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Harmony in Motion: Exploring the Cinematic Soundscapes of Ryuichi Sakamoto

Relatore:
Prof. Denis Brotto

Laureanda:
Oksana Venzheha

2044780

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Contents

Abstract:

This master's thesis explores the multifaceted career of Ryuichi Sakamoto with a particular focus on his contribution to film music. The study begins with providing an overview of the role of music in cinema and relevant theories, introducing methodologies of Sergio Miceli, Michel Chion, and Martine Huvenne, which I selected for in-depth analysis of composer's film scores. The second chapter presents a short biographical overview of the composer's life and artistic portrait uncovering the stylistic and thematic evolution in his compositions. The third chapter analyzes the development of Sakamoto's film music career through selected five films of different genres in collaboration with Bernardo Bertolucci, Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick, Luca Guadagnino, and Andrew Levitas, ending with identifying the fundamental sonic features of the composer's music. In general, the case studies of the films explore how his music signatures affect narratives, characters, diegetic and non-diegetic spaces, and viewer engagement.

Questa tesi magistrale esplora la poliedrica carriera di Ryuichi Sakamoto con particolare attenzione al suo contributo alla musica da film. Lo studio inizia fornendo una panoramica del ruolo della musica nel cinema e delle teorie pertinenti, introducendo le metodologie di Sergio Miceli, Michel Chion e Martine Huvenne, che ho selezionato per un'analisi approfondita delle colonne sonore del compositore. Il secondo capitolo presenta una breve panoramica biografica della vita e del ritratto artistico del compositore scoprendo l'evoluzione stilistica e tematica nelle sue composizioni. Il terzo capitolo analizza lo sviluppo della carriera musicale per film di Sakamoto attraverso cinque film selezionati di generi diversi in collaborazione con Bernardo Bertolucci, Amy Ziering e Kirby Dick, Luca Guadagnino e Andrew Levitas. La tesi si conclude nel quarto capitolo con l'identificazione delle caratteristiche sonore fondamentali della musica del compositore. In generale, gli studi dei film selezionati esplorano il modo in cui il tocco di Ryuichi Sakamoto influenza le narrazioni, i personaggi, gli spazi diegetici e non diegetici e il coinvolgimento dello spettatore attraverso le sue composizioni.

Introduction

Ryuichi Sakamoto, a prolific composer, musician, and innovator in the world of contemporary music, has made significant contributions to the realm of film music. Speaking of his career as a free music artist, he left behind a huge and diverse legacy and was noted in almost all musical movements that have excited minds in the last half-century. Free jazz, synth-pop, electro-funk, ethno-fusion, neoclassical, ambient, noise, and Japanese flute opera can all be found in his extensive portfolio. Sakamoto liked to forge unexpected creative alliances: his collaborative list, stunning in its size and quality, includes famous musicians from completely different worlds - from rock idols like David Sylvian, David Byrne, and Iggy Pop to electronic experimenters Alva Noto and Arca. This master's thesis delves into the multifaceted career of Ryuichi Sakamoto as a film composer, analyzing his distinctive approach to crafting film scores and the profound impact of his work on the cinematic landscape.

The study begins by overviewing the role of music in cinema and examining relevant theories and frameworks in film music analysis to select a suitable methodology and introduce the reader to it. This methodology described in this chapter will be applied to provide a further analysis of the scores for the selected films.

In the next second chapter, a short biographical overview followed by the artistic portrait of the composer consisting of his musical influences, attitudes, and ideas can be found. This part is necessary to recreate the context in which Ryuichi Sakamoto was creating his sonic works considering his highly diverse and eclectic style.

The third chapter is analytical and it traces the evolution of Sakamoto's film music career, from his early forays in collaboration with the renowned filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci to his later engagements with contemporary directors. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore his collaboration with the Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci for his two films: *The Last Emperor* (1988) and *The Sheltering Sky* (1990). Then I will examine his sonic interpretation of the documentary film *Derrida* (2003) directed by Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick, followed by his collaboration with Luca Guadagnino for his short film *The Staggering Girl* (2019) and with Andrew Levitas for *Minamata* (2020). The choice of films is chronological and is not based on the level of success or recognition, instead, it is driven by the goal of highlighting the stylistic and

thematic transformation of the composer, and the creative evolution of his role within the film industry.

In the next fourth chapter, I will extract and identify the unique features of his style by examining case studies of selected films and the cultural relevance of his music. This study aims to investigate the profound influence of Ryuichi Sakamoto's film music on the broader cinematic experience. By analyzing case studies of selected films from the third chapter, this thesis explores how Sakamoto's unique sonic signatures have left an indelible mark on the narrative, characters, and overall viewer engagement. It also delves into the impact of his work on other film composers and the evolving landscape of film scoring.

In summary, this master's thesis takes a close look at Ryuichi Sakamoto's career in film music. It examines how his music has changed over time, what features make it unique, and how it has affected the world of filmmaking. By looking at it from different angles, this study helps us better understand how film music works, how different types of music come together in audiovisual work, and how music can deeply affect the way stories are told and culture is expressed.

Chapter I. Film Music Overview: *Its Role in Cinema and Examination of Relevant Theories and Frameworks in Film Music Analysis*

    The roots of film music can be traced back to the era of silent movies. During this time, motion pictures lacked audible dialogue, and the only auditory component was the accompanying music. It was crucial because the absence of music would have left the cinematic experience feeling incomplete. The music played a pivotal role in accentuating the narrative. In theaters, musicians would often improvise on the piano or organ to provide the musical backdrop for the film. This period marked the birth of film music, where music emerged as a driving force in enhancing cinematic storytelling.

    To provide research on film music a scholar needs to grasp at least two nonverbal systems of communication such as visual and audial. Music differs from the visual by being a more abstract mean because it is a less direct sensorial experience. This also implies that it is not always obvious what the source of a sound in a film is, which results in viewers being less conscious about the audial part of a movie. A professional composer counts on it while scoring a film. Indeed, because of its high subjectivity, it is hard to speak about music without involving metaphors.

    Despite film scholars closely examining its extensive history and challenges, film music, often seen as a less central topic in musicology, has received only brief attention. As stated by Martin Marks in his research, "Musicology is a little older than film itself and has emphasized the historical study of Western fine art and folk idioms, along with the ethnological study of music in other cultures; relatively little attention has been given to recent music in the professional and popular idioms-the idioms through which film music usually communicates."[1]

    Different film genres have their unique musical conventions or styles, resulting in distinct soundscapes for each genre. Westerns, horror films, romantic melodramas, war films, and other genres all have their own characteristic musical elements that set them apart in terms of sound. In spite of the existence of conventions, there is no right or wrong way to score a film and it always depends on the artistic vision of the filmmaker and the composer working together on a certain artistic idea.

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[1] Marks, Martin. *Film Music: The Material, Literature, and Present State of Research*, "Notes", vol. 36, no. 2, 1979, p. 283.

1.1. Music Application Dichotomy Concerning to Its Function in Film

In the first experimental films of soviet directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigoriy Alexandrov, the sound had to be directed along the line of its distinct non-synchronization with the visual image. This reformation accelerated the use of *contrapuntal* and *asynchronous* sound from then on. With the development of film technologies, more scholars started to write about naturalistic uses of sound[2]. Gradually these tendencies led to more naturalistic musical accompaniments in films, a program music made of abstract and natural sounds, as well as the phenomenon of "symphonies" of noise and a series of symphonies of the big city.

One of the scholars who contributed greatly to studying the relationship between film music and montage was **Hanns Eisler** (1898-1962). He saw montage as a uniting force between music and pictures and stated that the relation between music and pictures is diametrically opposed exactly at the moment of the deepest unity; this is due to many contradictions in this interconnection. Unlike Eisenstein, he was attributing a semantic and psychological meaning to film music, instead of considering it to have a merely technical function of expressing the rhythm of a motion. This view on the aesthetics of film music is close to the vision of Vsevolod Pudovkin, in whose works music had to keep an independent line and not be just an accompaniment. Pudovkin supported this opinion by expressing[3] an idea that an accompaniment to the visuals would give only the superficial aspect of the scene and the undertones of meaning would be ignored. In sound films, sound and image can be used in various ways to create a contrast, and this contrast is essential to go beyond simple realism and unlock the deeper meanings that sound can convey.

Hanns Eisler, in his treatise *Composing for the Films* written in collaboration with Theodor Adorno, explains that "illustrative use of music today results in unfortunate duplication. It is uneconomical, except where quite specific effects are intended, or minute interpretation of the action of the picture. The old operas left a certain amount of elbowroom in their scenic arrangements for what is vague and indefinite; this could be filled out with tone painting. The music of the Wagnerian era was a means of elucidation. But in the cinema, both picture and dialogue are hyper-explicit. Conventional music can add nothing to explicitness but instead may

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[2] Rudolf Arnheim published his theory of *Film als Kunst*; Bela Balazs stressed film's naturalistic character when combined with sound, in his own treatise, *Der Geist des Films.*

[3] Pudovkin, Vsevolod, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. and ed. Ivor Montagu, New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 190.

detract from it, since even in the worse pictures standardized musical effects fail to keep up with the concrete elaboration on the screen action. … Musical illustration should either be hyper explicit itself – over illuminating, so to speak, and thereby interpretive – or should be omitted."[4]

For around twenty years, the film composers in Hollywood preferred other techniques like illustration, and parallelism, which simply repeated what was visible on screen, instead of counterpoint. Often the music was tasked with concealing imperfections in the film and ensuring the success of productions at the box office. The composers in Europe had a more experimental approach to film music. For instance, Maurice Jaubert thought that music in movies should not just follow the actions or synchronize for no reason. He believed that the job of a film musician was to feel when the movie's story moved away from being strictly realistic and needed the artistic touch of music. He wanted music to help the viewer feel the rhythm of the scenes without spelling out their emotions or drama too obviously. According to him, music should support the movie behind the scenes, making scene changes and references easier to understand, without being too noticeable.

