered musically, *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* can be divided, like the film itself, into two parts. A key difference between them is that in part one diegetic music is clearly distinguished from the non-diegetic score while in part two this distinction is problematized. There is a representational difference as well in terms of which musical genres are deployed in the diegesis (and how). Part one features three layers of diegetic music: traditional Vietnamese music, Vietnamese popular music, and the faint sound of someone in the neighborhood (presumably Khuyến) practicing piano. Each of these diegetic layers has a different relationship to the film's visuality. Traditional Vietnamese music is always performed on screen, first by the father and eldest son of the household where Mùi works and later by musicians brought in as part of a healing ritual for the father. This clear association of traditional Vietnamese musical performance with the father, who otherwise utters few lines in the film, follows his narrative arc. After the father dies at the end of part one, part two features no traditional Vietnamese music, which symbolically dies

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[192] Trần Văn Khê, *La Musique Vietnamienne Traditionnelle: Thèse Pour Le Doctorat d'université; Université de Paris, Faculté Des Lettres et Sciences Humaines*, 1961. See also: François Picard, "Tràn van khê," *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie. Anciennement Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles*, no. 2 (January 1, 1989): 235–42.

with him. Popular Vietnamese music is heard in several scenes (only in the first part of the film) as a way to suggest the ambiance of a Saigonese street but the radio (or record player) that is projecting the tunes is not shown.

Although also not shown on screen, the sound of a neighbor practicing the piano is visually framed by an act of violence: over the sound of the piano, the eldest son is shown melting wax over a colony of ants. An extreme close-up shows the ants struggling for life as the hot drops of wax fall from above. The pairing of the sound of piano exercises and death delivered from above by a bigger adversary suggest a subtle correspondence between European/colonial pedagogy (piano exercises) and violence – specifically bombing. At one point during this act (which is shown in two disconnected scenes) a plane is heard passing close by overhead, reinforcing the connection.

The second part of the film features three kinds of diegetic music: French piano music, jazz, and avant garde music in the style of (indeed by) Tôn-Thất. While the sources of diegetic music in the first part of the film vary, in part two all of the music is performed by Khuyến himself on the piano. Yet Khuyến's diegetic performances are visually framed so that, though diegetic, they start to seem non-diegetic. This primes viewers, as we will see, for the final triumph of Khuyến's (Tôn-Thất's) music at the end. Khuyến's playing also provides a sense of continuity both in terms of music and narrative: it reminds us of the overheard piano music in part one and thus his progress as a musician over the ensuing decade. No popular Vietnamese music is heard in part two but Khuyến does intone jazz during a playful interlude with his fiancée, demonstrating his cosmopolitan taste and her Westernizing influence. His piano music choices, namely works by Claude Debussy and Frédéric Chopin, demonstrate his *conservatoire* pedigree and situate him –

and thus the real Tôn-Thất – within a French lineage of musical transculturation. I contextualize this lineage in the concluding section, following the analysis.

The discontinuity of diegetic musical content in parts one and two is bridged by the continuity of Tôn-Thất Tiết's non-diegetic score. Yet the relationship between diegetic and non-diegetic music is itself treated differently in each part. In part one the film score is separate from the diegetic music; but in part two, as Khuyến makes progress in his development of a Franco-Vietnamese musical idiom, Tôn-Thất's score and Khuyến's diegetic playing merge. At the end, the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic breaks down altogether as Khuyến's music becomes fully realized through Tôn-Thất's score. The score's continuity is structured by the use of leitmotivs: musical themes that mark characters or moods throughout the course of the narrative. Leitmotivs are not static indicators of fixed characters but dynamic signifiers that can connote ambiguity, track changes in mood, or reflect character development.

Over the course of the film several leitmotivs accomplish these tasks, which I name: Mùi's theme, boy's theme, siren theme. At the end of the film, during its final montage sequence, a new leitmotif emerges which I call the pedagogy theme, because it is set to images of the composer Khuyến teaching Mùi to read. But it also represents another pedagogical aspect, namely the culmination of Khuyến's years of music study in Saigon and Paris – and recalls the diegetic moments from part one in which he is overheard practicing fundamental piano exercises. This theme also represents the final synthesis of Khuyến's diegetic composing with Tôn-Thất's non-diegetic score, as they merge through the montage.

The film is initiated sonically, with a few plucked notes on the harp framed by the sound of cicadas. The lights come on with a flourish in the harp. This hesitant timbre introduces Mùi's theme music, which in its rhythmic fluidity and harmonic indeterminacy mimics her hesitant and

unsure perambulation of a Saigonese street: she is looking for the home where she has been sent to serve, presumably from a rural area. The music leaves space for Mùi's sonic entry into the scene. Her footseps can be heard through the ample silences and soft moments that punctuate the musical flow. A piano cues in the entry of a lush string texture crowned by a plaintive solo flute. This instrumentation – featuring harp, strings, and solo flute – characterizes Mùi's leitmotif. The correspondence between this music and Mùi is made definitive by her subsequent entry into the house. As the music stops Mùi knocks on the door. The Mother (played by Truong Thi Loc) utters the first line of the film, "*Ai đó*?" [Who's there?], and Mùi introduces herself.

The musical silence marked by this moment of introduction draws a clear line between non-diegetic and diegetic space. As Mùi crosses the threshold for the first time, entering the house where she will live and work for the next ten years, the moment is marked musically by a transition to diegetic performance accompanying the long tracking shot that introduces viewers to the home. The Father (played by Ngọc Trung Trần) plays the *đàn nguyệt*, a traditional plucked Vietnamese instrument named after the round "moon" shape of its body.

Figure 22: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

The Father’s music is soon framed by complementary sonic cues that fill in the soundscape and offer important contextual information that is not made explicit by the dialogue. The sound of light tapping on the wooden block (*mõ* in Vietnamese) that accompanies Buddhist chanting of sutras is heard first. Its entry is initiated in a subtle way. The Mother enters the room in which the Father is playing and, while he continues to play, lets him know that their new servant Mùi has arrived as she pours tea. Thus, her utterance of Mùi’s name and the sound of tea pouring coincide and mask the entry of the *mõ* that, as we come to learn in a later scene, is being rhythmically struck by the Grandmother (played by Thi Hai Vo) in an upper room, where she lives perpetually mourning her husband and deceased granddaughter, Tho. As the camera reverses shot to show the Mother’s face over the neck of the *đàn nguyệt* she tells the Father that if Tho were still alive “she’d be about Mùi’s age” [Fig. 22]. The continuous tapping of the *mõ* over this thought implies that, though mourning is in the air, the Buddhist principle of reincarnation is subtly at work. At the end of part one, the Mother gives Mùi clothes and jewelry that she intended for Tho, reinforcing the link between them. When the Father puts down his *đàn nguyệt*, as if on cue, a curfew siren strikes up – one of the few allusions in the film to broader historical realities beyond the domestic space of the household. The sirens also help fill out the soundscape of Saigon since a wide cityscape shot is never shown.

After waking up for her first day as a servant in the household, Mùi peers into the garden from her bedroom window and smells the scents of a green papaya growing there. Her name is a homonym for “smell,” so that the Vietnamese title of the film, *Mùi Đu Đủ Xanh*, means both “Scent of Green Papaya” and “Mùi of Green Papaya.” This second “naming” scene is framed by another iteration of Mùi’s leitmotif. As Mùi prepares to serve her first meal that afternoon the sound of Vietnamese popular music is introduced, played on the radio or record player though the

source is not shown. From the outdoor kitchen area, Mùi enters the house and serves to this diegetic track which continues while the camera remains at the table with the Father and his two younger sons. The eldest emerges from another room to tell the Father that he and his friend Khuyến are going out to eat. This is the first mention of Khuyến in the film, who is subsequently introduced when he visits the house. Meanhile Mùi is upstairs in Grandmother's room where she stares with curiosity at the portraits on the ancestral altar. The camera view gives us access to her lingering view of the photos while a repeated shot-reverse shot highlights her similarity to the image of the deceased Tho, reinforcing their correspondence. Once again we hear Mùi's theme express her subjectivity at this moment of wonder, identification, and character development. As she comes downstairs she sees Khuyến for the first time and is transfixed.

While eating her own lunch, Mùi gazes intently at a single ant gathering food, her view again revealed with a close-up shot. This is not a musical scene but it foreshadows subsequent images of ants which are connected to music and violence. Shortly after, a long tracking shot reveals the porousness of the house in which Mùi works in relation to the Saiognese cityscape. Beginning in the store that the Mother runs out of the house and opens onto the street, we are led into the interior. We hear several layers of music and sound that reinforce the porousness of Saigonese life and the tenuousness of the public/private divide in the dense urban environment. The sound of people and activity outside and inside the house (like the man pouring water) is layered with the sound of the Father practicing his *đàn nguyệt* which comes to predominate the sonic texture as the montage cuts into the Father's bedroom revealing his diegetic performance. The camera continues to pan over and cut to other parts of the house – Mùi cleaning the living area, the youngest boy sleeping in his room – until it lingers on the eldest boy who is squatting on the windowsill. As he steps down, grabbing a box of matches and a candle on his way, his Father

stops playing and a new music strikes up: presumably the sound of his friend, Khuyến, practicing the piano next door. To the diegetic soundtrack of piano exercises the boy lights the candle and, as shown in a close-up, melts it over a colony of ants. The shot is interrupted by a cutaway to the father putting away his instrument to lie down for a nap, perhaps a foreshadowing of the symbolic death of the father (and the music). Once again, the montage thrusts us out to the street-facing shop then tracks back into the house – this time to the sound of Vietnamese popular music wafting in from the street, or perhaps from the house itself (the source is not shown). After this brief interlude, we are thrust back into the boys' room. We hear Khuyến's ongoing practicing as the eldest son continues to drip wax over the ants. Another close-up reveals that many of them have died. We watch the surviving ants struggle then see the boy casually blow out the candle. While this violent gesture is coming to a close the droning of an approaching airplane is heard. As this sound gradually fills up the sonic space the piano exercises stop: as if Khuyến next door is pausing his practice to listen to the ominous noise, which wakes up the youngest son.

The youngest then has a scene to himself, with his own leitmotif. He appears in the living room as Mùi is busy cleaning the floor. The boy's childish leitmotif features a persistent jaunty beat, plucked strings, and playful rhythmic outbursts with colorful instrumentation. The steady beat and woody timbre of the boy's theme is also reminiscent of the Grandmother's regular performance of the *mõ*, perhaps implying that his childish mischievousness is tied to the idea of sacrilege and (boyish) transgressivity. Indeed, the boy rocks Mùi's water bucket until it spills over then marks his exit with a loud fart. This "boyish" moment is clearly gendered by the music. While Mùi's theme is rhythmically fluid and unfolds through hesitant melodic gestures the boy's theme is rhythmically driven and timbrally firm. In Mùi's theme the emphasis is on the way melodic and harmonic gestures grow (crescendo, reach upward) and decay into moments of silence while the

boy's theme persistently foregrounds percussive attacks (which emphasize the initial start of the notes rather than the quality of their sustain or decay, as in Mùi's theme).

As Mùi continues to do chores, the Mother looks over at her to the sound of a gong that marks Grandmother finishing her prayers. As she does a double take, a new theme is introduced. Initially it starts as Mùi's theme, with its familiar harp gesture. But a subsequent close-up shot of the Mother's face initiates a new theme marked by the glissando technique or "slide" in the strings. As the Mother continues to meditate on Mùi's appearance, Mùi's theme and this new theme intertwine. I call this the "siren theme" for two reasons. First, due to its "sliding" character it resembles the undulation of the curfew sirens that are heard several times throughout the first part of the film. Recall that the first time that the Mother mentions Tho in the film the sound of curfew sirens is heard shortly therafter. Second, the idea of "sirens" as metaphors for desire can be applied to the use of this theme throughout the film. In this instance the Mother, her memory activated by the sound of Grandmother's gong (implying a ritual to remember ancestors), desires to see Tho in Mùi. The gong sound that prompted the Mother's meditative mood in regard to Mùi also connects Mùi to her deceased daughter Tho, whose picture is featured on the ancestral altar in Grandmother's room. This desire can appear in other guises. For example, in the second part of the film, the siren theme expresses Khuyến's desire for Mùi, appearing whenever he lingers near her bedroom. It can also represent desire as suffering or mourning, appearing in a particularly intense form when the father dies. Although appearing in many situations, the siren theme is almost always (except in the second half of the film) connected to the Mother. At the first appearance of the theme, in the scene under discussion, the Mother lets Mùi know that she will allow her to visit her own mother after the holiday season.

A scene that follows shortly amplifies this connection between the siren theme and motherhood, as well as between Mùi and Tho. Mùi and the old servant Tí are lying in their beds and talking when a curfew siren cuts them off. Tí recounts the story of Tho to Mùi, and how she died while the Father was away, having abandoned the family for a time. In the middle of the night, Mùi starts repeating the word "*mẹ*" [mother] out loud in her sleep. A shot-reverse shot reveals the Mother looking down at her and at this moment the siren theme starts, again interwoven with elements of Mùi's theme. The theme continues uninterrupted over a cut away to next morning, when the servant Tí wakes her up and asks what she dreamed about. The music's continuity reflects Mùi's half-awake state and the lingering effect of her dream.