Canadian director **Roger Spottiswoode** delineated the functions of film music for the early thirties:

1. **imitation** of natural sounds or the tonal use of speech;
2. **commentary** of the visual in a film, often with irony;
3. **evocation**, in which the score is often synchronized, silence and sound are deliberate, and leitmotifs serve as emotional cues and help the visual provide a deeper understanding of the characters they are associated with;
4. **contrast** of the score with the visual to enhance the effect of the visual;
5. **dynamic use**, when the alignment of what we see and what we hear highlights the pacing and tempo of editing.

Aaron Copland in his turn [5] expanded the theory of the functions of music in film into another five important features:

1. setting the atmosphere of time and place
2. psychological fundamentals
3. neutral filling-in of dialogue gaps
4. preserving consistency
5. building climaxes and conveying a feeling of closure

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[4] Hanns Eisler, Theodor Adorno. *Composing for the Films*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, pp. 7-8.
[5] Aaron Copland, *What to Listen For in Music*, New York, The New American Library, 1963, pp. 154-155.

The feature that all of the theorists definitely share is the psychological function of music, which refers to how music is used to evoke emotions, enhance the audience's emotional connection to the story, characters, and scenes, and convey underlying psychological elements such as tension, suspense, or mood. Music in film can guide the perception of the viewers, and deepen their engagement with the narrative and characters. **Siegfried Kracauer**, a prominent film theorist and critic in his treatment of *The Theory of Film*, has synthesized this conclusion. His theory gathered the ideas and aesthetic views of all major film composers before him and of his time and resulted in a quite comprehensive structured explanation of the functions of film music.

A functional taxonomy of film music by Siegfried Kracauer**:**

I. INTRODUCTORY AND DESCRIPTIVE MUSIC
    A. Psychologically adjusts audiences by establishing general moods.
    B. Provides information as to initial and succeeding settings:
        1. Period.
        2. Location.

II. MOOD (BACKGROUND) MUSIC
    A. Intensifies apparent mood of sequence by synchronous:
        1. Imitation (Mickey-Mousing).
        2. Evocation (overall treatment).
    B. Provides ironic contrast of sequence mood by asynchronous counterpoint.

III. REALISTIC (SOURCE) MUSIC
    Provides musical realism by:
    A. Using justified incidental music.
    B. Integrating production number(s) in the film story.

IV. DYNAMIC MUSIC
    A. Emphasizes cutting rhythm.
    B. Provides continuity by:
        1. Connecting dialogue sections with neutral filler.
        2. Carrying on development of thought.
    C. Psychologically advances action by:
        1. Providing transitions.
        2. Building climaxes and preparing further action.

V. IMITATIVE (ONOMATOPOEIC) MUSIC
    A. Imitates mechanical or natural sounds other than human.
    B. Imitates human speech or utterances (screams, sighs, moans, etc.).

VI. SUSPENSORY AND TERMINAL MUSIC
    A. Suspends action.
    B. Terminates film.

As we can see from the table above, the psychological function appears first and gets more complex with each point as it is mixed with the technical functions. This line of thought brings us to the conclusion that the artistic concept, inherently deeply rooted in psychology as it directly interacts with the psyche of the audience, takes precedence over all other considerations. There is not a singular, universally correct method for composing film music because the approach always hinges on the specific artistic concept that filmmakers aim to communicate. In other words, the

choice of how to compose music for a film should align with and enhance the psychological and emotional aspects of the artistic vision, and this can vary widely from one film to another. As Douglas Gallez concludes for his time in an article from 1970 about film music theories for *Cinema Journal*[6]: "Terminology varies; semantic problems occasionally intervene. The foregoing principles appear to be established. Yet there may be others. The world of film is so varied that one would indeed be bold to circumscribe the possibilities for music. There are all kinds of films and many kinds of music. Theatrical pictures are increasingly experimental, and film music styles are having to keep pace. We are in a period of neo-Dada, of anti-rationality. Because the arts of music and film are heavily involved in the game of chance encounter, it may be that the aesthetic principle for our time is no principle at all. Random happenings will be sought or rather, allowed. To some of us, this means chaos. Maybe it is because the possibilities are so great we cannot comprehend them."

1.2. Sergio Miceli's Method of Levels

It would not be completely correct to analyze film music the same as music written independently because film music is presented in a narrative context and is meant to be heard along with the story. That is why it is so important to approach the analysis in a complex with the screenplay and montage. The most accurate and comprehensive theory of film music so far has been elaborated by a musicologist Professor Sergio Miceli that has also been commented on and approved by the praxis of such a great film composer as Ennio Morricone, and documented in the treatment *Composing for the Cinema: The Theory and Praxis of Film Music*.

In Miceli's theory, the *accompaniment type* of music is distinguished from the *commentary type*. The first one primarily emphasizes and complements the film through basic musical elements like sound effects and relies on simple musical conventions. In contrast, the commentary type goes beyond this and serves to interpret the narrative and symbolic aspects of the film in a more nuanced and complex way. The commentary music possesses its own distinct quality and formal logic, which may not always align with the visual aspects of film. In some cases it can diverge significantly, involving asynchrony or decontextualization with the visuals, and then, the score makes a meaningful part of a film's symbolic language and can simultaneously refer to itself as an independent entity.

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[6] Douglas Gallez. *Theories of Film Music*, "Cinema Journal", Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring, 1970, p. 46.

Speaking of accompaniment music, Miceli divides it into more subtypes and crystalizes the idea of *synchronization points* between music and film. These points distinguish between two types:

- ➢ *Implicit:* in which the music maintains its independent course but makes subtle adjustments in response to film events. 'The implicit synch point underlines sentiments more than events, thoughts more than actions. The modification can be rhythmic in nature (a momentary suspension in the flow or its rippling), harmonic (a cadential pattern, actually suspended, irresolute, a dissonance on the inside of a complex mixture, a harmonic thickening and clarification due to a series of instrumental doubles) or timbral (the entry of an instrument or a section, a unison, a jump in register). Every case remains coherently within the interior logic of the musical composition.'[7]

- ➢ *Explicit:* the moments when the music and image align in an obvious manner often emphasized by such musical means as a crescendo, chord holding, or rhythmic changes. The explicit way of scoring in some cases can get near to so-called "mickey mousing" (a term that we have already encountered in Kracauer's taxonomy and indicates the exaggerated imitation). Such points are very often used in comic genres and rarely by the protagonist of this thesis, Ryuichi Sakamoto.

Following the narrative point of view, linguistic and semiological methodology, Miceli establishes his method of levels. Instead of two levels developed before by other scholars from the Platonic concepts of "diegesis" and "mimesis"[8] pointing us into two musical categories – diegetic and extra-diegetic[9] –, Miceli approaches three levels of musical involvement: *internal, external,* and *mediated.* Here is a schematic description of the levels from the book of Miceli[10]:

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[7] Sergio Miceli, Ennio Morricone. *Composing for the Cinema: The Theory and Praxis of Film Music*, Scarecrow Press, 2013, p.76.

[8] *Diegesis* refers to the pure story, or the point of view of the omniscient narrator, and *mimesis* to the story taken from the point of view of the characters.

[9] *Diegetic* involves a tangible musical presence within the film's narrative.
  Extradiegetic typically refers to musical commentary or music that exists outside the immediate narrative context.

[10] Ibid., p. 93.

Internal level	Musical source belonging to the scene
	Visible or presumable identification of the music-making source
	In certain cases coincides with playback
	Absence of the author
External level	Ubiquitous, indeterminate musical source
	Typical commentary-/accompaniment-type score
	Has a leitmotif function
	At the limit of expressive neutrality is a generic background sound
	Epiphany (sudden intuitive perception of reality) of the author
Mediated level	Interiorized musical source, identifiable with a character
	A sort of mimesis that is subjective sound
	It can also have a leitmotif function
	Absence of the author

Sergio Miceli defines the internal level as "particularly dear to those directors who have a radical, documentary conception of the cinema, or who see the cinema first of all as an ideological vehicle", and according to him, "they have therefore a "little or nothing at all" aestheticism and hide in the expedients of a consolatory spectacularity as an end in itself".[11]

While the internal level is quite clear to comprehend, the external and mediated levels are slightly more complicated. The external level is more artificial in nature and openly reflects the poetic meaning of a work of art and the intention of the director and composer. It works as a revelation from the author's perspective. In fact, it is similar to the principle of the leitmotiv system, as the music on this level is usually thematically rich and gets linked to a character or certain scene. In contrast to the internal level, which lacks the author's presence, the external level is a deliberate musical choice of the authors that represents the aesthetic proposal and this choice becomes a part of the moral story and in some cases can even take on the primary role in the story. It is on this level that asynchronous musical use can be applied to reflect a deliberate artistic concept.

The mediated level goes beyond objective measures and has a semiotic function; it plays a significant role in the development of the narrative and it works similarly to the narrating voice that we perceive as a stream of consciousness, it is a substitute for the verbal language with the

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[11] Miceli, Sergio. *Miceli's Method of Internal, External, and Mediated Levels: Elements for the Definition of a Film-Musical Dramaturgy*. "Music and the Moving Image", vol. 4, no. 2, 2011, p. 6.

musical one. As explained by Miceli: "…the mediated level is to the soundtrack as the subjective shot is to shooting technique. The subjective shot forces the spectator to identify with the point of view of the character."[12] … "In the manifestation of an episode [with music] ascribable to the mediated level, the spectator has the privilege of listening to the inner thoughts or perceptions of the character. It is a procedure like that of the voice-over, with the difference that instead of listening to words, one listens to music. Naturally, they cannot be thoughts in the form of verbal organization but [have to be] emotions in a pure state, and obviously [there is] nothing better, more capable, than music to express them."[13] Therefore, to conclude, it is a situation in the film when the character expresses themselves through music.