The dream dissipates as the household is in for a rude awakening, discovering that the Father has once again disappeared. Shortly thereafter, the youngest son has a brief musical interlude, perhaps to lighten the mood. He belts a children's tune about morning routines in his pajamas with great enthusiasm, rounding out the performance with a growl; reinforcing the "boyish" theme associated with him. Almost immediately, this bout of youthful energy is compensated for by the wooden rhythm of *mõ*, whose source (Grandma's dutiful prayers) is seen for the first time and paired with a close-up of Tho's picture [Fig. 23]. This meditation on youth takes a perverse turn in a scene that shortly follows. The youngest son pees into a vase in sight of Mùi, inviting her to watch. Once again, the boy's puckish musical leitmotif contains his activity within the acceptable limit of playful exuberance rather than outright pathology.

But signs of disturbance truly seem to pester the sons after this latest abandonment by their father. The older boy stomps on a book that he had previously been seen reading. He then climbs onto the windowsill and, on cue, the sound of Khuyến's piano pedagogy starts. The boy looks down to see a single ant struggling to survive in the aftermath of the wax he dropped, a view

Figure 23: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

captured in close-up. This is the third scene in which the diegetic sound of piano exercises is paired with the older boy's act of violence towards the group of ants.

The increasing disharmony caused by the Father's absence gathers steam when the boy stalks through the house that night and overhears a conversation between his mother and grandmother. As he approaches the grandmother's room, where the conversation takes place, the siren theme takes an intensified form with the slides now more prominently foregrounded and spread across the instrumental ensemble from high to low register. This musical analogue of alarm foreshadows the anxious and emotional tone of the overheard scene in which the Grandmother excoriates her daugher-in-law for not being a better wife and thus driving away her husband. The difficulty of listening to the Grandma's accusative tone grates on both mother and son and is

reflected in the music, which grows silent during the conversation but comes back to life as the son, having witnessed the scene, runs out into the courtyard and lies weeping across the ground. This is a desparate gesture of desire for the Father's return, reflected by the siren leitmotif of desire.

In the next scene Mùi is reaching upwards for a green papaya fruit, and the same leitmotif, now enriched by a thicker and more exhuberant harmonic envelope, mimics her arm's upwards trajectory with upwards glissandi and tremollo (trembling) string techniques. This musical moment is interrupted by a cut away to Mùi cutting into the papaya. We see and hear her rhythmic knife work layered on top of the regular click of the *mõ* from Grandma's room. The moment Mùi opens the fruit and touches inside – marked by an extreme close-up – Grandma strikes her end-of-prayers bell. It is as if Mùi is touching the center or essence of something more significant than a piece of fruit. This sensually haptic moment, haloed by the diegetic sound of the prayer bell, becomes a representation of enlightenment and – by pointing to the seeds inside the fruit – a prefiguration of her future pregnancy.

The father's absence takes a critical turn when voiced aloud. The youngest boy expresses his dissatisfaction out loud at the table: "*Tại sao ba không về*?" [Why isn't dad back?]. The older son tells him off, "*Im!*" ["Shut up!"], before flying out of the room. A cut takes us to the Mother entering her son's room over the sound of Grandma intoning a Buddhist chant. As the Mother sits at her son's bedside her face is framed by the windowsill and her growing emotion is reflected by a new iteration of the siren theme. In the next shot they are both crying while Grandma's chanting continues softly in the background.

We cut to a close-up of a grasshopper cage, accompanied by a piano sonority that initates Mùi's theme as she offers the vocal insect water. This sets us up for a key moment in Mùi's character development as well as the film's narrative arc – hinting at the direction taken in part

two. Khuyến is coming to dinner. Mùi convinces the older servant to let her serve the dish of sautéed vegetables. And she puts on very fine clothes in order to attract Khuyến's attention. Her crush is musically accentuated by a reapperance of her leitmotif, though initiated by an iteration of the siren theme to represent her desire and her angst as she prepares to serve the dish.

The next significant event is the father's reappearance. He has fallen ill. We witness a Vietnamese ensemble playing traditional music for a curative ritual [Fig. 24]. While this diegetic performance continues we cut to Grandma's room and her continuous beating of the *mõ*. While the traditional instruments' fade away the *mõ* beat is amplified in the sound mix. A cut away shot takes us to the announcement of the father's death which begins at the stroke of Grandma's prayer bell. Her diegetic strike cues a funereal iteration of the siren leitmotif. The expressivity of the theme's characteristic glissandi are amplified by the depth of the suspended sonority that frames them and ties them to a moment of suffering immobility. Indeed the mother passes out from the news – cut scene. A repeated harp motif dovetails into Mùi's theme, as we peek at her from behind a corner in a low shot reminiscent of Ozu. We fade to part two: ten years later.

Figure 24: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

Part two emerges as Mùi, now an adult, is informed by the Mother that she must transfer houses and will be working for Khuyến. The elder son, now married, is polishing his late father's *đàn nguyệt*. In one of the opening scenes of the film, he plays the traditional Vietnamese flute, or *sáo*, as a duet with his father. The presence of the instrument recalls his father's (sonic) absence and, filtered by the nostalgia of memory, what seemed like a more harmonious time. His wife exclaims: "Mùi won't be unhappy serving for Khuyến. He lives alone and composes music."

As she leaves her room for the last time Mùi's motif reasserts itself: as at the start, she is once again sent wandering into the Saigon street. But we can be confident that she is better oriented this time around. As she returns to her room and then leaves again her perambulation draws an intensified musical reaction which overlays her theme with a trembling mass of strings. The Mother is in trouble upstairs in Grandma's old room. As Mùi walks up the stairs the music pauses to let the Mother speak her last words, which are uttered as she sees Mùi approaching: "*Mùi, con của mẹ*!" [Mùi my child!]. A loud airplane sound fills the void – cutting to a close-up of a cricket outside its cage. Symbol of release and death.

Jumping forward in time, Mùi is now in Khuyến's courtyard. Khuyến is composing and Mùi's is overhearing the process along with us, as his avant-garde sonorities emerge from the silence of the house. Khuyến's composition bears a significant resemblance to Mùi's theme. Mùi walks into the house, turning on lights and tidying up Khuyến's studio, as the camera sees him at work for the first time [Fig. 25]. As Mùi enters the house, getting closer to the work studio, the music adds textural layers. When we get the first shot of Khuyến, from behind a window lattice, he plays a flourish in the right hand, marking the occasion and connecting the film's sound to the haptic – and diegetic – activity of playing piano. Khuyến likes this gesture. He raises his non-playing hand to notate the sequence. Meanwhile Mùi moves about his workspace, turning on the lights – a symbolic gesture of lending him the light of inspiration.

Figure 25: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

As Mùi returns to the outdoor courtyard Khuyến switches seamlessly from composing his own music to performing Debussy's famous anthology piece, *Clair de lune* [Moonlight]; perhaps a habit he picked up in Paris. He plays the piece haltingly – like a composer rather than a pianist. Juxtaposing the two pieces in this way reveals hidden correspondences between them: a propensity for arpeggiated gestures, a certain rhythmic fluidity, and a profusion of decorative surface details.

This musical cut-away from Khuyến to Debussy is visually framed by a haptic close-up of Mùi's foot extending to touch a toad.

Khuyến's performance of Debussy remains continuous over a subsequent cut, where Mùi has moved forward in time and switched locations, finding herself in the kitchen preparing to serve dinner. This visual discontinuity problematizes the diegetic/non-diegetic divide that has hitherto applied to the film. Now in part two, because Khuyến's music both represents and actually is the music of Tôn-Thất Tiết, the distinction between diegetic music and the film score dissolves. While Khuyến continues with the Debussy performance Mùi serves the Vietnamese dishes she prepared. The serving table on which she places them is positioned conveniently next to a three-volume set of French books titled, in prominent capitalized letters: "*HISTOIRE DE LA MUSIQUE*."[193] Mùi finishes artfully placing the plates at the exact moment that Khuyến lifts his fingers from the

Figure 26: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

keyboard [Fig. 26]. As the final sonority lingers on the camera cuts to close-up still shot of Khuyến's composition prize from the Paris conservatoire. The scene thus artfully frames a double

[193] The book, published the year in which part two takes place, is: Robert Bernard, *Histoire de la musique. Introd. de Jacques Ibert.* (Bourges: F. Nathan, 1961).

display of pedagogy: Khuyến shows off his conservatoire pedigree while Mùi reveals the results of her training as a household servant.

His fiancée interrupts the moment. Her entry is accompanied by the sound of Chopin. She teases him about his composing and Mùi's cooking, uttering "*Thơm quá*" (Smells good!) next to the dishes before suggesting they eat out. As they leave the studio, Chopin's music music fades away. Later in the night, the couples' return is marked by a shift in musical genre. The camera moves into Khuyến's studio where the composer is contentedly vamping a jazzy tune. His fiancée removes her heels in the background and pulls him away from the music and toward the bedroom.

The next morning, as Mùi is cleaning up the studio, she notices the shoe left behind by Khuyến's fiancée. This Cinderella moment is accompanied by another iteration of *Clair de lune*. Once again the music provides continuity for a scene that cuts forward in time, implying Mùi's progress in tidying up the house. As Mùi opens the bathroom window a reverse-shot reveals Khuyến sitting at the piano, diegetically performing what started off as non-diegetic music. The music starts to intensify as Mùi discovers Khuyến's finacée's lipstick. Here both Khuyến and Mùi show their ambiguity about products from the West: he switches from Debussy's French music to the avant-garde idiom of his own musical language, and she decides to forego the allure of lipstick – at least for the time being. We see a close-up of Khuyến's head that shows him sight-reading the music he wrote down in the previous scene. He is evaluating his composition so far.

We then cut to a later moment of Khuyến sitting down and reading a musical score silently. Appropriately enough, this moment is highlighted by the first unambiguous deployment of the non-diegetic score in part two of the film. The music grows slowly from a soft entry but as Mùi is framed by the camera the unmistakable string slides announce yet another iteration of the siren theme. This time the object of desire that the leitmotif represents is Mùi herself.

The next morning, Khuyến being absent, Mùi decides to put on the jewelry, shoes, and *áo dài* that the Mother bequeathed to her – as well as try on the lipstick left behind by Khuyến's fiancée. The music starts exactly when Mùi runs over to the bedroom and opens the drawer where she stashed the lipstick. What she finds in the drawer is a sketch of her own face on piece of staff paper (for music notation) along with a musical theme notated at the bottom of the page [Fig. 27]. It turns out Khuyến had been composing her leitmotif all along. The music stops suddenly as Mùi flees in embarrasment from Khuyến's sight but resumes when he wanders slowly into the servants' quarters, looking for her.

We cut to a later scene, where Khuyến is playing Chopin's *Prélude 23* for his fiancée. The work's effervescent texture reflects the couples' playful mood. This is the same piano piece that was heard as non-diegetic music when the fiancée made her initial appearance. Seeing Khuyến play it this time around makes it appear that the initial non-diegetic iteration was actually a temporally transposed prefiguration of this later diegetic performance. The mood changes as the fiancée wonders aloud why Khuyến has been reluctant to visit her family lately. Khuyến responds not with dialogue but by switching to a contrasting piece by Chopin, the broody and tempestuous

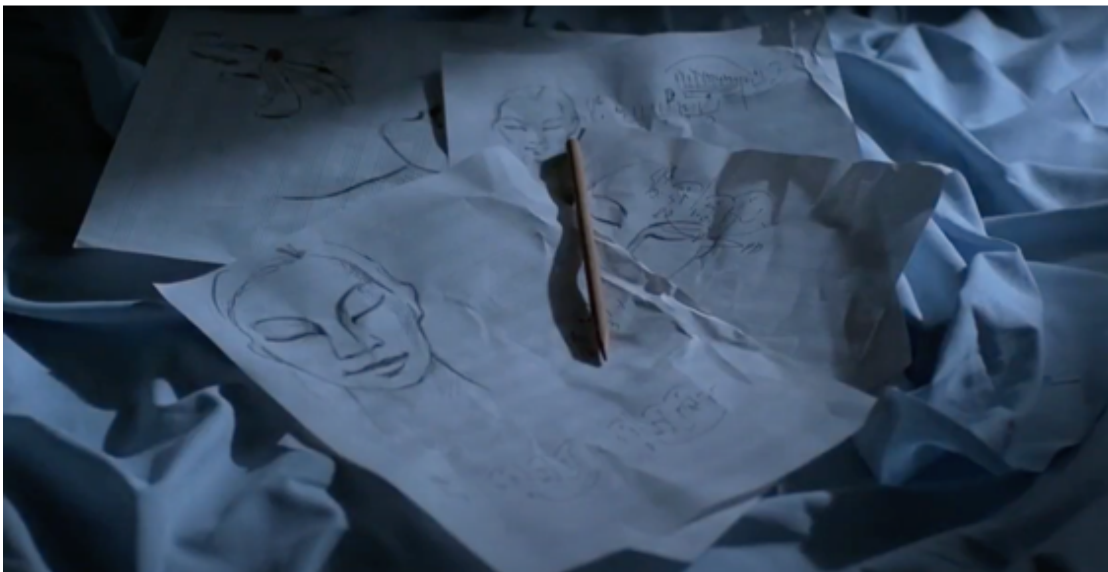

Figure 27: *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, directed by Trần Anh Hùng (President Films, 1993).