1.3. The "Audio-Vision" of Michel Chion

Another prominent figure in film music studies is French film theorist and musician Michel Chion. His concept of "audio-vision" delves into the intricate connections and interactions between what we see and what we hear in audiovisual works. He did not consider only the form of classical film storytelling but also video art and music video clips. Some of the key aspects of his concept from the book are the synesthetic experience, audiovisual contracts, added-value sound, audio-vision as an art form, etc. Michel Chion explores how sound and image can create a synesthetic experience where the senses of hearing and seeing are intertwined, and how this combination can provoke emotions, meanings, and sensory experiences. He proposed the idea of "contracts" that work like an unspoken agreement between filmmakers, actors, and the audience, which influence our perceptions and interpretations of audiovisual works. In other words, it suggests that the audience willingly suspends the disbelief and accepts the constructed reality presented in audiovisual works.

The idea of **added-value sound** emphasizes the significant role of sound in enhancing and amplifying the emotional impact of images. He argues that sound can provide layers of meaning and depth to visual storytelling.[14] Chion views audio-vision as an art form in its own right, distinct from both music and traditional visual art. He highlights the artistic possibilities that arise when sound and image are combined and synchronized to create a unified sensory experience. He draws from semiotics to explore how audio-visual works can convey meanings, symbolism, and artistic expression. He examines the interplay between signs, codes, and cultural contexts in the audio-

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[12] Ibid. p. 16.
[13] Ibid., p.16.
[14] Cfr. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.

visual realm.

From sound and video art, his work extends into film soundtrack and the music's contribution to the narrative, mood and themes of a film. In his research, he concludes that the starting point here is language and, for this reason, he borrows the term "**acousmatic**" (from the Greek word *akousmatikoi* (ἀκουσματικοί)[15] from Pierre Schaeffer about the use of off-screen sound in film. In easy words, this term describes the sounds whose sources are not visible on-screen. Therefore, for the analysis of the relationship between music and visuals, semiotics, as a science of communicative systems and signs used in the process of communication, becomes fundamental. Analyzing film music according to Michel Chion is possible starting with identifying these acousmatic sounds and analyzing how they contribute to the narrative. Chion focused on noise — word, sound—image relationships, emphasizing that film analysis is still influenced by ideas from the time of silent cinema, such as the notions of "shot" and "editing". Consequently, he introduced the concept of cinema as a form of sound art, portraying it as a sophisticated audio-visual apparatus where reality coexists with the simulated.

According to Chion, in cinema, there are two ways the acousmatic situation can happen. In the first way, we see the sound source first and then it becomes an acousmatic sound. In the second way, the sound starts as acousmatic, meaning we cannot see the source of it, and then it is revealed later. In the first case, we connect the sound with a specific image right away. He calls this "visualized sound". It becomes a real sound linked to an image and therefore demythologized. In the second case, the veiled sound creates a feeling of tension and suspense, and the source is only shown after. This is often applied in mystery and suspense-based cinema and has the effect of de-acousmatising the initially hidden source of the sound. Chion explains that the difference between "visualized" and "acousmatic" is crucial for understanding the idea of off-screen space in films.

Audio-visual relationships are also crucial for the analysis with the method of Chion. In order to consider how sound and image interact, Chion proposes three categories of audio-visual relationships: *synchronous* (sound matches the action on-screen), *asynchronous* (sound contrasts with the image or complements it), *diegetic/non-diegetic relations* (how sounds relate to its on-screen sources).[16] Apart from the on-screen sound, comes the off-screen. Chion emphasized the importance of off-screen sound in creating suspense and tension. Sounds from outside the frame can frame the viewer's perception and this can be analyzed.[17] The viewer's spatial awareness is

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[15] Ibid., chapter 2.
[16] Ibid., chapter 3.
[17] Ivi.

formed by sound perspective, with which Chion refers to the placement of sounds in relation to the visual field.[18]

Another crucial point is **audio-visual dissonance**. The moments in which sound and image do not align harmoniously can be intentional and convey specific meanings or emotions, prolonging the film's virtual space.[19] Chion introduced three **modes of listening** to the sounds: causal, semantic and reduced. Analyzing which mode is dominant in specific scenes can tell more about how it influences the viewer's experience. *Causal listening* involves understanding sounds in a film as coming from a visible or implied cause within the narrative. It is about identifying the source of the sound and linking it to a specific action or object on the screen. In *semantic listening* mode, listeners interpret sounds in terms of their symbolic or metaphorical meaning, as they are not just heard as physical occurrences but are also understood as conveying emotions, ideas, or cultural associations. *Reduced listening* involves focusing on the qualities of the sound itself rather than its source or its symbolic meaning. It is about experiencing sound as a pure phenomenon, paying attention to its timbre, pitch, rhythm, and other acoustic properties.

According to Chion, the timing of sound creates an emotional impact, and examining it relates to the temporal structure of the film. Apart from the temporal relationships, the sound editing choices and juxtaposition of different sounds as well as silences and the overall rhythm of the soundtrack can be helpful points to start an analysis with, focusing on the intricate relationships between sound and image in cinema.

1.4. Audiovisual Chord of Martine Huvenne

In 2022 Martine Huvenne, lecturer and researcher on Sound and Music for Film at the Conservatory of Ghent, published her book in which she explained the concept of audiovisual chord. Similar to Michel Chion, it refers to a synergy between visual elements and musical or sound components in a film, creating a unified and impactful moment that deeply engages the audience's sensory experiences. This concept goes beyond the mere alignment of sound with visuals, it involves a sophisticated blending where the combination of audio and visual elements produces a meaning, emotion or sensation that is greater than the sum of its parts. She invites us to reflect on a sound as a dynamic movement.

"Neither a "container" of content nor a pointed actual moment, the audiovisual chord enables a superimposition of spaces and places in image, /sound/, music and speech in a poly-chronic context. It is a dynamic multisensorial knot of movements which can be experienced and perceived from different perspectives, and whose intervals invite the audience to participate in the film's

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[18] Ivi.
[19] Ivi.

dance of image and sound", explains Martine Huvenne in her work. [20]

An audiovisual chord can be thought of in terms of music—just as a chord is a set of notes that produce a specific sound when played together, an audiovisual chord combines sound and image to create an amplified emotional or narrative effect. This results in **embodied listening** and can occur in several ways: through emotional amplification, symbolic association, sensory immersion, rhythmic and temporal alignment. The embodied listening can be decomposed to such elements as *felt sound, kinesthetic experience,* and *inner time-consciousness*. Our five senses serve us to create a filmic space within us.

Emotional amplification means that music can heighten the emotional content of a visual scene, such as a soaring orchestral piece accompanying a triumphant moment, or a dissonant, tense score underscoring a scene of suspense or fear.

Certain sounds or musical motifs can become associated with specific characters, locations, or thematic elements, creating a symbolic language that enriches the film's narrative. This is a **symbolic association.** When these motifs are paired with corresponding visual elements, they form audiovisual chords that evoke deeper layers of meaning. **Sensory immersion** works through the combination of sound and visuals that creates an immersive experience that draws viewers more deeply into the film's world. For instance, the use of ambient sounds and music that matches the visual setting, like the sound of waves paired with the visuals of the ocean, can enhance the sensory realism of a scene.

The editing of visuals in rhythm with the music or sound can create a dynamic and engaging experience. This synchronization is achieved through **rhythmic and temporal alignment.** It is especially used to make action sequences more thrilling or give a poetic quality to more contemplative scenes.

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[20] Martine Huvenne, *The Audiovisual Chord: Embodied Listening in Film*, Singapore, Springer Verlag, 2023, pp. 158-159.

Chapter II. Biographical Overview of Ryuichi Sakamoto

2.1. Overview of Sakamoto's Life, Career, and Musical Influences

Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto, born in 1952 in Tokyo, creates an image of a humble and sensitive person who did not like to speak about his life in public, as he stated in many interviews. Taking this into account, and the fact that there are no monographic works on Sakamoto's life, I would like to dedicate this chapter to his formation as a film composer and have a close look at his musical influences. As the main source of information, I will use the recent documentary films *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda* (2017) and *Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus* (2023). As well as the films, I will analyze the interviews he gave to various journalists during film festivals, in which he shared his views on composing, social issues, activism, some of his personal experiences in the field, and other things that can be useful for the research and the following analysis of his works.

The art of Sakamoto is quite particular as it is a fusion of two worlds – Western and Eastern. Many genres passed through his prism of view on music, the most notorious ones are jazz, avant-garde, pop music, bossanova, neoclassical, electronic, free improvisation, and others. It is important to note that the composer's affinity for music did not solely depend on categorical distinction or genres; rather, his preferences are rooted in the inherent qualities of individual compositions, irrespective of genre. The key to understanding his sonic art lies in being open to the diversity that led to the development of musical metalanguage that has been employed and crafted by Sakamoto.

He obtained a Bachelor's degree in music composition and pursued a Master's degree, focusing extensively on electronic music and ethnic music at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. His academic journey included a deep dive into ethnomusicology as he aspired to become a researcher in this field. This knowledge was also useful in his film music career when he had to research musical material that was very far from his own culture in order to provide the music and soundscape for the narratives set for instance in North Africa[21] or China[22]. Inspired by the German electronic synth band Kraftwerk, he continued to explore the boundaries of electronic music. In 1977, Ryuichi Sakamoto, along with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi,

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[21] In *The Sheltering Sky* (1990).
[22] In *The Last Emperor* (1987).

collaborated as session musicians, which led to the formation of their widely acclaimed electronic band Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) in 1978. Their groundbreaking contributions to electronic music, spanning electropop, synthpop, cyberpunk, ambient house, and electronica have left an enduring mark. Their influence extends across diverse genres, including hip-hop, techno, acid house, and various melodic musical styles the reflections of which we can find in further works of the composer. In his life, both creative and personal, his priority was freedom. For this reason, Yellow Magic Orchestra was the only band he has ever joined out of a deep respect for the two musicians. After that, he went for a solo career, as he wanted to be himself in his creative expression. He has managed to create something for every single audience that has a different palette.