Prélude 24. It starts to rain. The fiancée leaves visibly upset. The scene cuts to inside the house where Mùi is bathing. Through these cuts Khuyến's performance of Chopin remains continuous.

An important close-up shot follows, revealing several different sheets of staff paper spread across Khuyến's bed. Each features a sketch of Mùi's face along with music notation, demonstrating that the paper Mùi found earlier was part of a series of drafts. Khuyến's walk down the hallway into Mùi's room is silent at first. But as he peeks through the lattice work of her room, once again the gesture is marked (like in the previous scene) by the arising of the siren lietmotif. A slow trill quickens into a faster pace, as more string lines are added to the texture to represent Khuyến's growing desire. He opens the door through which Mùi is seen sitting on her bed. The closing of the door is marked by a few notes on the harp – then silence.

After the implied lovemaking scene, Mùi receives a rude awakening. Khuyến's fiancée slaps her to the dissonant sound of a heavily intensified siren motif that expresses the fiancée's desire to tear apart the house. At the outset, she tears one of the musical sketch portraits of Mùi on camera then proceeds to throw out volumes from the bookshelf along with a bust of Ludwig van Beethoven, traditional figurehead of European classical music. She finally shatters a vase (her gift to Khuyến) then falls prostrate across the piano in exasperation while the music ebbs away along with her outburst. Khuyến's perusal of the damage is set to another iteration of the siren motif, this time lighter and more airy, as if a weight has been lifted. After surveying the studio, he walks into Mùi's room and hands her a book, a gesture that initiates the film's penultimate sequence.

This montage that puts into relation musical and linguistic pedagogy and demonstrates the influence of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation on both. Mùi's reading lessons appear as an allegory of the problematic connection to the Vietnamese language among "Việt kiều" (or diasporic Vietnamese) communities, whose members sometimes feel compelled to formally study

Vietnamese to reconnect with their heritage. The lesson is also an example of reeducation. Mùi has already learned how to perform the tasks required of her as a household servant – a role that did not require literacy. But now, the formally educated Khuyến feels obliged to cultivate this neglected aspect of her training. Not only does he teach her to read and write but also how to carry herself (during a dictation excercise he corrects her deportment). Lan P. Duong emphasizes the gender imbalance inherent in this scene of "reeducation":

> In the film women undergo a proces of reeducation by the film's conclusion. The nature of women's education, marked by an entrance into language and narrative, is a key element in Tran's film. Mùi's transformation in the conclusion occurs when Mùi's lover teaches her how to read and write, the extended sequence stressing her induction into voice, narrative, and discourse. Here, Tran emphasizes the power imbalance between the two lovers. The dictation of Vietnamese texts and her lover's correction of her posture while they sit – teacher and student, master and servant – reinscribe the pedagogical act of teaching gender *and* class performance.[194]

Although the lessons involve recitation they do not represent real "dialogue" since there is no verbal communication between them, beyond the utilitarian level of dictation. Khuyến's "response" to Mùi's lessons is not verbal but rather musical. The montage intertwines two processes: Mùi's progress in learning to read and Khuyến's progress in composing his music. This

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[194] Lan P. Duong, *Treacherous Subjects: Gender, Culture, and Trans-Vietnamese Feminism*, American Literatures Initiative edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 30.

parallel features a significant (if silent) tie-in with Franco-Vietnamese transculturation. Mùi is learning how to read Vietnamese in the Latin-based alphabet known as *quốc ngữ* (or national script). Meanwhile Khuyến's halting attempts at composition have reached a new level of fluency, as he fulfills Tôn-Thất Tiết's mission of developing a Franco-Vietnamese musical language. As Mùi opens the book Khuyến hands her, a new musical theme emerges characterized by quick piano passagework, performed by Khuyến. There is a pedagogical flair to the rows of cleanly executed scales that hearkens back to Khuyến's (much more slowly played) piano exercises in the first part of the film.

The final sequence of the film follows, representing the synthesis of Mùi and Khuyến's twinned pedagogies through a transcultural performance of "fluency." It begins with a reversion to an earlier scene from Mùi's childhood (in part one), when she splits a green papaya and the music highlights her finger penetrating the interior of the fruit to touch its seeds. The music that accompanies this moment is the culmination of Khuyến's pedagogy – as his completed (and orchestrated) masterpiece. It is also nothing more or less than Mùi's leitmotif, as introduced at the start of the film. As if to emphasize the cyclical temporality of the moment Mùi's voice is heard over the abstract (out-of-focus) montage uttering the words: "*Em bắt đầu nhé?*" [I'm starting, ok?]. She proceeds by reciting an excerpt from *Kusamakura* [Grass Pillow] by the Japanese novelist Natsume Soseki, in a Vietnamese translation, emphasizing the transcultural character of her re-education. At the end of her recitation (and the film as a whole) we learn that she is pregnant.

In the introduction to this chapter, I assert that *L'Odeur* represents Trần's attempt to establish a Franco-Vietnamese diasporic cinematic "heritage" by drawing on the paratextual associations evoked by Tôn-Thất Tiết's score and biography. Even before Tôn-Thất Tiết decided to incorporate Asian elements (broadly speaking) into his compositional style, French art music

had already undergone a process of transculturation via contact with "non-Western" musics. Since the second half of the 19th century, the French *Expositions universelles* staged encounters between audiences in the metropole and musicians from far reaches of the globe.[195] These exotic spectacles are representative of the rampant phase of colonization under the Third Republic during the late 19th and early 20th century – when French Indochina was established. They demonstrate the central role played by music in mediating and theorizing transculturation in the French colonial context, as well as offering composers an alternate musical pedagogy, beyond the scope of their institutional studies.[196] During this period, French composers came to be profoundly impacted by their exposure to non-Western musics. It is no accident that Tôn-Thất Tiết's composition professors, Jean Rivier and André Jolivet, encouraged him to search abroad for inspiration, since not only they but also previous generations of French composers had done the same.

Rivier was known for his many works written in the neoclassical style that was ascendant in France in the second quarter of the 20th century and associated with Les Six, a composers' collective led by Cocteau that included Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, who were influenced by the music of Igor Stravinsky. From 1948 to 1962 Rivier shared his *conservatoire* professorship with Milhaud (due to Milhaud's teaching obligation at Mills College in California),

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[195] See: Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Jean-Paul Montagnier, "Julien Tiersot: Ethnomusicologue a l'Exposition Universelle de 1889, Contribution a Une Histoire Française de l'ethnomusicologie," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 21, no. 1 (1990): 91–100; Lesley Wright, "Music Criticism and the Exposition Internationale Universelle de 1900," *Context*, no. 22 (Spring 2001): 19-30.

[196] Jann Pasler, "The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 1 (2004): 24–76; Jann Pasler, "Theorizing Race in Nineteenth-Century France: Music as Emblem of Identity," *The Musical Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2006): 459–504; Jann Pasler, "The Music Criticism of Gaston Knosp: From Newspaper Journalism in Tonkin to Comparative Musicology (1898-1912)," *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Muziekwetenschap* 66 (2012): 203–22.

teaching every other year; and he was influenced by Honegger.[197] From 1922 to 1926, while studying at the Paris conservatoire, Rivier studied music history with the composer and musicologist Maurice Emmanuel, known for his incorporation of exotic (including French regional) modes into his works.[198] While himself a student at the conservatoire, Emmanuel studied with Ernest Guiraud, who also taught Debussy. The pervasiveness of Debussy's music in part two of the *L'Odeur* alludes to Tôn-Thất Tiết's pedigree, which reaches back to Debussy through Rivier. Rivier also taught the eminent French film composer, Georges Delerue, whose final film score, discussed in Chapter 3, was written for Pierre Schoendoerffer's *Điện Biên Phủ* (1992).

Emmanuel also taught music history to Rivier's conservatoire colleague, Olivier Messiaen. Messiaen, who himself subsequently taught at the *conservatoire*, mentored Nguyễn Thiên Đạo there, the French-Vietnamese composer who scored Lâm Lê's *Poussière d'empire* (1978), the film that inspired Trần to become a filmmaker. Messiaen is particularly well-known for his systematic adaptation of non-Western musical materials – rhythms, modes, languages, programs – into his "musical language." In his treatise, *Technique de mon langage musical* (1944), he itemizes his influences which include: "birds, Russian music, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, plainchant, Hindu rhythmics."[199] He closes by "particularly" thanking "my friend" André Jolivet.[200] Jolivet –

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[197] "Rivier, Jean," Grove Music Online, accessed October 10, 2023.

[198] Christophe Corbier, "Continuité, tradition, nouveauté: Essai sur l'esthétique de Maurice Emmanuel," in *Tradition et innovation en histoire de l'art*, ed. Jean-René Gaborit (Grenoble: Collection Actes des Congrès des Sociétés historiques et scientifiques, 2006); Maurice Emmanuel, *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1911).

[199] These were likely influenced directly by Emmanuel: "A certain British music magazine publishes three long articles on Olivier Messiaen, in which his main interests are enumerated as: Hindu music, bird song and plainsong. No mention that Emmanuel, the teacher of Messiaen, as long ago as 1920 wrote a piano Sonatina on Hindu modes, another Sonatina based on bird song and a book on plainsong. Emmanuel's name is mentioned once only – in Messiaen's *curriculum vitae*, a passing reference." Ronald Stevenson, "Maurice Emmanuel: A Belated Apologia," *Music & Letters* 40, no. 2 (1959), 154.

[200] Olivier Messiaen, *Technique de mon langage musical* (orig. 1944; Paris: Éditions Alphonse Leduc, 1956).

who participated in two composers' groups with Messiaen, *La Spirale* and *Le Jeune France*[201] – was Tôn-Thất Tiết's second composition teacher at the conservatoire (after Riviere). His wife Hilda Jolivet describes him as schooling his peers in musical developments outside France:

> Jolivet was three years older than Messiaen and Daniel-Lesur,[202] and he introduced his younger colleagues to new music from the rest of Europe…Jolivet was familiar with the Second Viennese School, Bartok, etc., and he guided his friends. These young musicians often met at our house to look at every work possible, especially the most recent.[203]

What is particularly resonant about Jolivet's style in relation to Tôn-Thất Tiết is the oblique way in which he approached transcultural adaptation. Musicologist Deborah Mawer explains that "Jolivet sought to internalize non-Western cultural concepts rather than to externalize them through mimicry."[204] This method resembles Tôn-Thất Tiết's way of absorbing Eastern influence not only directly through music but also through the study of Eastern philosophy, as explicitly exhibited in his works that are based on Buddhist and Taoist concepts but implicitly present in his musical language in general.

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[201] Nigel Simeone, "La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities," *The Musical Times* 143, no. 1880 (2002): 10–36.

[202] Another member of Jolivet's milieu. See: Andrew Thomson, "Daniel-Lesur: The Athenian of Paris," *The Musical Times* 132, no. 1781 (1991): 333–36.

[203] Nigel Simeone, "La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities," *The Musical Times* 143, no. 1880 (2002): 10–36.

[204] Deborah Mawer, "Jolivet's Search for a New French Voice: Spiritual 'Otherness' in Mana (1935)," in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly, Eastman Studies in Music (Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 173.

Tôn-Thất's conservatoire pedigree does not only connect him to his immediate teachers, Riviere and Jolivet. It also connects him to a longer historical lineage of French composers that structures the second half of the movie, which interweaves scenes in which Khuyến is developing his own musical language to those in which he is performing the music of Debussy, and occasionally Chopin. Paratextually, the point of connecting Tôn-Thất to Debussy is to demonstrate that French music had already undergone a historical process of transculturation, and had done so specifically in relation to the Far East.

Because Debussy is a notable representative of this tradition of musical transculturation between France and the Far East it will be useful to briefly contextualize this aspect of his compositional language in the context of transcultural musical encounters in the metropole during his time. Citing a contemporary of the composer, Pasteur Vallery-Radot, musicologist Jean-Michel Nectoux describes the décor of Debussy's studio – framed as "the very image of his works" – largely by itemizing objects from the Far East:

> A long room lit by three windows, one of which opens onto a little garden. By the back window stood his work table on which was found, beside large sheets of staff paper, an enormous Chinese toad made of wood that he called "Arkel," a kind of fetish that never left his side. On the mantelpiece, dominating the room, a large statue of the Buddha. To the left of the mantelpiece, a little upright piano in black wood. On the walls, books, musical instruments from the Far East, colored reproductions of paintings by Whistler and Turner, Japanese prints of which one, *The Wave*, was represented on the cover of *La Mer*. There is also a Chinese laquered

panel that inspired *Poissons d'or*. Large curtains of nasturtium [*capucin*] velvet gave the room an atmosphere of intimacy and calm.[205]

A window that leads into a garden, Buddhist statuary, a mixture of Western and Eastern objets d'art centered around a piano – this eye-witness description of Debussy's décor is not distant from the Orientalizing décor of Khuyến's own studio.

The effect made on Debussy by the Javanese gamelan at the 1889 Paris Exposition is well-documented. Less commented on is his attendance at the "Annamite Pavilion" at the same Exposition, where he was able to attend performances of the traditional sinicized Vietnamese "opera," *hát tuồng*. In 1913, he could still recall the effect that these performances made on him. With acerbic wit, he describes them favorably in comparison to the excesses of Wagnerian lyric drama

The Annamites perform a kind of embryo of lyric drama, with Chinese influence, in which the tetralogy [Wagner's *Ring*] can be recognized; there are just more Gods and less stage sets…A small raging clarinet drives the emotion; a tam-tam organizes the terror…and that's all! No more special theatrics, no more hidden orchestra! Nothing but an instictive need for art that satisfies

[205] "Une assez longue pièce, éclairé par trois fenêtres dont l'une donnait sur un petit jardin. Devant la fenêtre du fon était sa table de travail sur laquelle se trouvait, à côté de grandes feuilles de papier à musique, un énorme crapaud chinois en bois, qu'il appelait 'Arkel,' sorte de fétiche qui ne le quittait jamais. Sur la cheminée, dominant la pièce, un grand prêtre de Bouddha. À gauche de la cheminée, un petit piano droit en bois noir. Aux murs, des livres, des instruments de musique d'Extrême Orient, des reproductions en couleurs de tableaux de Whistler et de Turner, des estampes japonaises dont l'une, *La Vague*, fut représentée sur la couverture de la partition de *La Mer*. Il y avait encore un panneau de laque chinois qui inspira *Poissons d'or*. De grands rideaux de velours capucine donnaient à la pièce une atmosphère de calme et d'intimité."Jean-Michel Nectoux, "'Je veux écrire mon songe musical…'," *Debussy: La musique et les arts* (Paris, musée de l'Orangerie, 2012), 15.

itself ingeniously; no trace of bad taste! – To think that these people [the Vietnamese performers] never had the thought of seeking their formulas at the Munich school: what are they thinking?[206]

Debussy was not alone in paying close attention to non-Western music at the Expositions. The French musicologist Julien Tiersot, for example, wrote a regular music review column for the 1889 Exposition in *Le Ménestrel* in which he describes these musical encounters for the reading public. In one article, he sensationalizes the cultural shock of encountering Vietnamese *hát tuồng*:

> Visitors [to the section] dedicated to the French colonies have, for a week now, found themselves transfixed before an open-roofed house by frightening shouts, accompanied by the din of drums and pans. What are these noises? Crime is discarded as a hypothesis: real crime likes more mystery[...]In fact: it's Annamite theater.[207]

These encounters sometimes provided points of reflection about musical transculturation. Contextualizing Tiersot's approach to non-Western genres within contemporaneous French debates about race and music, Jann Pasler points to his 1905 essay *Notes d'ethnographie musical* in which he reflects on a transcultural musical situation at the 1900 Paris Exposition:

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[206] "Chez les Annamites on représente une sorte d'embryon de drame lyrique, d'influence chinoise, où se reconnait la formule tétralogique; il y a seulement plus de Dieux, et moins de décors[…]Une petite clarinette rageuse conduit l'émotion; un Tam-Tam organise la terreur…et c'est tout! Plus de théâtre spécial, plus d'orchestre caché. Rien qu'un instinctif besoin d'art, ingénieux à se satisfaire; aucune trace de mauvais goût! – Dire que ces gens là n'ont jamais eu l'idée d'aller chercher leurs formules à l'école de Munich: à quoi pensent-ils?" Claude Debussy, "Du gout," *Revue de la Société Internationale de Musiques 15* (1913): 223-224.

[207] "Les visiteurs de l'exposition qui traversent la partie[...]consacrée aux colonies françaises sont, depuis une semaine, arrêtés, devant une maison construite à ciel ouvert, par des cris épouvantables, accompagnés d'un tapage de tambours et de casseroles fêlées. Quels sont ces bruits? L'hypothèse d'un crime est écartée tout d'abord: le crime aime plus de mystère[...]En effet: c'est le théâtre annamite." Julien Tiersot, "Promenades Musicales A L'Exposition," *Le Ménestrel*, June 16, 1889.

> Tiersot encountered an Arab musician playing a tune that resembled a bourée from the center of France. Nearby, Tiersot heard a group of musicians from that part of the country who, all day long during the Exhibition, played their regional repertoire. Tiersot deduced that the Arab must have borrowed from what he had just heard. "But let's imagine that this Arab took his Bourbonnais air back to Algeria," he continues, "and later there was a European who heard it and noted it down – what a strange idea he would have of Arab music!"[208]

Debussy's transcultural approach to music composition reflects broader developments in late 19th and early 20th century French musical life that were themselves profoundly shaped by French colonialism and the occasions it furnished for his reeducation as a Paris conservatoire trained composer. In *L'Odeur* the frequent recourse to Debussy's music is a sonic background that stands for Franco-Vietnamese transculturation. Music's role in conveying this meaning is essential since, like French colonialism, it is never discussed in the dialogue.[209] Likewise, the Paris conservatoire pedigree of Khuyến represents not only the film composer, Tôn-Thất Tiết, but also a lineage of conservatoire educated composers leading back, through Rivier and Jolivet, to Debussy; composers who did not singlemindedly pursue the style they learned at the conservatoire but underwent – and encouraged their students to undergo – a reeducation based on their exposure

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[208] Jann Pasler, "Theorizing Race in Nineteenth-Century France: Music as Emblem of Identity," *The Musical Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (Winter 2006), 471-472.

[209] The other composer whose works are featured is Frédéric Chopin. In 19th century France, Chopin's music was appreciated for its transcultural synthesis of Polish music, redolent of the composer's nostalgia for his native Poland, and Parisian salon music. Chopin was himself half Polish and half French (on his father's side). By adding the diegetic performance of Chopin to that of Debussy, the film's paratext of French musical transculturation is reinforced.

to non-Western musics. This is the pedigree to which Khuyến's narrative arc connects Tôn-Thất Tiết.

If we are cognizant of music's paratextual significance in the film we can understand that *L'Odeur* does not primarily envision a transcultural Franco-Vietnamese "heritage" then set it incidentally to music but that it highlights a diasporic composer's connection to a pre-existing French *musical* "heritage" of transculturation. In doing so it offers audiences themselves a reeducation about the complex heritage of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation, rendered not directly through the dialogue or narrative "text" but rather obliquely through the musical paratext. Perhaps such a transparent reading of the film's paratextual and (trans)cultural representation as I have been trying to articulate is itself an effect of representation rather than reality. Perhaps in engaging with the film at the granular level of scene-by-scene music analysis my interpretation has assumed an unrealistic level of access to transcultural representation and not paid enough attention to the opacity or silence inherent in cultural difference. As John McLeod writes:

> Postcolonial critique insists that we suspect the apparent transparency and cummunicability of difference via a mode of representation that appropriates more than it articulates. One's perspective of other peoples is not so easily focused and realised. What we sometimes hear amidst the blether of conversation is silence, one that marks an uncrossable threshold in the global contact zones of the contemporary. Here we need the increasingly mothballed wisdom of postcolonial studies ever more urgently, perhaps.[210]

[210] John McLeod, "Sounding Silence: Transculturation and Its Thresholds," *Transnational Literature* 4 (November 1, 2011), 10.

Not all commentators have read the film as embracing transculturality. Some have seen it as reflecting a conservative tendency to preserve an idealised cultural history. Leslie Barnes calls it a "cinematic attempt to slow the process of acculturation in the modern world and protect elements of Vietnamese tradition on film."[211] Where Barnes sees Vietnamese tradition Thúy Dinh highlights elements of French heritage, seeing in *L'Odeur* a combination of "the meticulous naturalism of Balzac, Flaubert and Proust with the wry flavor of the archetypal Cinderella tale (or Tấm Cám, as the Vietnamese version is known)."[212] Thi Nguyen discusses Trần's depiction of Mùi within the East Asian cultural framework of Confucianism, calculated so that "every Vietnamese, wherever he or she lives, feels nostalgia."[213] Nguyen ties sonic and musical aspects of the film in relation to a conservative Confucian ideal of femininity:

> In *The Scent of Green Papaya*, the scenes of the house are all static, possessing almost no sound. The sound outside the street does not seem to penetrate further inside. Dialogue is also very scarce. A gentle, peaceful atmosphere is created even when the family is in the most difficult situation. For example, there are only two scenes in which the mistress cries. In one of these, she cries when talking to her mother-in-law, although the viewer does not actually hear the sound of crying. Rather, Tran Anh Hung uses a distance shot with the point of view of the second

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[211] Leslie Barnes, "Cinema as Cultural Translation."

[212] Thúy Dinh, "*The Scent of Green Papaya* Ambiguity of the Vietnamese Essence," *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 3 (January 1994), 82.

[213] Thi Nguyen, "'Mapping Vietnamese Identities in Tran Anh Hung's and Tony Bui's Films: Femininity and Love,'" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 20 (June 9, 2020), 55.

son to symbolically convey this emotion [...] In another scene, she cries when Mui has to leave her home due to the family's difficulty in supporting the servants. In saying farewell, she calls Mui her "daughter." Tran Anh Hung displays her sobbing not in silence but rather aloud in order to express this woman's sincere attachment to and love for her daughter Mui. To her husband, who returns after enjoying many nighttime pleasures, she does not say a word of criticism. Rather she immediately invites the doctor to help him recover. Furthermore, because she understands her husband's love of song, she still hires a music player to perform for him. All of these actions are manifestations of the specific way of "practicing" love and femininity in the form of a combination of the three Confucian categories – "love" (tình), "decorum" (lễ), "uprightness" (nghĩa).[214]

George Dutton reminds us that we have to be careful in applying idealized Confucian categories to the historical realities lived by Vietnamese women.[215] Yet Trần's film is itself highly idealized, lending itself to such categories. Hanh Nguyen points to a musical division of labor in the film which can itself be seen to reflect this Confucian idealization. As Dutton points out,

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[214] Thi Nguyen, "'Mapping Vietnamese Identities in Tran Anh Hung's and Tony Bui's Films: Femininity and Love,'" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 20 (June 9, 2020), 57.

[215] "The influence of Confucianist norms and their application has changed over the centuries, affecting not only Vietnamese women but also Vietnamese society. The question remains: to what degree did these norms – articulated in the writings of elites (and sometimes echoed in oral form at the village level) – reflect a remote ideal or an applied reality? Given the influence of a written record compiled by elites, it has often been tempting to conflate ideals and realities, and efforts to separate the two are complicated by the fact that scholars have not yet been able to gather a large enough body of countervailing information." George Dutton, "Beyond Myth and Caricature: Situating Women in the History of Early Modern Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 2 (2013), 8.

according to the traditional Confucian ideal, elite men belonged to the scholar class (*sĩ*) while women were expected to tend the household and also conduct commerce (*thương*).[216] We see this division in operation in *L'Odeur*, as Khuyến and the Father pursue the scholarly pursuit of music while Mùi and the Mother take care of domestic duties and commerce. As if representing this dual role, the Mother's shop is attached to the house:

> The males in the house are either unconcerned and withdrawn to their own musical world or helplessly silent. If the visual creates an intimate bond among the women, the sound detaches the men from the domestic surroundings and elevates them to an isolated, artistic space. The film's diegetic music is owned by men, first by the lady's husband and eldest son, and later by Khuyến…These men own not only musical instruments but music itself by producing it and having it played for them, be it traditional Vietnamese music or classical Western music. Unconcerned with the domesticity, performing music is the only activity men participate in at home besides the absolute necessities such as eating. Music is also how the men interact with one another, for example, when the father and the eldest son perform a duet in replacement of verbal communication after the son comes back home at night. Women, however, are excluded from this leisurely musical world in which men indulge themselves. The only woman that showcases any affiliation with music is Khuyến's Westernized fiancée (Talisman Vantha) who tries to read a music sheet

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[216] George Dutton, "Beyond Myth and Caricature," 10.

> which is then taken away by her fiancé, or when she moves her head accordingly with the rhythm of the piano music Khuyến is playing.[217]

Because of the highly idealized quality of the film, Derderian has interpreted it not as a counter-example that goes against the grain of 1990s French nostalgia film but as a continuation of the genre. The film makes him seriously question "the ability of ethnic minority artists to resist dominant modes of representation."[218]

A convincing reading of the film as a medium of representation would have to account for the undeniably autobiographical element of its diegesis. Because in *L'Odeur* this element is inextricably tied to the representation of cultural difference, it may be useful to think about it in terms of Pratt's idea of "autoethnograhic gesture," which involves "transculturating elements of metropolitan discourses to create self-affirmations designed for reception in the metropolis."[219] As we have seen, Trần's film has itself been subject to criticism for representing a past in which the historical realities of colonialism and war have been poeticized away. Chua brings up the visual absence of bombs in *L'Odeur* despite sonic indications of their vicinity: "we hear the sound of

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[217] Hanh Nguyen, "The Scent Of Green Papaya: Female Solidarity and Male Disengagement," 2021.

[218] "The rich colors, exotic beauty, and complicated love affairs found in Tran's films are reminiscent of the kind of lavishness, splendor, and romance which Norindr finds in French films such as The Lover (1992), Indochine (1992) and Dien Bien Phu (1992). It may be going too far to conclude that Tran's work, like those of French filmmakers, helps sustain and perpetuate traditional myths about France's relationship with Indochina. However, the familiar elements found in Tran's films, all released after the trio of French films on Indochina, do raise questions about the ability of ethnic minority artists to resist dominant modes of representation or commercial pressures to market ''exotic'' spaces in recognizable forms." Richard L. Derderian, "Urban Space in the French Imperial Past and the Postcolonial Present," *Asia Europe Journal* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2003), 83.