One of the most influential musical movements that has significantly shaped Sakamoto's musical aesthetics is American minimalism, exemplified by such artists as John Cage, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philipp Glass, La Monte Young, and several others. Even though the focus of minimalism in its essence goes into the repetitions of melodic and rhythmic patterns, Sakamoto confessed that for him it is more about the color of music, speaking with terminology, it is about timbre. Even though the piano is the closest instrument to him, we can notice that the compositions of Sakamoto are often quite abstract in terms of form and melody because he liked to experiment with the instruments and their timbres. Being also a sound designer and a Foley artist, he often tried not traditional ways of extracting sound out of the instruments, using objects like stones, pieces of glass, Tibetan singing bowls with a violin bow, and others. He was using his smartphone every day to record the sound of streets and nature. The artist tended to minimalism because of the details and the attention that goes to the timbre of instruments, rhythms, and other non-melodic aspects of music and it explains the sensitivity with which he approached the composing of film music considering that the rhythm is an essential element of film montage.

The artwork of Ryuichi Sakamoto in the second half of his career has been extremely symbolic and poetic; he was using sound and melody as a language, saturating them with metaphors and meanings. For instance, many times in various interviews he mentioned his love for the music of French symbolist-impressionist composer Claude Debussy, which he encountered for the first time around the age of 13. The imagination of a young musician remained impressed with discovering such a fresh and new sound that sounded mysterious to him, so he called Debussy "the door to all 20th-century music" and stated that "Asian music heavily influenced Debussy, and Debussy

heavily influenced me. So, the music goes around the world and comes full circle."[23] He clearly absorbed the harmony of the 9-chords and the modality of Debussy. In fact, the second movement of his orchestral composition *La mer* (The Sea) is Sakamoto's favorite musical piece. He appreciated it for the fluidity of sound, and its synesthetic features. Moreover, many musicologists indeed agree that Debussy is the father of modern music and that there are the first traces of jazz harmony in his compositions. In the fusion of sounds of Sakamoto, we can see something similar; he became a bridge between the West and the East. As he once explained: "*I have a sort of cultural map in my head, where I find similarities between different cultures. For example, Japanese pop music reminds me of Arabic music, due to the vocal intonation and vibrato, and in my mind, Bali is close to New York. Maybe everyone has this kind of geography in their head; I work like this*."[24] From Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart, skipping the Romanticism era, he arrived to discover the music of impressionists and avant-gardists of 20th-century Europe in the names of Ravel, Stravinsky, and Bartok, which had a huge influence on him.

Sakamoto sensed perfectly the artistic tendencies of our time and even transcended them, following the minimalistic concept of "perpetual sound" that does not dissipate over time as a metaphor for eternity. The notion of the "perpetual sound" crystallized within his creative consciousness as a direct result of his prolonged engagement with the piano as his primary musical instrument. Sakamoto observed that the piano's sound has a transitory quality, gradually decaying and merging with the ambient sounds of its surroundings. This characteristic of sonic impermanence fostered a sense of longing, compelling him to envy to a certain degree instruments such as the guitar or violin. These instruments sustain their sound, inspiring the composer to embark on the quest of searching for the perpetual sound that goes along with the film flow very well and, according to the composer, gives a little color to that flow.

From a technical perspective, the concept of the "perpetual sound" is exemplified through a musical genre known as *process music*, guided by a fundamental principle that involves the utilization of musical processes that possess the capability of shaping both the precise detail of each note or sound and the overall structure of composition at the same time. Within the realm of minimalism, different composers held distinct perspectives on how these processes should manifest. Some sought to conceal the underlying processes, aiming to create a musical experience characterized by a continuous flow. Conversely, figures like Steve Reich pursued an intentional audibility of these processes.

Speaking of filmic influences, he always mentioned the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky and

[23] Douglas Q. Smith, *Gig Alert: Ryuichi Sakamoto*, "WNYC Culture Producer", October 2010.
[24] *Ryuichi Sakamoto*, Festival MITO SETTEMBRE MUSICA, 2019.

French director Robert Bresson, speaking of their books – *Sculpting in Time* and *Notes on the Cinematographer*, respectively.

Sakamoto, in his late period of creativity, declined to ambient music, the modern form of which intrigued the artist for studying the relationship between sound and the environment. The last decade of his life and career was inevitably marked by being diagnosed with throat cancer. Obviously, his health became the primary focus, overshadowing all other concerns. Following his successful battle with cancer, Sakamoto abandoned all preexisting plans and creative concepts. He was driven by an imperative to initiate a fresh creative journey but found himself confronted by an absence of novel artistic ideas. Consequently, he embarked on an extensive four-month quest to discover a new and distinctive sonic identity, the outcome of which was his album "*async*" which emerged in 2017. This album is characterized by its striking originality and balance between fragility and resilience, while the title plays with the ideas of asynchronism. We, human beings, tend to synchronize, we are creatures that get pleasure from being in synchronicity, and the idea of Sakamoto was to create untraditional music that would seem more to be a soundscape and would not synchronize. He suggests we listen to each sound separately without evaluating if it is pleasant or unpleasant. It is a type of sonic meditation.

The composer said that at the beginning of making the album in his imagination, he had the Bach theme[25] from *Solaris* (1972) by Andrei Tarkovsky, arranged by Eduard Artemiev on synthesizers. Therefore, we can speak about another line of influence on his (not only) film music aesthetics that lies in Johann Sebastian Bach, the electronic music of Artemiev, and even the directions of Tarkovsky. Working in the film music industry requires a sort of synesthesia from a composer and Ryuichi Sakamoto definitely was in possession of it, as he was able to perceive film works as a symphonic piece. For instance, he said, "as I've been making music and trying to go deeper and deeper, I was finally able to understand what the Tarkovsky movies are about — how symphonic they are — it's almost music. Not just the sounds — it's a symphony of moving images and sounds. They are more complex than music."[26] In fact, within his album *async* again he establishes a thematic link with the aesthetics of Tarkovsky by incorporating a poem of the director's father, Arsenij Tarkovsky, in the track LIFE, LIFE.

Sakamoto's connection with the polyphony of J. S. Bach bears a noteworthy distinction. Being left-handed, Sakamoto typically encounters a significant right-handed bias in piano music. This convention typically places the melodic or thematic elements in the right hand, with the left hand

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[25] Choral prelude in f-minor "*Ich ruf' zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ*", BWV 639 from the Little Organ Book of J.S. Bach.
[26] Craig Hubert, *Composer Ryuichi Sakamoto Reflects on His Life, Work, and Battle with Cancer,* "Hyperallergic", July 2018.

assuming a complementary, accompanying role. The polyphonic music of Bach, however, represents a transformative experience for Sakamoto and a departure from that conventional paradigm.

In his latest years, Sakamoto assumed a significant role in advocating against nuclear power. Particularly in response to the Fukushima Nuclear Accident, Sakamoto organized the No Nukes 2012 Concert in Chiba, Japan. He reasoned it by saying that "keeping silence after Fukushima is barbaric". His active engagement in public activism and his battle with cancer is a fundamental element in the documentary film *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda.* In one scene of the film, he says, "*I honestly don't know how many years I have left. It could be 20 years, 10 years, or a relapse reduces it to just one. I am not taking anything for granted. But I know that I want to make more music. Music that I won't be ashamed to leave behind — meaningful work.*" The documentary follows him creating field recordings on different symbolic locations. To add more about his activism, it is worth saying that he was also an environmentalist, very interested in retaining forests through the 90s, and tried different ways to make a difference in these issues. Sakamoto and his working team found a company to plant forests in Japan and the Philippines, which has planted nine forests since then, collaborating with the local forest unions. He was also involved in film scores such as *Original Child Bomb: Meditations on the Nuclear Age* (2004), which explores the consequences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He also contributed to the soundtrack of *Alexei and the Spring*, a documentary highlighting the impact of the Chornobyl disaster on a village in Belarus.

2.2. Exploration of Sakamoto's Contributions to Film Music

Sakamoto received an opportunity to compose his first film score at the age of 34. Before that, he had had no idea that he would ever be working in the film industry, although he has always been a cinephile. His career in cinema started with a proposal of acting in *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* directed by Nagisa Ōshima, to which instead he proposed his candidature to write music for the film and ended up both acting and composing. Since starting his soundtrack music career with that project, he admits of having become more conscious about sound and music in a film. Working with Nagisa Ōshima has brought Sakamoto to meeting with Bernardo Bertolucci. Sakamoto was introduced to him some years before the shooting of *The Last Emperor* and, again, Bertolucci at first wanted him to act in his film.

Film directors typically lack formal musical training, thereby necessitating the composer's role in translating the director's creative vision into the language of music. Composers, such as Ryuichi Sakamoto, must possess a profound understanding of the director's musical desires and be adept at interpreting them. This process can prove arduous and anxiety inducing. According to Sakamoto, some of his most challenging yet rewarding projects have been his collaborations with Bertolucci and Iñárritu. This is attributed to the fact that these directors possess a deep knowledge of music and approach it with a high level of seriousness and dedication. Throughout the course of his career, Sakamoto composed a substantial body of work comprising approximately 50 scores. Many of them garnered international acclaim and were lauded with prestigious awards such as Oscar, ASCAP award, BAFTA, Golden Globe, Grammy, and many others, thus achieving widespread recognition and renown. Notably, Sakamoto's portfolio extends beyond the realm of feature films into television series, short films, music for video games, and animated Japanese film productions. The following is a selection of his most important works that display his impact within cinematic landscapes:

- *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, directed by Nagisa Ōshima (1983)
- *The Last Emperor*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (1987)
- *Le ali di Honneamise* (王立宇宙軍 オネアミスの翼), directed by Hiroyuki Yamaga (1987) (anime)
- *The Sheltering Sky*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (1990)
- *The Handmaid's Tale*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff (1990)
- *Tacones lejanos*, directed by Pedro Almodóvar (1991)
- *Little Buddha*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (1993)
- *Snake Eyes*, directed by Brian De Palma (1998)
- *Love Is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon*, directed by John Maybury (1998)
- *Tabù - Gohatto*, directed by Nagisa Ōshima (1999)
- *Femme fatale*, directed by Brian De Palma (2002)
- *Tony Takitani*, directed by Jun Ichikawa (2004)
- *Silk*, directed by François Girard (2007)
- *The Revenant*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (2015)
- *Proxima* (2019)
- *Minamata*, directed by Andrew Levitas (2020)
- *Beckett*, directed by Ferdinando Cito Filomarino (2021)
- *Kaibutsu*, directed by Hirokazu Kore'eda (2023)

This diverse body of works demonstrates Sakamoto's remarkable versatility and enduring influence in the world of film music.

A thorough examination of Ryuichi's interviews reveals his inclination to maintain a high degree of privacy concerning his personal life. Instead, he consistently directed the focus of discussion towards his work and creative process, so he frequently delved into the topic of his collaborations with the film directors and his integral role in the filmmaking process. He articulated a significant challenge that he had to face as a contemporary film music composer that revolved around the need to fight the prevalent preference among directors for preexisting classical music in their films. The formidable nature of this challenge stems from the inherent difficulty in competing with classical recordings, which are renowned for their exceptionally high sound quality and performance standards. Another challenge for him was the conventionality and sketchiness of film music. It was a constant search of the balance of sounds in order to not fall into a prominent and compelling melody that brings irritation and seizes the focus, overshadowing the visual elements within the cinematic experience. On the other side of the scale is the music that is too calculated, of which he once said, "the bad music is always made intellectually, with formulas". As an example of film music that had impressed him deeply and served as a composing model, he always mentions the suite of Nino Rota for Fellini's film *La Strada*, especially the opening solo part that entered into the subconscious of the viewer from the very beginning and then returns many times in the film as a leitmotiv. This film was his childhood memory.

The film soundtrack is the foremost sound, encompassing such elements as noise, dialogue, and music. As sound recording technologies advanced, film music started to contend with ambient noise and natural soundscapes. This evolution reduced the necessity for a continuous musical accompaniment, as it would create dissonance with the authentic sounds of daily life. In this context, Sakamoto introduced an element to the cinema that is often absent. He simplified the texture of the scores so that it would have a lighter, more transparent sound and would not be too intrusive for the viewer. Music can take the attention away from the visual part, and he was avoiding this. By simplifying the texture, he focused primarily on the rhythm and the precise timing of the music's entry into the film. Sakamoto recorded all by himself in contact with the orchestra making sure that each nuance was performed according to his idea:

> *"Working with orchestras is always very interesting. You shave got an entire*
> *room filled with people making sound, and I stand there, in the middle, all-*
> *silent. Being in that room, conducting a group of musicians to play the music I*

make is always very nerve-racking. However, when things start to get into motion, you forget that you were ever nervous. It's a very intriguing process because the orchestra reflects the emotions that I emote through my gestures."[27]

One of the films scored by Sakamoto is *Derrida*, of which I will speak closely in chapter IV. It is a documentary film about contemporary post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida who passed away in 2004. Among the philosopher's extensive ideas is a concept related to the future, in which he distinguished between what was "the future" and "l'avenir" (the 'to come'). "The future" refers to something that can be foreseen and anticipated, while "l'avenir" represents an unpredictable dimension of the future into which the thinkers must immerse themselves. In this context, Sakamoto's work primarily involved engaging with the foreseeable and logical future, since he was engaged in musical innovations, recorded some kind of music of the future.

2.3. The Philosophy of the Music of Sakamoto

He once expressed that music in its essence is a product of human artifice, crafted from the raw materials of the natural world and that art is an abuse of nature.[28] Paradoxically, despite the inner conflict, he acknowledged the irresistible nature of this creative impulse. In *Coda*, he is meditating on technology and naturalism in the context of the nature of music. Seated in front of his Steinway grand piano, Sakamoto articulated how the piano music's existence owes itself to the Industrial Revolution, being a combination of wood and string and the formidable power of industrial production. The technology is being used to create music. *"Matter taken from nature is molded by human industry, by the sum strength of civilization,"* he says in the film. *"Nature is forced into shape."* He contemplates that human ingenuity and the collective forces of civilization reshape matter sourced from nature. In fact, nature is enforced into conforming to human designs but eventually, everything returns to its natural form. This echoes with the Japanese idiom *"mono no aware"*[29], meaning the deep gentle sadness for the passing and changing nature of all things. Instruments, whether digital or organic, are simply tools, since existence is a fleeting condition. We can employ these tools to create something lasting, and Sakamoto's choice was sound.

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[27] *Ryuichi Sakamoto Talks About His Unique Perspective On Music*, interview by Red Bull Music, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJEZFTbxm4o

[28] Kevin Nguyen, *Music Sounds the Way It Does Because of Ryuichi Sakamoto*, "QG", 2023.

[29] (物の哀れ), lit. 'the pathos of things'.

Sound was always the most essential element for him, more than music itself. Sound and music are, of course, related concepts but they differ in several key aspects: sound can be chaotic and includes all audible phenomenon, whether musical or non-musical, such as speech, noise, or environmental sounds; music is a form of artistic expression and is highly organized in terms of pitch, rhythms, dynamics. Music is crafted intentionally for aesthetic or emotional purposes and sound is a byproduct of music and a building material at the same time. Sakamoto did not limit himself just to the musical sounds and the fixed pitches of 12-tone equal temperament typical for Western music. Quite often, he would apply various noises and natural sounds in his works, as for example bird singing, which according to him is always in tune naturally and in perfect timing. The issue of authenticity and natural harmony always runs like a thin thread in his work, even and especially in his electronic music. His concept when making music was that there is no border between music and noise. The clean sound generates an artificial, virtual world where every imperfection is eradicated. In contrast, the raw, unrefined quality analog tape reproduces life, occasionally distorted but never malevolent.

After being diagnosed with cancer in 2014, his music took on characteristics almost akin to Zen philosophy. It became an exploration of observation, a relationship with the infinite, and a perception of movement in the world around us. For him, nature symbolized the stability of the world and a representation of pre-existence. "I was, I am, and I will be", recite the line of Arsenij Tarkovsky in *Life, life,* conveying the eternal continuum that extends beyond earthly existence alone and implying that our body serves as the vessel enabling us to be in this world, perceive the very essence of it. Following his illness, Sakamoto appears to have embraced the philosophy and aesthetics of *wabi-sabi,* the main principle of which is in finding beauty in simplicity. Consequently, he delved into the ambient genre, where each sound carries a significant weight. This shift in his musical focus may have been influenced by his contemplation of mortality and a transformation in his worldview. In the film sphere, Sakamoto always resonated with films of highly existential topics.

Regarding creativity, the composer has also expressed a thought-provoking perspective. According to him, performing live in a concert is not an act of creativity, probably alluding to the Freudian concept of sublimation, where the artist's mind works with processing the material that has already been there and not being able to generate entirely new creations from scratch.[30] Since his live performances were often very interactive with the public and included technologies as a

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[30] Leonardo Vittorio Arena, *La filosofia di Sakamoto: Il wabi/sabi dei colori proibiti*, Milano, Mimesis, 2017, p. 18.

medium, it leads us to another substantial theme for Sakamoto's art – the intersection of music with the digital realm. In his opinion, in our era of the internet and authorship, we returned to a more communal and tribal attitude to music. A prime example of this is the practice of *sampling* technique, where anyone can extract and reuse some segments of music created and played by others. This trend forces us to reevaluate the controversial issue of artistic ownership of a work of art and harks back to the older times when music was shared without concern for attribution, and a song could be considered the property of a whole village. Through the continuous editing of the piece, the creativity blooms and the roots of this thinking probably lie in his ethnomusicological background. In an interview for Sónar, he said that in his opinion, a composer is always interested in technology and innovation, giving an example of Beethoven who in his turn composed a cycle of 32 sonatas for the piano that at his time was a new and innovative instrument.[31]

Sakamoto would walk out in a street or on a forest path with a microphone in his hands to collect the soundscapes of different environments. His connection with raw natural sounds draws parallels with the philosophy of concrete music, a genre that relies on real-world sounds rather than traditional music notation. Composers of concrete music, such as Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgard Varèse, Iannis Xenakis, and others, delve into the auditory qualities and textures of everyday sounds, like footsteps, water droplets, or industrial machinery, to transform them into musical components. This blurring of boundaries between music and sound design underscores the inherent musical potential of any sound source. Concrete music played a pivotal role in advancing electronic music and was a precursor to the use of synthesizers and electronic instruments in contemporary music production. Therefore, we can observe these direct interconnections between film music, the nature of sound, minimalism, and electronic music as permanent pillars of Sakamoto's artistic interest along with his cultural universalism.

Sakamoto simultaneously managed to transcend his cultural limits and geographical boundaries, remaining a deeply Japanese composer. His collaborations with artists from different cultural backgrounds, his compositions for films, dealing with the themes of identity and pressing global challenges, and his socio-cultural and political engagement underscores his commitment to global concerns.

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[31] Sónar+D, *The future of music according to Ryuichi Sakamoto,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSk8eBj4tkk

Chapter III. Analysis of Selected Film Scores

3.1. Collaboration of Ryuichi Sakamoto with Bernardo Bertolucci

In the world of filmmaking, where visuals and melodies come together to evoke emotions, some collaborators shine as outstanding examples of creative synergy. The union of Ryuichi Sakamoto with the Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci is one of them. Bertolucci is known for visually striking aesthetics and thematically rich films, often exploring political and societal issues.

While being a harmonious blend of sonic innovations and visual storytelling, the composer confessed it to be a very challenging yet productive experience. For instance, while scoring *Little Buddha* and The *Sheltering Sky*, Sakamoto had to engage with musical material that diverged significantly from his own cultural roots. The setting of *The Sheltering Sky* in the Middle East, with filming amidst the Sahara desert, demanded him to immerse himself in a musical landscape foreign to his Japanese heritage. Even in *The Last Emperor*, where the narrative unfolds in China, the composer admits that he did not have a good knowledge of Chinese music and so he faced the task of acquainting himself with a genre he initially found dislikable.[32] Conducting extensive research and delving into cultural exploration, he embarked on a profound mind journey to immerse himself in the musical traditions of China and North Africa. His success in mastering these musical landscapes can be attributed to his ethnomusicological background, demonstrating his ability to interpret different cultural musicality. After all, the collaborations with Bernardo Bertolucci brought him two Golden Globes, two Grammy awards, an Oscar, and a BAFTA award.