[219] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (orig. 1992; London: Routledge, 2003), 143.

airplanes, but we never see the bombs." He asks Trần if this abence might "ultimately contribute to some kind of cultural amnesia that exists in the U.S. and France about Southeast Asia." In his response, Trần points to the "lack of cinematic heritage" that he felt as a diasporic filmmaker raised in France.[220]

Avoiding colonialism and war, otherwise rendered with much historical verisimilitude by French nostalgia productions of the time, afforded Trần the opportunity to focus on positing his vision of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation beyond the strictly national conception of "heritage" that these films worked with. This strategy broadened the film's audience base and created global opportunities for its reception. *L'Odeur* was not only well-received in France, garnering the Caméra d'Or at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival and a César for Best Debut, it was also submitted by Vietnam as their official entry for the Oscars that same year.[221]

Trần did not consider the possibility of drawing on the cinematic heritage that already existed in Vietnam – despite his example of a Japanese director turning to Japanese cinema as a source. As a diasporic filmmaker, Trần chose not to turn to the Vietnamese cinema tradition presumably because it was not cosmopolitan enough for his audience and did not fully reflect his own personal experience of "heritage." This is a crucial point. It reveals that the "cinematic heritage" that Trần was searching for in the 1990s was not simply a Vietnamese heritage. *L'Odeur*

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[220] "What is perhaps necessary to understand is that I cannot adequately convey what I haven't experienced, what I haven't lived through. Right now, at least, I am not capable of rendering properly the war and colonialism…I grew up in France, and yet I wanted people to have at their disposal a body of film about Vietnam. And yet I found that there was no cultural foundation for that heritage. If a Japanese filmmaker wishes to make a film about Japan, he or she has recourse to a ton of people: Ozu, Mizoguchi. I have this problem of a lack of cinematic heritage behind me. I had to make a film that was a departure to something." Lawrence Chua and Tran Anh Hung, "Tran Anh Hung."

[221] A choice probably encouraged by the fact that Régis Wargnier's *Indochine*, the heritage film blockbuster discussed in Chapter 1, won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film the previous year.

represents his attempt to establish a diasporic cinema "heritage" within a cosmopolitan context that is both Francophone and Vietnamophone, and which can appeal to a global audience, including that of Vietnam. In his reimagining of mid-century Saigon as a site of Franco-Vietnamese transculturation, Trần turned to music.

Conclusion

Points of Imitation:

Resonances of the Nostalgia Film

Counterpoint is a musical term that designates the interaction of two or more identical melodic lines. A canon is a musical composition made entirely of counterpoint: overlapping iterations of the same line. A standard canon includes four lines of counterpoint, each of which starts by copying the first, but emerging at a different point in time ("row row row your boat…"). These moments where the lines copy one another but at different times and at differnt intervals are called "points of imitation." In this chapter, I offer several films as points of imitation of the French nostalgia films analyzed in the preceding chapters. Some emerge earlier than the films in question, same later. Some are analyzed at greater length, or according to various intervals. Like a canon, these comparisons do not have a harmonic resolution, as they are continuously reverberating as long as the individual voices are in play. What I intend is to show how filmmakers have responded to these points of imitation in their own registers and in their own times, thus transforming, even through bouts of imitation, this continuous motion over time.

As I have done several times throughout the dissertation, I begin by reaching back into the late 19th century, before emerging from the historical contextualization to focus on two films, or two melodic lines in the "canon" of nostalgia film. One is Trần Anh Hùng's *Cyclo* (1995), a follow-up to *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* that responds very differently to the nostalgia film model. I analyze parts of this film in order to show how Trần offers a radical reaction to nostalgia film that

is nevertheless informed by its conventions. The second film, which I both analyze and contextualize at some length, is Việt Linh's 2002 film *Mê Thảo: Thời Vang Bóng* [Me Thao in Its Golden Time]. Linh's film offers a counterpoint to the French/Franco-Vietnamese views considered in this dissertation by turning to the perspective of a female Vietnamese director in the post-Dổi Mới era. Set during the French colonial period, Linh's film offers a fascinating study of a creative reversal of French nostalgia conventions.

The first line of Charles Baudelaire's well-known collection of unedited fragments, *Mon coeur mis à nu* [My Heart Laid Bare], first published (posthumously) in 1887 as part of the *Journaux Intimes* [Intimate Notebooks], offers a useful model for the reception of film sound: "*De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du Moi. Tout est là.*" That is to say: "The vaporization and centralization of Myself. It's all there." Much gets lost in translation. "*Moi*" means more than "me." It is the seat of the individuated self. And "*centralisation*" does not in this context denotes the process of concentrating dispersed energies into a point. "*Centralisation du Moi*" thus signifies the recrudescence of the self after an interval of dispersion, or "*vaporisation*."

The *Trésor de la langue Française informatisé* quotes Émile Zola's 1890 novel *La Bête humaine* as a historical example of the use of "*vaporisation*." Zola uses the term to refer to the steam of a locomotive, characterized as: "*douce, obéissante, facile au démarrage, d'une marche régulière et continue, grâce à sa bonne vaporisation*" [sweet, obedient, easy to get going, moving in a continuous, steady motion]. By eroticizing the engine Zola depicts its relationship to the novel's protagonist, the train conductor Jacques Lantier, for whom the train is personified as a woman. In this instance, "*vaporisation*" refers to the steaming of the train engine, a sign of jouissance. Zola's symbol of vapor as the visual consummation of the narrator's eroticizing gaze is transposed into film in director Jean Renoir's film adaptation.

The opening shots of Renoir's film establish the locomotive as a fetish object. The languorous views of its metallic body exuding vapors by which it is alternately enveloped and revealed, the dramatic lighting which imbues the vapor with luminosity, the caressing tone of the voice-over narration which rises audibly with the word "*vapeur*," the film score that emerges from the undulating sound waves of the ondes martenot, like steam from the engine: these characteristics all serve to frame an erotic appreciation of the train that attunes viewers to the perspective of Lantier (Jean Gabin). Renoir's adaptation of Zola's train transports viewers (and listeners) not to a different location but rather to a different state of being. To draw on Baudelaire's formulation above, we might say that Renoir's train transports us from the centered sense of self (*moi*) to the erotic state of vaporization, a passive process in which we loose ourselves: in another object, another person, another idea, another time.

Most striking, however, is the sound design. As much as the train's "*vaporisation*" is visually invoked in Zola's novel, so it is aurally presented in Renoir's adaptation. The steam's sonorous hissing is the aural background from which the narrator's voice emerges. For some time, the recitation hovers over the complex sibilant sound, until the steam itself is transposed into music, first in the surging ondes martenot line then settling into the warm string pad that steams over the crisp ostinato lines signaling the train's mechanism. The vaporization of the opening shot becomes centered on the voice of the speaker; first by elision, and subsequently by the music which amplifies the narration. It is significant that the phrase during which the music emerges, unlike the text used for much of the script, is lifted directly from Zola's novel. The narrator's voice, as it emerges from the steam's vaporization to be centered by the music, becomes an act of homage.

In an essay on film sound, Michel Chion invokes the sonic properties of steam in yet another French literary scene, from Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Published in 1869, the

Bildungsroman follows its protagonist, Frédéric Moreau, as he comes of age in Paris through the events surrounding the revolution of 1848. In one of the novel's evocative passages, Frédéric quite literally embarks on a journey to Paris aboard a steam ship.

Chion analyzes the sonic complexity of Flaubert's description of that scene, zooming in on the phrase: "*Le tapage s'absorbait dans le bruissement de la vapeur*." This roughly translates to: "The noise absorbs itself in the sound of the vapor." As a proponent of the *mot juste*, Flaubert chose his words with great precision. "Noise," for example, does not do justice to "*tapage*," which suggests the collective sound of many people or animals congregating, and "sound" hardly does service to "*bruissement*," associated with soft continuous breathy sounds like that of flutes, vapor, voices, or wind.

Let us first of all admire the turn of phrase which makes the sounds of voices and machines "absorb one another," and not "be absorbed," into a more general and indistinct sound. It is a partly active, partly passive form which seems to personify the sound in question…Usually, we say of someone that they have absorbed themselves, in their thoughts for example. One finds here a very Flaubertian idea of contemplation, in which the Multiple — in other words the human, torn apart by the solicitation of the senses, desires, and unjust impulses — aspires to reabsorb itself voluptuously into the Unique. And it is true that the sonorous domain is more apt than the visual to represent this process, since it is frequently the case that a larger and more vast sound functions like an absorbent, the sponge of all the other particular sounds.[222]

Trần Anh Hùng 1995 film "*Cyclo*," his follow-up to *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*, starts with an example of an "absorbent" sound that acts like a "sponge" to an array of individual sounds.

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[222] Michel Chion, "Promenades d'écoute," in *Les Paysages du cinéma*, ed. Jean Mottet (Seyssel: Éditions Champ Vallon, 1999), 45.

The film opens with the screeching of breaks. This sound becomes vaporized by and absorbed into the noise of Saigon traffic in which we see the young cyclo driver, known simply as Cyclo, visually immersed. As we dwell within that soundscape (which is the cyclo's quotidian environment), its teeming, multilayered quality emerges. There is the sheer multiplicity of its human and animal sources – its *tapage* – including the sound of cyclo pedals, car horns, rattling engines, motorcycles, the squealing of breaks and of pigs, and sundry other items that blend into the continuous din of traffic. The larger sonorous domain of traffic, as the sponge of all other particular sounds throughout the film, acts as what Chion calls a "*bruit fundamental*." For Chion, who coined the term in order analyze film sound, it "designates the continuous and undifferentiated noise [*bruit*] in which all other film sounds are symbolically threatened to be swallowed or dissolved, or into which they are reabsorbed and go quiet, be it that this noise covers all these other sounds in a given moment, or that it is revealed as the fundamental sonic background that one hears when the other sounds have died down, and to which they will return."[223]

The *bruit fundamental* is inherently ambiguous and therefore difficult to localize, as is apparent from the discontinuities that intrude on the Cyclo as the scene introduced above continues. After the initial squeal of brakes subsides, a paternal voice hovers over the din, describing the cycle of poverty into which the Cyclo was born, along with the first stirrings of the musical score, once again by Tôn-Thất Tiết. As this voice-over is reabsorbed into the sonic sponge of the traffic's *bruit fondamental*, the camera focuses more intensely on the Cyclo and the score swells up. From the initial vaporization of the scene with the sudden onrush of noise, we return to a recentered "*moi*"

[223] "Désigne au cinéma le bruit continu et indifférencié dans lequel symboliquement tous les autres sons du film sont menacés de s'engloutir ou de se dissoudre, ou tendent à se résorber et à s'apaiser, soit que ce bruit recouvre à un moment donné tous ces autres sons, soit qu'il se dévoile comme le bruit de fond qu'on entend lorsque les autres sons se sont tus, et auquel ils vont retourner." Michel Chion, *Un art sonore, le cinéma: histoire, esthétique, poetique* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003), appendix ("bruit fondamental").

of the individual cyclo. Suddenly, the camera pans out, and the traffic disconcerts both the Cyclo's concentration and ours. On cue, the score's orchestration broadens out. At the same time, it becomes increasingly entangled within the sound texture, to the point that the sound of the traffic and the sound of the orchestra absorb each other. From a single point, emerging through the underscoring of the father's remembered voice, and highlighting the Cyclo's individual predicament, a more dispersed vaporization manifests the subsequent burst of orchestrated traffic. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Trần's *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* is a response to, rather than a neat example of, French nostalgia film. It is distanced from the genre by its foregrounding of the Vietnamese language, its absence of French characters and the casting of Vietnamese (main) roles, as well as a hybrid point of view informed by Trần and Tôn-Thất's Franco-Vietnamese perspective. Yet if *L'Odeur* signifies an independent departure from the nostalgia blockbusters in whose wake it was released, *Cyclo* presents a yet more radical difference from this model, a stylistic turn manifested by the dissonance of the *bruit fondamental* established in the opening scene. In this, his first film shot in Vietnam, Trần represents a contemporary Vietnam that, in its unflinching realism, is far from the nostalgic aestheticism of *L'Odeur*.

French nostalgia film also impacted Vietnamese directors working for the Vietnamese market. A good example is Việt Linh's 2002 film *Mê Thảo: Thời Vang Bóng*, which represents a Vietnamese response to the French nostalgia film of the 1990s. In counterpoint to the nostalgia film's use of classical music, Linh elects to deploy traditional Vietnamese genres that evoke a sense of Vietnamese "heritage" to represent the French colonial period. Linh attended film school at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. From her Soviet training she may have picked up the keen interest in expressive use of montage, as I analyze below, contrary to the smooth continuity editing of French nostalgia films.

Based on *Chùa Đàn*, a *truyện dài* [long story] by Nguyễn Tuân, the story tells of a hamlet in north Vietnam, Mê Thảo, whose proprietor, also named Nguyễn, decides to destroy all signs of modernity within his domain after his bride-to-be dies in a car accident on her way from Hanoi. In the original book it was a train accident. Blaming her death on the "Europeanization" [*Âu hoá*] of Vietnam, Nguyễn requires all the villagers in his purview to abandon all but their most traditional possessions, which are ceremonially burned in a dramatic bonfire on top of which, symbolically, lies a clock. From this point time seems to stand still, if not move backwards, for Mê Thảo.

The idea of a "glorious" or "golden time" of the film's subtitle, *Thời Vang Bóng* – translated variously as *The Legendary Age*, *Once Upon a Time*, and in French *Il Fut un Temps* – is thus revealed to be a key metaphor of the film, as well its central irony. What is idealized as a golden age is depicted in the film as a time of cultural decadence and colonial domination. Significantly, one of the denizens of Mê Thảo steals a record player from Nguyễn's bonfire, storing it away in an undisclosed location. By the time the record player reappears in the movie, this time projecting the rhythmic grooves of a tango across the Mê Thảo landscape, the villager is working for French authorities, helping construct the railway that will become the nail in the coffin of the traditional Vietnamese village. Thus, Linh's film frames the transcultural struggle between Europeanization and Vietnamese identity during the colonial era as a struggle between musical genres, and in doing so recontextualizes the trope of a record player churning out the tango, as heard (and seen) in both *Indochine* and *L'Amant*. In those films, the tango/phonograph combination is presented as a domesticating technology of European acculturation. In Việt's film, it is presented outside at a scene of forced labor, an instrument of colonial exploitation [Fig. 28].

This final scene is the one and only instance of the use of diegetic Western music in the entire film. The rest of the narrative is entirely taken up with the articulation of a Vietnamese cultural identity against the background of encroaching colonialism in the form of the musical genre *ca trù*, also known as *hát ả đào*, among other names. I provide a musical/sonic analysis as well as a historical contextualization of the complex deployment of *ca trù* in *Mê Thảo Thời Vang Bóng*. I argue that the film draws on the genre's colonial-era association with sex work but also independence from French control as a way to construct a subtle correspondence between gender and postcoloniality in the post-Đổi Mới era.

Figure 28: *Mê Thảo, thời vang bóng*, directed by Việt Linh (Hãng Phim Giảy Phóng, 2002).

Construed around male spectatorship of female vocality, the genre offers significant clues not only about how Vietnamese femininity was construed during the colonial period but also how it was rehabilitated in the wake of Đổi Mới. During the colonial period, the gendered formation of *ca trù* or *ả đào*, which triangulates between a female singer and two male instrumentalists, came to be associated with sex work and sensuality. At the same time, *ca trù* venues became enclaves of an emerging Vietnamese national identity, in particular among the milieu that Ben Tran

associates with "post-mandarin masculinities."[224] The pleasures that the post-mandarin milieu shared in *ả đào* performance – at the linguistic, cultural, sexual, and musical levels – were reportedly not shared by French male colonists. Starting in the late 1980s, a new influx of Western capital created a financial and cultural imbalance within Vietnamese society that reflexively brought to mind parallels from the period of French colonialism. From this postcolonial vantage point, contemporary tensions between Westernization and Vietnamese identity could be interrogated on screen by Vietnamese directors in the guise of filmic representation of the French colonial period.

Caroline Eades draws on Paul Ricoeur's notion of "putting the past into temporal perspective" in order to theorize how postcolonial films "maintain a connection with History and constitute a rewriting of events that are linked to colonization and described as causes of a posterior event, 'decolonization,' proclaimed from the assumed position of contemporary filmmakers."[225] She elaborates:

Filmic representations of colonialism, among others, propose to explain the circumstances surrounding the end of Empire through a description of life in the colonies or by citing notable events and people of the colonial period; but it is above all by representing this experience as already passed and gone, taking into account the narrator's position posterior to decolonization,

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[224] Ben Tran, *Post-Mandarin: Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

[225] "Nous appliquerons ce que Paul Ricoeur appelle "une mise en perspective temporelle du passé" à des récits filmiques qui…entretiennent un lien avec l'Histoire et constituent une réécriture d'événements liés à la colonisation et décrits comme causes d'un événement liés à la colonisation et décrits comme causes d'un événement postérieur, "la décolonisation," à partir de la position d'énonciation assumée par les cinéastes contemporains." Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français*, (Paris: CERF, 2006), 19.

that they contribute to a description of the chronological and logical unfolding of decolonization as a process resulting from colonization.[226]

Norton points out that, in Nguyễn's novella, in which the master of Mê Thảo is named Lanh Ut (not Nguyễn), "*ca tru* is situated in opposition to French colonialism; music provides an escape from the overwhelming grief felt by Lanh Ut…and an escape from the inevitable destruction of traditional village life by the colonialists."[227] Despite its anti-colonial association in the novella and the film, during Vietnam's postcolonial period *ca trù* came to be seen as "tainted by colonialist decadence and corruption, rather than antithetical to it."[228] This difference in opinion points to the importance of periodicity in reconstructing shifts in Vietnamese cultural identity over the 20th century. A few decades can make a big difference. Norton points to what he calls the "authorial present" of the book as taking place in the mid-1940s, while the authorial present of *Mê Thảo* is post-Đổi Mới Vietnam of the early 2000s. This difference is related to the respective experiences of the author of the book and the *auteur* of the film. Norton reminds us that:

Nguyen Tuan was himself imprisoned twice by the French for his opposition to colonialism, and from the first page of Chua Dan, anti-colonialist sentiments are evident throughout references to the "terror" (*khung bo*) of French rule and descriptions of the harsh conditions experienced by Lanh Ut in the prisoner-of-war camp. [229]

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[226] "Les representations – cinématographiques entre autres – proposent une explication des circonstances de la fin de l'Empire à travers la description de la vie dans les colonies ou la mention d'événements et de figures notables de l'époque coloniale, mais c'est surtout par la présentation de cette expérience comme passée et révolue, c'est-à-dire la prise en compte du statut du narrateur comme postérieur à la décolonisation, qu'elles contribuent à décirire le déroulement chronologique et logique de la décolonisation comme processus issu de la colonisation." Caroline Eades, *Le cinéma post-colonial français*, (Paris: CERF, 2006), 20.

[227] Norton, "Singing the Past: Vietnamese Ca Tru, Memory, and Mode," *Asian Music* 36, no. 2 (2005), 31.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid., 29.

This uneasy synthesis between traditionalism and modernity reflected the unique set of historical pressures facing Vietnamese society during the French colonial era, pressures that became increasingly legible – and audible, as we will see – in the late colonial period, in the wake of the nationwide adoption of the romanized *quốc ngữ* script. Often cast at the center of these societal cross-currents, the Hanoi-based circle of French-educated intellectuals that called themselves the Self-Reliant Literary Group [*Tự Lực Văn Đoàn*] made the connection between Westernization and the changing role of women in Vietnamese society an explicit goal of theirs. Points 1 and 6 of their ten-point manifesto reflect these concerns:

> 1. Modernize completely, without hesitation,
> and modernization means Westernization…
> 6. Encourage women to go out into the world.[230]

Beyond purely literary concerns, the group advocated for a modernized *áo dài*, the updated traditional Vietnamese dress worn by Catherine Deneuve in *Indochine* during the scene in which she labeles herself "*une asiate*." This new design was undertaken by one of the literary group's members, Nguyễn Cát Tường, known by his French alias, "Lemur" – a calque of his given name, Tường, which also means "wall." Peter Zinoman connects these changes with the political success of the left-wing alliance Front Populaire in 1930s France. According to Zinoman, the resultant "euphoria" for Europeanization that overtook Vietnamese society gave rise to "a colorful array of

[230] Ben Kiernan, *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present*, Illustrated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 348.

new social types…[including] the foreign-educated student, the crusading journalist, and the 'new' woman."[231]

Portrayals of these Westernizing social types were often satirical in nature and reveal the existence of conflicting opinions and a vigorous debate surrounding the relative merits and gendering of Europeanization within Vietnamese society. Zinoman describes the Self-Reliant Literary Group as the "bitterest literary rivals" of another Vietnamese intellectual, Vũ Trọng Phụng.[232] He locates what he characterizes as Phụng's "reservations about the 'new Vietnamese woman'" in "the traditional model of female virtue provided by his mother" who raised him alone and did not remarry after his father's passing.[233] Xuân, the resourceful protagonist of Phụng's novel *Dumb Luck* (*Số đỏ*), serialized in the journal *Hà Nội Báo* in 1936, becomes a successful salesman at a women's clothing store, satirically titled the Europeanization Tailor Shop.

The novel depicts the socially climbing Xuân cashing in opportunistically on the "new woman" ideal as a sales pitch for the shop's risqué Western fashions. Like Xuân, Phụng was exposed to Western influence not by going abroad but remaining in urban Hanoi. Zinoman reminds us that though he did not study in France like his rivals in the Self-Reliant Literary Group he was nevertheless "among the first generation of northern Vietnamese students to receive primary instruction exclusively in French and in the recently adopted…*quốc ngữ*," the latinized "national script," and that therefore he "acquired a cultural orientation radically different from that of every previous generation of northern Vietnamese intellectuals."[234] Phụng's biting satire of headlong

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[231] Peter Zinoman, ed., *Dumb Luck: A Novel by Vu Trong Phung*, trans. Nguyen Nguyet Cam (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2.

[232] Ibid., 8.

[233] Ibid., 5.

[234] Ibid., 8-9.

Vietnamese Westernization was itself informed by a Western-oriented education that enabled him to cite "Zola, Hugo, Malraux, Dostoyevsky, and Gorky as major influences," as well as employ references to Flaubert, Baudelaire, Colette, Gide, Verlaine, and Freud.[235]

It must be noted that these journalistic debates about the "new woman" were carried on by a distinctly male homosocial milieu. Ben Tran positions the gendered context of figures like Phụng and members of the Self-Reliant Literary Group in late colonial Vietnam within what he terms "post-mandarin masculinities."[236] He locates this historical positionality within the Vietnamese development of reportage, or *phóng sự*. Phụng's exposé of female prostitution in Hanoi, called *Lục Xì* (a transliteration of the English phrase "look see"), published in 1937, became a model of the *phóng sự* genre. The genre is defined by a confluence of three key factors: the subjective experience of male journalists like Phụng, the stylistic influence of French literary and artistic movements, and a distinct focus on indigenous female sex worker as subject matter. Tran labels the writing style engendered by *phóng sự* "autoethnographic writing," defined by a polarized relationality of gender, between male authors and a "female other." In this relationship, male authors depended on the "female other" in order to reinforce their threatened masculinity as urban Vietnamese intellectuals in the late colonial era:

> [A]utoethnographic writing was not only a tool of anticolonial nationalism; it also negotiated the new post-mandarin gender relations between Vietnamese men and women. In multiple *phóng sự* works, the narrator acts as a participant observer writing his own culture, defining the self through his engagement with a female

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[235] Ibid., 11.

[236] Ben Tran, *Post-Mandarin: Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam*.

> other…[*P*]*hóng sự* chroniclers' investigative journalism [is] an embodied interaction in which the narrator's subjective viewpoint starkly contradicts his claims to objectivity, revealing the instability of *phóng sự* writers as post-mandarin intellectuals grappling with their own masculinity and sexuality…[The] claims to objectivity actually point to a larger anxiety among *phóng sự* authors about their masculinity as they struggled to overturn the twin authorities of the mandarin intellectual and the European colonizer. *Phóng sự* authors exercised their intellectual authority while displacing their masculine anxieties, turning to the indigenous female sex worker as a figure for their own abjection and thus the other of this embodied, ethnographic relationship. *Phóng sự* authors saw the indigenous female sex worker as symptomatic of the cultural and material transformations triggered by colonial modernity.[237]

The gendered dynamic of the post-mandarin milieu was not limited to the realm of literature and journalism. It was also evident in the traditional musical genre *ca trù* which reinforced the fetishization of the "female other" characteristic of *phóng sự*. As discussed above, the musical genre was a featured topic of Vietnamese reportage. However, *phóng sự* was a Western import drawn from French journalistic and literary sources, while *ca trù* was a distinctly indigenous genre. As such, it became a site of resistance to French cultural hegemony and Europeanization and consequently a space of distinctly Vietnamese constructions of gender and sexuality.

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[237] Ibid., 25-26.

Citing contemporary witnesses, including Bernard Joyeux, a French doctor who specialized in treating venereal disease in Hà Nội, and Ngọc, a *ca trù* singer, as well as journals of the time, Christina Firpo highlights the conspicuous absence from *ả đào* venues of French men: Curiously absent from the newspaper reports on Ả Đào music houses were references to French men; former Ả Đào singer Ngọc, who practiced in the 1940s, also does not recall seeing French men in the establishments. Joyeux reasoned that European soldiers remained uninterested in Ả Đào singing because they could not speak the local language and were unfamiliar with the traditional culture. In 1938, another French administrator observed that European men were more interested in open air cafes or dance clubs, another venue for prostitution. Firpo frames *ả đào* venues specifically in terms of their utility to indigenous sex workers in evading the colonial administration's regulation of prostitution. The very traditionalism of the art form was the perfect cover for illicit activity:

> The success of clandestine prostitution in *ả đào* venues lay in the ability of sex workers and their managers to capitalize on the sensuality of female performance art while claiming the legitimacy associated with a revered traditional art form. The result was that *ả đào* venues operated as ambiguous spaces that blurred the traditional lines separating art, sex, and commerce. This association of sex and song in the colonial era would taint the reputation of the singers and, ultimately, the art form itself. [238]

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[238] Christina Firpo, "Sex and Song: Clandestine Prostitution in Tonkin's *Ả Đào* Music Houses, 1920s–1940s," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 2 (2016): 9.