Sakamoto acknowledged Bertolucci's inherent musicality, considering that the director would redesign the score according to his vision without taking any advice from the composer. According to Sakamoto, the director's Italian background and exposure to lyrical operas during his upbringing influenced his approach. He perceived Bertolucci's camera movements as a form of melody, providing significant inspiration and guidance for Sakamoto in the composition process, considering especially the fact that he was never present at the film set for organization difficulties. This is confirmed through the interview with Bernardo Bertolucci, conducted by Sakamoto himself, where the filmmaker explained:

"Back to your question, now let's talk about the evolution of music in my films first. Music has
always been very vital to me. To an extent, it is musical films that I always wanted to make. In
other words, my dream was to direct a musical without actual music, a musical where the image

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[32] *The Thousand Sounds of Ryuichi Sakamoto*, interview moderated by Peter Cowie, February 15, 2012.

itself is the music. Maybe that's why my camera moves so much- there is a musical approach to it. All the movements I love are organized and calculated like a rhythm- scherzo, adagio, andante, presto..."[33]

The most demanding film project was *The Last Emperor*, primarily due to challenging physical conditions and the tight period of two weeks, within which he had to compose 45 cues, record the music with a Chinese orchestra, and transport the materials to London. *"I carried the tape from Tokyo to London and played it to Bertolucci and his crew while watching the video, and they all stood up and shouted, "Perfetto! Perfetto!"* said Sakamoto in an interview.[34] At the time, internet communication was not available, and the intensity of the project took a toll, leading Sakamoto to end up in a hospital afterward. The composer, who identified as a "synchronization fanatic", found it quite traumatic how effortlessly Bertolucci could edit or adjust seconds in The Last Emperor. Each time Sakamoto had to compose, he resisted to establish any artistic routine, opting instead to simply sit in front of the piano and play, synchronizing with the film narrative and visual, ensuring that each note and composition complemented the visual narrative seamlessly.[35] Nonetheless, the director, being "musical" himself, would reinterpret Sakamoto's compositions to suit the film, highlighting a mutual artistic understanding. The idea of Bertolucci was to bring together the West and the East by employing two composers from the two parts of the world. Therefore, the choice fell on Sakamoto and David Byrne.

As Sakamoto remembered, during the production of *Little Buddha*, Bertolucci tasked him with composing the "theme of reincarnation" which at first appeared too abstract and complicated to the composer. Given the film's deep connection to Buddhist philosophy, Sakamoto had to embark on a study of Buddhism to grasp its core concepts. The challenge laid in capturing the essence of reincarnation musically. In his pursuit of the motive, he employed various methods to stimulate his creativity. Ryuichi Sakamoto was approached to compose the film score for Little Buddha only after the completion of the shooting and was out of context. He delved into different musical modes and even sought inspiration from his dreams, where the melodies would occasionally manifest. Despite the initial struggle, Sakamoto eventually designed a motive that evolved into the theme of Little Buddha.[36] For the last cue of the film, Bertolucci asked him to compose "the saddest music

[33] *Sakamoto: "Per la morte di Bertolucci mi sono seduto al piano e ho scritto per lui",* interview available on: https://bernardobertolucci.org/diary/sakamoto-bertolucci/
[34] Stella Hsieh, *A Private Dialogue: Shigehiko Hasumi and Ryuichi Sakamoto on The Last Emperor*, Honhondo Publisher, 1988.
[35] *The Thousand Sounds of Ryuichi Sakamoto*, interview moderated by Peter Cowie, February 15, 2012.
[36] Ivi.

in the world". However, the initial attempts fell short of the desired level of melancholy, prompting several revisions. Bertolucci's feedback ranged from the music lacking sufficient sadness to being deemed overly despairing without a sense of hope. It was only after the fifth attempt that Bertolucci approved the music. These instances illustrate the complex reality of collaborations between two distinguished artists. For this film, the director spent two years working with lamas in Kathmandu and then Little Buddha was shot in Nepal and Bhutan. The idea of Little Buddha comes from a conversation with Dalai Lama, in which the director asked him if in his opinion there is any danger in a non-Buddhist director making a film about Buddhism, and Lama responded that there is a small Buddha in each of us and each has a sleeping potential inside.

It was a big experience of discovering the East for Bertolucci, considering that he did not feel inspired by the situation in Italy at that time and wanted to go as far as possible. Among the differences that impressed him the most is the stance on ego in the East and the West; as Westerners, we have to stand out from the masses and enlarge our egos, while in China he saw people to be happy in the collective. Buddhism logically happens to be in the center of this work and it speaks of ego as our biggest enemy.[37]

3.1.1. *The Last Emperor* (1988)

The film combines the lines of political turbulence, historical richness, and personal transformation. It sends the viewer on a journey through the opulent corridors of the Forbidden City, masterfully accompanied by soundtracks from Ryuichi Sakamoto and David Byrne. After a break of six years, Bernardo Bertolucci came back with a well-crafted film that tells the story of Chinese history in the 20th century. It explores themes of power, identity, and the impact of political change on an individual's life. The perspective is unique, focusing on a leader born into privilege but disconnected from the people that he leads. The film chronicles Aixinjueluo Puyi, the protagonist, who was the last Emperor of China, and his journey from being an emperor at a very young age to his later life as a political prisoner of the Chinese Communist Party. The narrative therefore unfolds against the backdrop of significant events in Chinese history, including the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the rise of the Republic of China and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This is a particular epic because it tells us about an exceptionally passive protagonist, who above all at the same time is an emperor, holding a title without any accompanying power. His imprisonment, literal and metaphorical, goes as a meaning line through the whole film on many levels. As Robert Ebert describes in his review, "throughout the film, Puyi

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[37] Interview with Bernardo Bertolucci at The Charlie Rose Show, available on:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPrZKpy80Kk

remains a pawn and a victim, subjected to the actions of others, exploited for their purposes, and valued for what he lacked rather than for what he was."[38]

Sakamoto was entrusted with creating music for the grand and opulent scenes such as the coronation, while David Byrne was tasked with composing for the more intimate and discrete moments, and Su Cong was involved in giving the soundtracks a Chinese touch. Given that certain Chinese instruments do not adhere to Western scales, Byrne had to enlist classical players capable of adapting their techniques to mimic those heard in Chinese music. Su Cong was responsible for the period-specific Chinese source compositions around the imperial palace during the protagonist's childhood. Most of these pieces are "Lunch" alike featuring a variety of folk Chinese instruments like *dizi* flute[39], *pipa* lute[40], *guzheng*[41], metallic percussion instruments and all-over-the-place *erhu*[42].

Sakamoto commissioned nine tracks for the film, many of which later became recognizable outside of the narrative context of the film. The cue list looks like this:

1.	"First Coronation"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:46
2.	"Open the Door"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:54
3.	"Where Is Armo?"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:26
4.	"Picking Up Brides"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:39
5.	"The Last Emperor – Theme Variation 1"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:19
6.	"Rain (I Want a Divorce)"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:49
7.	"The Baby (Was Born Dead)"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	0:55
8.	"The Last Emperor – Theme Variation 2"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	4:28
9.	"The Last Emperor – Theme"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:54
10.	"Main Title Theme (The Last Emperor)"	David Byrne	4:01
11.	"Picking a Bride"	David Byrne	2:00
12.	"Bed"	David Byrne	5:00
13.	"Wind, Rain, and Water"	David Byrne	2:18
14.	"Paper Emperor"	David Byrne	1:49
15.	"Lunch"	Cong Su	4:54
16.	"Red Guard (Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman)"	The Red Guard Accordion Band	1:20
17.	"The Emperor's Waltz"	The Ball Orchestra of Vienna	3:06
18.	"The Red Guard Dance"	The Girls Red Guard Dancers	0:39

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[38]

[39] The dizi (Chinese: 笛子; pinyin: dízi, pronounced [tǐt͡sɨ]), is a Chinese transverse flute.

[40] Pipa or p'i-p'a (Chinese: 琵琶) is a traditional Chinese musical instrument belonging to the plucked category of instruments. Sometimes called the "Chinese lute".

[41] Gu zheng (Chinese: 古筝; pinyin: gǔzhēng; lit. 'ancient zheng'), is a Chinese plucked zither, tuned in a major pentatonic scale.

[42] Erhu (Chinese: 二胡; pinyin: èrhú; [aɻ˥˩xu˥˩]) is a Chinese two-stringed bowed musical instrument, more specifically a spike fiddle.

Therefore, as we can see here, there are two main themes of The Last Emperor: one by Ryuichi Sakamoto and the other one by David Byrne. These two theme melodies persist throughout the entire film. However, they are reinterpreted using different instruments, tempos, rhythms, and textures, aligning with the mood of various scenes. Sakamoto chose the symphonic Western style for scoring the film.

The melodic material of Sakamoto's part of the film score consists of two main themes, which have the function of leitmotivs. The first one is the theme of The Last Emperor (theme A), it appears in the scenes with dramatic events always extra-diegetically, sometimes to refer ironically to the royal status of Pu Yi in the moments of his weakness and powerlessness. We can hear this theme in "First Coronation" (track 1) and the theme variations (tracks 5, 8, and 9).

Figure 1. The Last Emperor's leitmotiv, theme A

From a musicological perspective, this theme is in d-minor key and based on constantly gravitating to the root tone, which is D. There are almost no wide-interval moves and the melody revolves around the tonic, creating the impression of closure and a metaphor of the state of imprisonment and limitations of Pu Yi.

The second leitmotiv is theme B, which we can hear in "Open the Door" (track 2) and "Where is Armo?" (Track 3). The melodic material of this leitmotiv is of a more lyrical and begging character:

Figure 2. Theme B

The melody is crafted based on a 1-bar motive development through modulations and inversions.

The marching rhythm in the bass line helps to keep the imperial mood, although the main voice seems to be singing kindly "open the door". The orchestra's introduction to the theme sounds threatening and volitional because of the string's tremolo and chromatic down-going melodic line. It gives us an idea of some tragic consequences that will come in the future. Analyzing the moments in which this theme appears, it seems to be a leitmotif of the suppressed will of the emperor.

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The opening scene [0:02:26] after the titles, starts with the diegetic sounds of the train and the military men giving orders to the political prisoners. The scene is full of tension as the commander orders to be silent with the threat of being punished otherwise. This tension is conveyed by the persistent fixed extradiegetic sound in the low register on the background that is slightly vibrating and transmits the feeling of fear and anxiety of the prisoners. (Fig. 3)

Figure 3. *The Last Emperor*, opening scene.

In this scene, the protagonist tries to commit suicide by closing himself in a room and this is when we hear for the first time Sakamoto's music "Open the door", that immediately sends us to the past events of his life as the Emperor and to the next scene by using the parallel montage. The doors and walls of the Forbidden City are the key symbols of the Emperor's cosmos that is inside the palace. These walls are the absolute borders for him. Sakamoto, who admitted in an interview to consider it in the soundtrack for the film, confirms this semiology.

Figure 4. *The Last Emperor*, first flashback.

The next scene [00:06:48] is set in Peking in 1908. This scene portrays the appointment of Pu Yi as a puppet emperor, a decision taken by Cixi in order to prevent the imperial power from fading away. This is the point from which the life of Pu Yi will get more and more dramatic and this is underlined by the music. The lyrical melody that accompanies the appearance on the screen of the infant Pu Yi with his mother, develops into the marching melody to display the cold-blooded structure of the monarchy system indifferent to the emotional needs of the child.

[00:16:10] During his coronation, Pu Yi looks at the open door (Fig. 5). The camera movement is aligned with the soundtrack "First Coronation". It begins with the harp arpeggio and follows the stairs and a bright flute motif accompanies the curious child running down in the hope to play. As he approaches the door, we are reminded of the scene's original mood of the coronation through the almost threatening sounds of the orchestra moving down chromatically for a few seconds and then the music stops. In this scene, Pu Yi receives a box with a cricket insect inside from one of the eunuchs, which is a metaphor for his own situation of being imprisoned inside of the walls of the Forbidden City (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. *The Last Emperor*, coronation scene (up); Pu Yi receives the cricket (down).

"Where is Armo?" at [00:34:59] is a variation of "Open the Door" and it appears again with the dramatic events on the screen. The scene depicts the ceremonial guards accompanying Yuan Shikai, the president of the Republic of China, as he enters the Forbidden City. Additionally, the nurse Armo, who had been alongside Pu Yi is compelled to leave the palace. In comparison to the first appearance of this theme, the instrument choice has changed from cello to violin unison mixed with erhu, guzheng and pipa that play together the dramatic leitmotiv bringing the feeling of despair and helplessness.

Figure 6. *The Last Emperor*

Next time we can hear Sakamoto's soundtrack in a scene where the Emperor learns about his mother's death and he is just 14 years old. It is a very dramatic and emotional scene, a turning point after which he realizes that he wants to set himself free from this prison. This is the moment when he realizes that he is not omnipotent and his power is not enough to make the servants obey and open the door for him (Fig. 5). As Bertolucci himself commented, "the boy does something very self-destructive, he throws his little mouse companion against the gate in rage." This gesture tells us a lot about his state of frustration. In this scene, Sakamoto used the main theme of The Last Emperor because, as he explains, it is emotional. The sorrowful melody, characterized by the use of violins, heightened the Emperor's grief. In the moment when the boy throws the mouse, the music stops. This choice was made in order to pay attention to this dramatic gesture, as silence is always very intense.

Figure 7. *The Last Emperor*, scene of expelling from the Forbidden City

In the scene when the Emperor and his wives are being expelled from the Forbidden City, we can hear again the main theme of the Emperor. It is the first time the protagonist steps out of the doors of the royal complex. The music here always appears on the external level; theme A expands and plays a role of the medium, transmitting to the viewer the emotional state of Pu Yi. On the level of film editing, we can notice the correspondence of tempo and rhythm with the movements of the characters on the screen and the length of the takes. The play of sound dynamics with the narrative is also significant, since it works as a switch between the inner world of the Emperor and the outside world in which the coup is happening. The instrumentation choice also helps to express the fear and despair; the main voice is given to the violins, which has the closest timbre to a human voice and indeed is often applied in order to imitate it.

One of many narrative lines that go through the whole film is love and marriage during the era when the Chinese feudal society was aligning with the Western society. For over two thousand years of Chinese history, parental discretion played a decisive role in arranging marriages for their

children. The primary emphasis was placed on procreation as a duty for couples, with family contributions to economic development following closely. In this context, emotional affection between men and women was often given the least consideration and, in certain instances, even denied. This way the Emperor was arranged to marry Wanrong and chose to have a noble concubine Wenxiu. Wanrong was educated in a Western thought and initially was more of a liberal ideology but the identity of the empress has forced her to move from openness to feudalism, and she ended up being addicted to opium. Meanwhile, Wenxiu's destiny in the narrative was to evolve from feudalism and conservativeness to personal freedom. Music highlights this intention. For instance, in the scene when Wenxiu demands divorce, a completely new music theme comes. It is melodically and rhythmically very different from the emperor's theme and theme B. "Rain" sounds like a bird that is flying out of its cage.

Figure 8. 'Rain'

The composition is performed by string instruments only. The repeating chords imitate the heartbeat of excitement for taking an extremely important decision of setting oneself free. In terms of Chion's 'point of audition', this music represents the subjective reality of Wenxiu. The leading voice is ascending, which symbolizes hope for the new life.

Figure 9. *The Last Emperor*, the scene when we hear 'Rain'

Here is how Sakamoto comments the production of this scene:

"*There was a key change, and I used a computer to calculate the number of beats when put on the music, so that the time of the music and the time of the frames of the film were close to one thousandth of a second. It's a perfect match there. The duration of the music and the time between cuts of the film worked really well together. Normally, the music has a certain tempo, but since there are so many frames, I had to slow down the tempo a little bit, which I did in many places. In musical terms, I want this duration, but since the film is like this, I'll slow it down. That would make it longer. That's why I was really happy when I got the perfect match for that scene. But after that, she said, "I don't need an umbrella," and runs into the rain. Just as she is about to disappear, the car of Eastern Jewel comes in. The suddenness of that scene is unbelievable. The car didn't come in from the porch, but from the lawn. So, of course, the car was waiting.*"[43]

The statement of not needing the umbrella anymore carries a profound meaning, suggesting that the protective role traditionally assigned to husbands in feudal marriages is no longer necessary. Therefore, in this scene the music enhances the storytelling by making the viewer understand that it is a turning point.

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[43] *David Byrne and Ryuichi Sakamoto interview - The Last Emperor*, "A Música no Cinema" (Music Behind The Scenes), available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwLBkbLaOrA

Figure 9. The Last Emperor, farewell scene.

In several scenes, pre-existing music is featured. Its inclusion typically carries symbolic significance in a film, introducing an additional layer of meaning. This is particularly impactful when the chosen music holds historical or cultural relevance, connecting it to specific elements of the story, characters, or overarching themes. For instance, when Pu Yi departs for the dock to bid farewell to his mentor Johnston, we hear the melody of *Auld lang syne* played by the folk orchestra (Fig. 9). It is an 18th-century Scottish song, which has been adapted in many countries in the world. In China, it is commonly called "friendship all way long" and symbolizes a bittersweet ending.[44] The choice of this Scottish song is also obvious since the character of Johnston in the film is Scottish, and in order to adapt it to the fusion idea of the film, it is performed with Chinese folk instruments. This is as well one of not many examples of diegetic music in *The Last Emperor* and, apart from the song, we can also hear the overlapping sounds of the crowd at the port and the extra-diegetic sound of a ship signaling its departure. Going deeper into the analysis of the soundscape of this scene, the signaling ship in this case becomes a foreground sound to which the viewer consciously pays attention, while the sound of the speaking crowd is the keynote.[45] This mixture of sounds and music, together with the camera following Johnston as he leaves and then smoothly approaching Pu Yi sitting now alone in the car, transmits the feeling of loneliness of the former Emperor. It is a complex and interesting scene from the point of view of film music theory.

Figure 10. *The Last Emperor*, second coronation scene.

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[44] Yushang Ni, *Analysis of the Fusion and Collision of Chinese and Western Music and Culture from the Film Score of "The Last Emperor"*, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Language, Art and Cultural Exchange ICLACE 2021, Vol. 559, p. 590.
[45] According to the soundscape theory of Raymond Murray Schafer.

The scene of the second coronation is another example of the use of pre-existent music in the film. The musical piece featured in this scene is *The Emperor Waltz* Op. 437 by Johann Strauss. Categorizing this case in terms of on-screen music source is challenging. The music aligns with the visual narrative, featuring a waltz accompanied by people dancing, yet the orchestra remains unseen, so we do not see the source. Through parallel editing, the contrast of the overall mood of the celebration and the empress's despair is shown. She is not dancing, but walking around alone and acting unconventionally. This contrast creates a surrealistic impression and serves as a commentary, highlighting the insincerity of the coronation and the overall situation. In relation to the visual part, music here is parallel and at the same time it is contrapuntal on a more subtle psychological level, since it does not stop even after the empress left the ball.

In one of the following scenes in the prison, Pu Yi has a conflict with the oldest prisoner in the room, who starts to call the guards shouting loudly. Right after this, a transition to the past comes and it is the sound that connects these two scenes. Starting from here, the climax part of the story begins. The shouting of the old prisoner "Guards! Guards!" switched to the screaming of a newborn baby. This is also when we hear the last track of Sakamoto "The Baby (Was Born Dead)". The soft sound of a flute opens the theme, while on the screen we see the face of the empress full of tenderness towards her child. However, the cold equal beat of the piano suggests the idea of fate and death, for instance similar to Chopin's Prelude in E minor. The sinister atmosphere is enhanced even more by the part of violas and we see the doctors poisoning the child.
Parallel to this event, the emperor signs another restraining order dictated by the Japanese officer Masahiko Amakasu, and right after this, he discovers that the baby was born dead and his wife is sent away. Again, he is in a helpless position, being just a puppet and not holding any real power, not even to save the empress. As he runs in hope to stop the car, we hear one more time "Open the Door" theme and the scene recalls the one from the beginning, when he was trying to stop the eunuchs from taking away his nurse and childhood companion Armo. The door one more time gets symbolically shut just in front of him.