Unlike its legendary origins as far back as the Lý Dynasty (1009 – 1225), the historical beginnings of *ca trù* are difficult to trace. But its modern form is not. Drawing on the work of Nguyễn Xuân Diện, Norton specifies that "the contemporary ensemble form – that is, a male *dan day* player, a female singer who also plays the *phách* (clappers), and a male drummer who plays the praise drum (*trong chau*) – emerged in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century."[239] In the traditional Vietnamese genre, a mandarin patron would author a poem which the female singer was expected to interpret on the spot on his behalf. In turn, the educated author participated in the musical performance by providing a running commentary through a coded system of drumming patterns that could express either praise or disapproval.

While the mandarinal practice of composing poems on the spot was no longer compulsory during the colonial period, the ideal of the spectator-participant remained. This fundamental break in the fourth wall structures the performance of *ca trù*: the audience listens to the drumming of the *trống chàu*, which responds to the singer's voice, which is accompanied by the plucked string instrument *đàn đáy*. *Ca trù* is thus not simply the musical delivery of a given repertoire, it also frames the ritualized performance of a practice homologous to film theorist Laure Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze."[240]

This colonial era stereotype of *ca trù* singers had consequences for the subsequent history of the genre. Seen as symptomatic of Western cultural decadence, it was suppressed during the post-colonial period, before it was rehabilitated in the wake of Đổi Mới as part of Vietnam's

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[239] Norton, "Singing the Past," 30.

[240] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18.

cultural heritage. In 2009 it was inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding by UNESCO.[241]

Linh's film often uses music to build toward a sonic climax (the sound of a gun shot or a string popping) or juxtaposes sound with music, as in the opening credits where the sound of a train cuts immediately to a *ca trù* performance (analyzed below). Sound, including dialogue, is often what implicates music in the narrative. Neither reducing sound to music nor treating it as a cultural universal, my analysis demonstrates how it negotiates cultural difference and shapes representations of colonial Vietnam in *Mê Thảo Thời Vang Bóng*.

The film narrative is framed by two interrupted performances of traditional Vietnamese musical genres, first a *ca trù* performance and second a *chầu văn* performance. Both genres feature a specific kind of strained vocal style (that has no technical name appart from its genre designation) accompanied by a string instrument and a small wooden block (*phách*). And in the film narrative both performances result in death. Several commentators have pointed to the importance of these scenes and we will analyze them shortly; but it is important to start the analysis by attending to the very first sonic gesture of the film, which establishes a complex relationship between sound, musical genre, gender, and postcoloniality that is carried through to the end.

Sonically, the film opens in a non-standard way. Rather than begin with a typical classical music film score, the film is introduced with train sounds before cutting to the title sequence overlayed with *ca trù* music. Significantly, what we hear is the introductory part of a *ca trù* performance, composed of the high clicking sounds of the *phác* and the tense undulation of the *đàn đáy*, during which, traditionally, the mode and mood of a song are established. What we do

[241] "UNESCO - Ca Trù Singing," accessed May 20, 2024, http://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/ca-tru-singing-00309.

not hear is the expected vocal part. Because *hát ả đào* features a female soloist, the choice to leave out her voice from the opening credits foreshadows the film's key theme of female absence and mutism.

There is a subtle distinction to be made in relation to this sonic absence. It is not that the singer herself is absent from the opening credits, since it is she who is necessarily performing the *phách* part, it is simply that the gendered signifier of her voice has not yet been introduced. And there is yet another conspicuous sonic absence in the opening sequence: that of the *trống chầu*, the drum played by the male spectator-connoisseur. The film thus opens the way that a *ca trù* performance is introduced, by establishing a general mood, before the vocalist posits specific narrative content that can be deciphered and critiqued by a (male) spectator-connoisseur.

It is as if the film itself emerges from the overture of a *ca trù* performance. The choice to use this specific genre, rather than a generic film score, introduces an element of historicity into the film. The music enters along with the credits which move from a title frame that contains a reference to the "Golden Time" ["*Thời Vang Bóng*"] in which the film is set, to specifying the time period and place of the first scene: "*Hà Nội Đầu Thế Kỷ 20*" [Hanoi at the Beginning of the 20th Century]. It is the historical specificity of the *ca trù* genre that allows the film to jump from its initial vision of contemporary Vietnam, pictured as a train roaring through the Vietnamese landscape, back into the urban soundscape of colonial era Hanoi, evoked by the quaint sound of rickshaws. When considered within its sonic framework, the *ca trù* music of the opening credit sequence may appear at first listen to be merely sandwiched between two sonic signifiers of historical distance, sonically suturing the late 20th-century train to the early 20th-century rickshaw. Yet a closer analysis reveals that the *ca trù* musical excerpt is carefully calibrated to provide a subtle moment of transition between the two time periods.

The initial train scene is built up from a visual and sonic montage. As the camera frames different perspectives on the train, the sonic presence of the train changes to reflect the relative distance and position of the camera view. We begin close to the track, hearing the approaching train before it traverses the frame. As the montage cuts to a close-up shot of the train tracks, the volume increases and a horn adds an almost expressive touch to the train's sonic presence. Next the montage takes us into the interior of the train. A young boy and girl, presumably siblings, view the passing landscape through the window frame of the train hallway. But they, unlike us the spectators of the film, are not listening to the sounds of the train. Rather they both have their headphones on, and their body language lets us know that they are grooving to their own tune: presumably Vietnamese or maybe Western pop music [Fig. 29]. It is tempting to consider this brief glimpse into the interior of the train as an allegory of the film medium itself, since the siblings are watching images moving by through a rectangular frame while listening to prerecorded audio which at some subjective level provides continuity for their viewing experience.

In an interesting twist, we the spectators are left out of their shared experience: we can neither see their viewpoint nor hear their musical soundtrack. All we hear is the sound of machinery in motion, as the train rumbles through the landscape. This psychologizing, internal view of the train is immediately compensated for in the montage by pulling far back to reveal the train from a great distance rolling across the landscape in miniature, its sonic footprint now a mere echo, barely louder than the surf visible below. The montage then parries with a move back into the interior of the train with an even closer shot of the siblings, accompanied by an even louder train sound. For a moment they appear to be looking backwards with a nostalgic mien, as if captured by the view of a place the train had just passed by – perhaps Mê Thảo hamlet – that is now moving irremediably behind them, into the past.

As they enter a tunnel, the transition to dark screen is accompanied by the introduction of a new sonic element, the *phách* [wood block] rhythms that provide a transition into the *ca trù* section. The *phách* belongs to a category of instruments known as *idiophones*, meaning that it produces sound directly from the material it is made out of (rather than a resonating chamber or a vibrating string). The *phách* thus introduces a distinctly wooden sound into the train's metallic rumble. In doing so it also provides a transition into the post-credits opening scene, which is initiated by the sound of wooden rickshaw wheels rolling by on stone.

Figure 29: *Mê Thảo, thời vang bóng*, directed by Việt Linh (Hãng Phim Giảy Phóng, 2002).

One of the film's overarching narrative arcs is the construction of a train line through Mê Thảo hamlet by French colonial authorities (at the beginning of the 20th century). In the original book, Nguyễn's wife is killed in a train accident, and it is this event that triggers his and Mê Thảo's retreat from modernity. The train also represents Eades' view of postcolonial cinema as inherently rooted in the present day, from a perspective that makes the end of colonialism rooted in causes within colonialism itself and therefore as implacable as the procession of a train through a landscape. It also speaks to Ricoeur's point about postcoloniality representing colonialism as a

point irremediably left behind in the past, which is the viewpoint of the young siblings on the train who are not connected to Mê Thảo in any direct way. Theirs is the perspective of the post-Đổi Mới generation raised in the late 1980s and 1990s, the high period of French nostalgia films about colonial Vietnam.

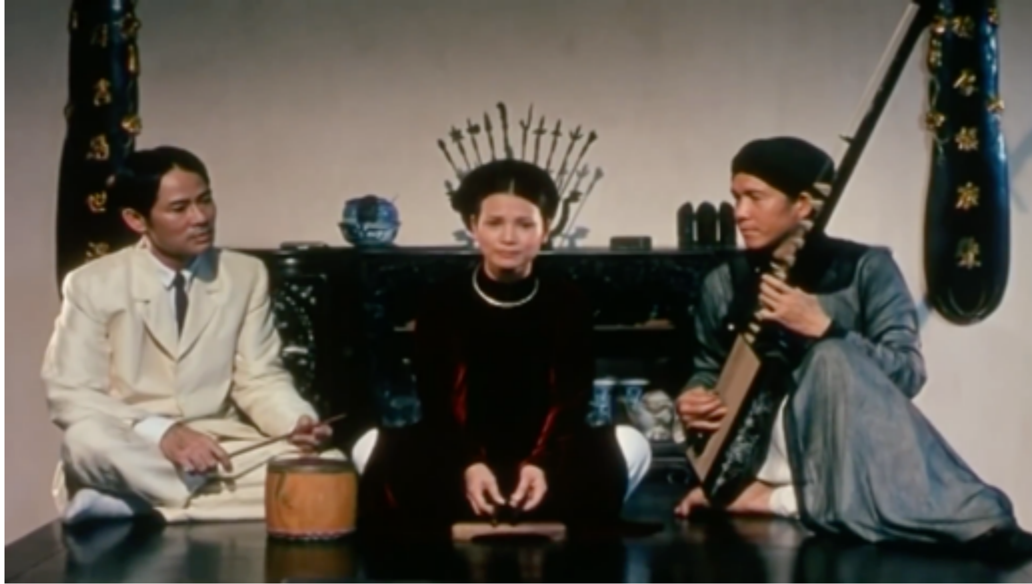
Figure 30: *Mê Thảo, thời vang bóng*, directed by Việt Linh (Hãng Phim Giải Phóng, 2002).

The extended scene of *ca trù* performance near the start of the film introduces the perils of this nostalgia in the form of violent interruption. Nguyễn is visiting Hanoi in order to buy his bride-to-be jewelry for their wedding. Not being able to find a one-of-a-kind item, he leaves the jewelry shop disappointed. His assistant recommends an evening of *ca trù* performance as a way to raise his spirits. He warns him that the genre has come to be associated with low morals, but that he knows a venue where it is preserved in its pristine form. This is a "*hát chơi*" performance at a private home rather than at one of the public *ả đào* houses. The host, in his mandarinal outfit, is quick to deliver a sermon on the decadence of today's music and the elevated nature of the performance that Nguyễn is about to hear – as well as participate in. As the evening's honored patron, Nguyễn joins the singer Tơ and *đàn đáy* player Tam on stage [Fig. 30]. He demonstrates his connoisseurship of the genre by adroitly striking the drum after each verse. After a few verses

however, there is a rude interruption. A belligerent voice is heard coming up the stairs, revealing a man in a European suit. Drunk and disheveled he disrupts the performance by propositioning Tơ, thus reintroducing the association of *ả đào* with sex work that he had presumably picked up at a different venue. Catching echoes of the performance outside, he felt compelled to enter.

The intrusion of a disruptive urbanite into the private interior of a *hát chơi* performance may be read as an allegory of the disruptive effects of colonialism, a metaphor furthered developed when the rebuffed young man threatens Tam with a pistol, a Western instrument of violence. Rather than creating music, this instrument makes noise: the gun goes off in the ensuing battle between the two, killing the would-be shooter. The loud bangs of the pistol plunge the room into darkness both metaphorically and literally, as they explode the lamp and cause chaos. The final bang is sonically highlighted by a moment of silence followed by Tơ's expressive scream, which transforms her vocal production from music to noise.

The film's closing scene is similarly structured around an interruption, with Tam's death arriving before the end of the performance [Fig. 31]. It has been a year since the initial performance, and Nguyễn has become increasingly removed from reality following the death of his fiancée. On Tam's pleading, Tơ agrees to sing for Nguyễn one more time in order to try to alleviate his condition. But she warns Tam that she swore to her late husband, a musician, that she would never sing again unless her accompanist was willing to play his instrument, which is cursed. She tells him that the body of her husband's *đàn nguyệt*, a "moon-shaped" plucked string instrument, which sits above the ancestral altar, is made from a virgin's coffin. This bit of information both feminizes the instrument and imbues it with mystery. Tam does not believe her warnings until he witnesses the altar incense burst into flames and the instrument move by itself, as if in admonition of his unbelief. This miracle is depicted in sonic as much as in visual terms.

This particular instrument (*đàn nguyệt*) was the same instrument played by the Father in Trần's *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*. Although the Father does not die immediately after playing the instrument, the opening scene during which he plays it, along with a few subsequent shots of him practicing, are his key on-screen moments. When he dies the instrument is shown by his bedside. And ten years later, in part two of the film, his son is shown polishing the instrument. One of the reasons that *đàn nguyệt* might be associated with loss is because the instrument is associated with a style of performance called *chầu văn*, which involves mediumship of ancestral spirits through trance-induced states. The *đàn nguyệt* is also associated with funeral music.

As Nguyễn's retinue approaches, Tơ prays to her husband's altar to spare Tam from the curse of the *đàn nguyệt*. Pointing out the selfless nature of his act on behalf of Nguyễn and the people of Mê Thảo hamlet, she intones the words: "*Ông ấy đến đây chỉ vì người khác*" [He came here only for the sake of other people]. Visually, the music begins with a close-up shot of an incense burner, redolent of the life-and-death situation of the performance. The incense smoke also becomes useful as a cover for the singer's hands, making her complicated *phách* patterns look more realistic.

Figure 31: *Mê Thảo, thời vang bóng*, directed by Việt Linh (Hãng Phim Giảy Phóng, 2002).

The music begins in a loose meter, before the tempo speeds up. This rhythmic intensity is initiated by both the *đán nguyệt* and *phách*, breaking away suddenly with a burst of rapid strumming. Each verse now brings a new level of rhythmic intensity to the performance and an ever quicker tempo, helping the performers achieve the trance induced state required for mediumship. At the fastest and highest point of his playing, Tam turns to Tơ with a pained expression. The camera pans over to her as she sings a farewell. From this point, Tam's part begins to unravel, loosening its metric adhesion to a regular beat and becoming softer until his body bends down with a final bow. Tơ attempts to complete the verse by herself, her voice carrying through its plaintive intensity for another moment until she too finds that her voice has given out. Wondering at the sudden silence, Nguyễn looks up to see Tam's supine body. The camera shows his scream, which is observed in complete silence – as if Tơ's loss of voice is projected onto him.

In the following scene, Nguyễn's voicelessness leads to his loss of authority. Observing the French-led Vietnamese crews constructing a railway through his precious domain, Nguyễn announced to the villagers that he is no longer their master. As they disperse, the camera turns to the construction site. On of the Vietnamese workers is hugging a phonograph like a dance partner, and bouncing to the tango being projected out from it. Standing above the fray, a French officer yells at the workers: "*Au boulot!*" [Back to work]! Thus the narrative closes with the "death" of a live traditional music genre and its replacement by a new Europeanized genre that is mechanically reproducible, like film.

The French word *mémoire* can be translated as both *memory* and *memoir*. This semantic slippage is particularly salient for nostalgia film, a genre that exhibits as equal an interest in recreating memory on screen as in incorporating the off-screen authenticity of actual memoirs. Each film under discussion, in fact, features an off-screen biographical link, suggesting that it is

in part an adaptation of a real-life memoir. Sometimes this more or less the case, as in *L'Amant* and Duras, *Điện Biên Phủ* and Schoendoerffer, *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* and Tôn-Thất Tiết, and (much more loosely) Madame de la Souchère and *Indochine*. On the other hand, these films could create such an irresistible effect of being actual memorials that they could be reinscribed back, as it were, into the published word. *Indochine* spurred a literary adaptation of the film.[242] Throughout the dissertation, I have interrogated the ways in which sound and music create this "irresistible effect" by way of subtle but persistent correspondences with filmic narratives and styles of representation.

In Chapter 1, I interrogated the role of voice, music, and narration as gendered sonic markers of nostalgia in Wargnier's *Indochine*. I also analyzed the ways in which Patrick Doyle's score shares a common sonic framework with Éliane's narrating voice. In doing so I showed how the classic style of film scoring helps prop up a glamorized Hollywood-like "star-text" of Deneuve that is important to Éliane's status as an allegorical figure who represents France's changing relationship to Indochina during the transitional period of decolonization. In the analysis section, I categorized the separate leitmotivs, or musical themes, used in the film and demonstrated the extent to which they are in fact fragmented parts of a single, connected musical passage – titled "Adoption" [*l'Adoption*] in the film soundtrack. I called this complete statement of all the interlinked themes the "ur-leitmotif." I also described the individual components of the ur-leitmotif as "sub-themes" and described how they their subtle syntax bridges the film's score with its narrative.

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[242] Christian de Montella, *Indochine* (Paris: Fayard, 1992). As discussed in Blum-Reid, 31.

In Chapter 2, I explored the ways in which Annaud's film, *L'Amant*, represents Durassian presence by means of a subtle weaving together of sound design, diegetic music, and Gabriel Yared's score. Through close analysis of scenes, I showed how the film takes a cue from the source novel's own purposive evocation of memory, and evokes sonic Durassian effects. I described this sonic actualization of Durassian tropes and discussed their connection to nostalgia film. The analysis section focused on the sonic qualities of the Cholen room as well as the diegetic use of a Chopin waltz during the film's dénoument. Through these means, I showed how the ways in which the film's representation of Durassian writing, themes of pianism, exile, and memory circulate in complex ways, modeling the film's subtle deployment of music across the diegetic/non-diegetic divide as well as its interest in resonant chambers as sonic spaces of memory.

In Chapter 3, I interrogated the transdiegetic use of the *Concerto de l'adieu* between diegetic performances that take place at the Hanoi Opera House (a French, colonial-era structure) and non-diegetic deployment of the music during battle scenes in Schoendoerffer's *Điện Biên Phủ*. I traced the numerous examples of Schoendoerffer's personal stamp of memory on the filmic narrative. Drawing on Panivong Norindr's criticism of the film, I interrogated the ways in which Schoendoerffer's memory was treated as collective. I also analyzed the sonic aspects of the film, showing how the subtleties of the sound montage are important to the film's narrative. My musical anaysis was focused on the recurrent transitions between the Opera House and the battlefield that create sonic/musical parallels. I also analyzed the sonic and narrative aspects of the deployment of various languages in the film.

In Chapter 4, I contextualized *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*" as part of Trần Anh Hùng's mission to invent a filmic "heritage." I demonstrate the extent to which, in the absence of "a body of film about Vietnam" on which to draw, Trần turned to music as a point of departure. In doing

so I offered a close analysis of scenes, with particular attention given to the interaction of diegetic musical moments with the score by Tôn-Thất Tiết. A key aspect of my anlysis was focused on the second part of the film, which follows Khuyến's frustrated attempt at composing a new musical work, as well as in demonstrting the ways in which earlier diegetic moments in part one prepare the narrative's musical orientation. Like variations of a theme that emerges at the end, I showed how Khuyến's work-in-progress starts to transform, almost imperceptibly at first, into a key piece of French musical heritage: Claude Debussy's *Claire de lune*, an anthology piece for the piano. Through a close analysis of scenes, I demonstrated that Khuyến shares a family name with the actual composer of the film (Tôn-Thất Tiết) and I discussed the close relationship between the on-screen and the off-screen composer.

Like an echo reverberating back to its source, these films connect France (especially that of the early 1990s) to the long period of French colonialism in Vietnam, known in Vietnamese as *Pháp thuộc.* All four films share focus in the decline of French empire in the region. The persistent focus on the mid-century period of decolonization reveals as much about what the films withhold from view as about what they show. None of the films deals in any meaningful way with the origins of French colonialism. As the opening monologue in *Indochine* makes clear, the world of colonial Vietnam already comes fully formed, since three of the four "inseparable things" intoned by Deneuve's voice-over — men and women, mountains and plains, humans and gods (but not Indochina and France) — transcend the historical record, and therefore, unlike French colonialism, have no recorded point of origin. If, as Svetlana Boym put it, nostalgia is a "longing for a home

that no longer exists," then these films represent that "home" as French Indochina (which no longer exists).[243]

One of the signs of this nostalgia is that three of the films are narrated from contemporary Europe: two of them by narrators who were born in Indochina. In *Indochine,* the narration of Éliane is presumed to be situated in a later, "contemporary" moment, set during the Geneva Accords. In *L'Amant*, the narration of Duras "herself" at the beginning of the film frames the entire narrative as a flashback narrated from Paris. In *Điện Biên Phủ*, Pierre Schoendoerffer's voice and memory ground the narrative. *L'Odeur de la papaye verte* offers a contrast in which Trần Anh Hùng imagines a postcolonial Vietnam not dominated by images of war or political confrontation but rather framed by a meeting of cultures through musical "language." Nevertheless, the film ends during a "postolonial" moment.

Music and sound are key narrative element in all the films, not least through their deployment of language. Here, too, the French bias is apparent. Vietnamese and other non-European languages are typically used as mere soundscape – or to put it more bluntly, noise – while plot development take place almost exclusively in French. In the case of *L'Amant*, however, for reasons of commercial interest rather than cultural awareness, to be sure, the decision was made to dub over the original French dialogue into English. Once again, *L'Odeur* offers a reaction to this phenomenon. The film is shot entirely in Vietnamese. The language of the colonizer is glimpsed only once, on a diploma from the Paris Conservatory that hangs on the wall of Khuyến, the Vietnamese composer, as discussed in Chapter 4. In Trần Anh Hùng's reaction to nostalgia film, the French language has in its turn become a facet of décor, or a souvenir.

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[243] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

The idea of echoes that reverberate both forward and backwards across nostalgia films can be applied to Linh's film, which gives us a view into the Vietnamese counterpoint to the genre. The train scene, for example, is highly reminiscent of the train scene in *Indochine*, as discussed in Chapter 1. Another common element is the preponderant place of traditional music genres. Music lends nostalgia films historical authenticity but also opens them up to the question: whose authenticity is to be established? Is the tango being used as an instrument of acculturation to French society in a colonial context or is it *hát ả đào* that is posited as a form of resistance to acculturation? These questions reflect the postcolonial position of the director and the film's intended audience.

If we want to further trace the influence of the French nostalgia model, we might consider a number of Franco-Vietnamese productions that, since the 2000s, have been informed by it and achieved a certain amount of critical success. Vietnamese-American director Nguyễn Võ Nghiêm Minh's The *Buffalo Boy* (2004) [*Mùa len trâu* in Vietnamese and *Le Gardien de Bouffles* in French], a co-production between France, Vietnam, and Belgium, garnered scores of international awards and was Vietnam's official Oscar entry. The film is a coming-of-age story of Kim, a boy who volunteers to take his parents' water buffalo on a journey inland during the French colonial period in the 1940s but on the cusp of the Japanese occupation. The *Rebel* (2007) by Vietnamese-American director Charlie Nguyễn is a martial arts film that takes place in the 1920s amid peasant rebellions against the French occupation. Cambodian director Rithy Panh adapted Duras' *Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique* as a French, Cambodian, and Belgian co-production in 2009, starring Isabelle Huppert. These films demonstrate the extent to which the nostalgia film model has come to predominate filmic representations of the French colonial period on a global scale while leaving room for genre hybridity (for instance the combination of nostalgia and martial arts film in *The Rebel*).

In 2023, Trần Anh Hùng won the Palme d'Or for Best Director for his latest feature, *La Passion de Dodin Bouffant*, translated as *The Taste of Things*, a nostalgia film set in late 19th-century France based on Marcel Rouff's *La vie et la passion de Dodin-Bouffant, gourmet*, first published in 1924. In its recreation of "La Belle Époque," the film luxuriates in visual, haptic, and aural sensations, especially the sounds of cooking and eating. Juliette Binoche, who co-stars in the film alongside Benoît Magimel,[244] told The Guardian that, with the film, "Tran seems to have reinvented himself as a hyper-French director…It doesn't mean that he's lost his Vietnamese side, but he loves the *raffinement français*, the refinement – it's part of who he is, his sensibility. There are many different ways of being French, but he found the most refined."[245]

Like an echo, a musical canon does not have a defined ending: it often reverberates in the memory long after the original sound has faded. A canon does not end with a neat cadence. It simply stops when the players have stoped holding up their lines, which may be picked up at a later time, by another group of players. Nostalgia film is like this. Its returns are not developments but rather static repetitions of the same theme. Their nostalgic perspective, as discussed throughout the preceeding chapters, makes them resistant to the idea of development, as they try to recapture the passage of time with images of and echoes from the past – real or imagined. But as we have also seen in this chapter, while the genre is inimical to development it does have "counterpoints." A single line, echoed in a resonant space (like a cave), will produce a natural polyphony of lines that interact with one another at various intervals. A musical canon is just a formalized version of

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[244] They first met on the set of Diane Kurys's nostalgia film, *Les Enfants du Siècle* (1999), in which they played George Sand and Alfred de Musset.

[245] Romney, Jonathan. "The Taste of Things Director Tran Anh Hung: 'Cinema Needs to Be Very Sensual, Very Physical.'" *The Guardian*, February 4, 2024, accessed May 20, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/feb/04/tran-anh-hung-the-taste-of-things-juliette-binoche-benoit-magimel.

that process, where the voices have strict, harmonious entrances, so that the repetiton of a single line produces a consonant whole. Although one is a natural phenomenon and the other defined by humans, both an echo and a musical canon feature counterpoints in which an obsessive idea is temporally offset with itself (being repeated at more or less distant intervals of time). Likewise, the intsensely French perspetive of *Indochine*, *L'Amant*, and *Điện Biên Phủ* is offset (at a perceptible interval) by the Franco-Vietnamese vision of *L'Odeur*. All of these are more radically decentered (with a wider interval) by way of films like *Cyclo* and *Mê Thảo: Thời Vang Bóng*. The solipsism of nostalgia film is dynamic. Like Baudelaire's spiral process of "*vaporization*" and "*centralization*" evoked above, its show of historical authenticity and its commercial appeal are premised on resounding returns.

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