Figure 11. The Last Emperor, comparison of two scenes.

Two transformative moments of the protagonist Pu Yi are accompanied with a famous Chinese erhu song "Two Springs Reflected in the Moon" composed by a blind artist A Bing. The song conveys the thoughts and feelings of a blind artist, who has endured the hardships and sorrows of the world throughout his life.[46] First transformative moment happens while watching a documentary on the Japanese invasion of China in a probation center. That is when Pu Yi realizes that he is not only a victim but also complicit in the atrocities. The documentary intensified his shock and self-awareness, and in this scene the song serves as a metaphor for the shame and suffering embedded in China's history. The melody of the song appears in the background, resonating with the protagonist's sadness and resentment, and underscoring his evolving

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[46] Ibid., p. 591.

understanding of his role in the historical events.

The second transformative moment is at the end, when Pu Yi returns to the Forbidden City, which has become a museum by now. He is walking around the palace and reflecting on the years he spent there, and the song conveys his feelings about it. As he enters the coronation hall, he encounters a boy that asks him to prove that he is the former emperor of China and at this moment, the Emperor's theme is playing for the last time, framing and closing the story beautifully, connecting the past and the present. The cricket is released from the box and so is the emperor, who has now become a simple citizen.

Conclusions:

In *The Last Emperor*, the music played an important role in shaping the emotional and narrative landscape of the story by blending Chinese and Western musical elements. Mostly, the source of sound is off the screen, non-diegetic. The music goes parallel to the visuals, enhancing what we see on the screen and it is synchronized with the camera movements, interpreting the film's plot. Most of the time, the soundtrack reflects emotional states of the main characters and does not convey the objective reality of the narrative, while the off-screen sounds form the viewer's perception and spatial awareness with the help of soundmarks.[47]

It is clear that there are two main leitmotivs in the film: "The Last Emperor" and "Open the Door". They appear throughout the film, framing the narrative. The story unfolds simultaneously in two realities – the present time in Communist China with an imprisoned emperor, where extra-diegetic music is absent, and the past events from the emperor's life always accompanied by Sakamoto's soundtracks. The film skillfully uses both music and sound, as well as moments of silence, to effectively convey the intended messages.

In some scenes, the intentional usage of audio-visual dissonance is evident. It is done in order to evoke specific emotions. The message of imprisonment and suppressed will of the emperor is encoded even in the melodies, which on the screen relate with the visual symbol of perpetually closing doors.

The approach of Sakamoto, David Byrne and Su Cong is rooted in a deep background of musical culture and involves continuous exploration and integration of diverse Chinese and Western musical aesthetics. As a result, we have the film that is an excellent example of the international music creation and communication put into one piece by Bernardo Bertolucci.

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[47] According to Chion's concept of soundmark, it is when some sound appears a few times in the process of editing and begins to be associated with a place, character or a situation, becoming a symbol.

3.1.2. *The Sheltering Sky* (1990)

How many more times will you watch the full moon rise?

Perhaps twenty. And yet it all seems limitless...

After a spectacular historical drama, Bertolucci naturally turns to a more intimate and psychological love story with the setting in North Africa. Again, he invites Sakamoto to compose music for the film in a couple with Richard Horowitz, whose contribution involves deviating from conventional Western scoring and incorporating Middle Eastern elements into the film score. Compared with the work for The Last Emperor, this time Sakamoto was tasked with capturing the panoramas with his music, and Horowitz, who specialized in music from the Middle East, was occupied with composing for more oneiric and culture-related scenes. From the list below, we can see that he composed twelve pieces, others are composed by Horowitz and a few are source music:

1.	"The Sacred Koran"	Ibrahim Canakkeleli, Fevsi Misir, Yusuf Gebzeli, Aziz Bahriyeli	0:40
2.	"The Sheltering Sky Theme"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:19
3.	"Belly"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:27
4.	"Port's Composition"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:23
5.	"On The Bed (Dream)"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:37
6.	"Loneliness"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:30
7.	"On The Hill"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	6:10
8.	"Kyoto"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:04
9.	"Cemetery"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:25
10.	"Dying"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	3:30
11.	"Market"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:42
12.	"Grand Hotel"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:06
13.	"The Sheltering Sky Theme (Piano Version)"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	4:16
14.	"Je Chante"	Charles Trenet	2:44
15.	"Midnight Sun"	Lionel Hampton, Sonny Burke, Johnny Mercer	3:14
16.	"Fever Ride"	Richard Horowitz Avec Nizar Ismael	3:50
17.	"Chant Avec Cithare"	Burundi traditional	0:44
18.	"Marnia's Tent"	Richard Horowitz	3:02
19.	"Goulov Limma"	Cheba Zahouania	5:47
20.	"Happy Bus Ride" (Features Tunisian song "Nari ala Zarzis")	Naama	1:41
21.	"Night Train" (Features Moroccan women's voices recorded in 1955 by Paul Bowles)	Richard Horowitz	

The story was written by Paul Bowles in 1947 and it is transmitting the all-around post-war existential crisis that is reflected through the main characters: Port and Kit Moresby, a married couple from America embarking on a journey for Northern Africa in pursuit for new senses: of life and of their relationship. They are young and going through the process of reevaluating American culture, looking for something new and inspiring, but instead they meet with the truth about them, which destroys them. Through their escapism justified by being travelers and not tourists, the various themes are being raised. Bertolucci explains: "*They are like the spiritual children of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald who find that their world, the world of culture and glamour, has been broken up after the war. There is something they want to escape and something also that they are looking for. They decide to emigrate, culturally, and come to North Africa in the years when existentialism was born. … They are in the years of Camus, of L'Etranger and La Peste. And though Port was not in any way influenced by Camus, I think this was the direction in which a sensitive intellectual at that time would have gone. Existentialism, with its idea of the acte gratuit, has much in common with Arab fatalism: the notion that something has been written. I think all these things were in the atmosphere that Paul Bowles breathed when he went to live in Tangier.*"[48]

The writer intended this novel to be a philosophical and multifaceted piece, while Bertolucci conceived it more as a psychological love drama, which of course had some social and political shades in it. The protagonists' actions and reactions carry a persistent undercurrent of colonialism and xenophobia. As outsiders, they grapple with a sense of incomprehension and mistrust when encountering the local people.

The director shared that after the only love scene they shot in a valley, the actors were emotionally exhausted and then he told his wife in a call about how hard it is to make this film about a couple divided by a metaphoric glass wall. In a few days, he received a message from her that while he was speaking about the couple separated with an invisible wall, the Berlin wall had fallen. [49]

The difference of the points of view on the story of Paul Bowls and Bernardo Bertolucci led to the writer being completely not satisfied with the film that went out on the screens in 1990. "I was terrified and fascinated by the amount of poison in the book and did not know if I would be able to have the same amount of poison in the film. … It is a very common story about two people who love each other but cannot be happy in love", commented Bertolucci. [50]

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[48] Harlan Kennedy, *Bernardo Bertolucci - In Interview The Sheltering Sky,* "American Cinema Papers Archive", 1990.
[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrbGmgjOMrs
[50] Ibid.

The critics held divergent views on the film, as evidenced by Roger Ebert's review, which states:

"The book is so complete, so deep and so self-contained that it shuts the movie out. Bertolucci shows us the outsides and the surfaces, and a person seeing this movie without having read the book might ask what it is about. It is not about travelers and doomed lovers and juxtapositions, that's for sure. It is about educated, bookish, somewhat jaded American intellectuals being confronted by an immensity of experience that they cannot read or understand. Here is civilization up against the unanswerable indifference of nature."

Bowles' characters Kit and Port embody the Western agnostics engaging with North African mysticism and fatalism, just like Bowles himself.

The film begins with the opening titles accompanied with a famous jazz standard *Midnight Sun* by Lionel Hampton with vintage looking shots of New York streets in the background and a departing cruise ship. Here the instrumental version is applied and seemingly, this musical choice contrasts with the dramatic events that unfold later in the film, but the lyrics for this song are providing us with an allusion on what the film might be about:

I can't explain the silver rain that found me or was that a moonlight veil?
The music of the universe around me, or was that a nightingale?
And then your arms miraculously found me, suddenly the sky turned pale,
I could see the Midnight Sun. Was there such a night, it's a thrill I still don't quite believe,
and yet when you were gone, there was still some stardust on my sleeve.

Right after the titles, the music drastically changes and we hear Quran recitations while seeing a close-up on the eyes of Port. It is the moment of their arrival to Algeria, so the music serves here as a sign of change in the environment and the cultural space, but apart from this, there is another layer of meaning if we try to dig deeper into this track. The recited surah is *An-Nas*, which is used by Muslims to pray for peace of mind and protection from evil. Port wakes up to the sound of this surah and then tells about his disturbing dream. The record is from a Turkish performer and Turkish classical music like Arabic music is built on *maqams* which function similarly to the European modes or scales, giving the desired mood to the performance. This particular *surah* is recited in a maqam called *hijaz*. This maqam's function is to evoke a sublime sadness and give humility to the human soul. It is one of the most used modes in musical treatment. It is believed that *hijaz* maqam is more effective in the assembly of dervishes and that its influence is greater between the noon and afternoon *adhans*, like in the passage at [00:15:50]. Adhān is the call for an obligatory prayer. (Fig. 12)

Figure 12. The Sheltering Sky. The passage with the sound of *adhan*.

The use of it in this scene creates a contrast between the religious reality of the country of Algeria and its vicious nightlife with Port being a part of it as a traveler. In this scene after the call for prayer quiets down, he is going to meet a local souteneur, a prostitute, and a group of thieves.

Technically, Sakamoto applied a similar approach to scoring *The Sheltering Sky* as he did with *The Last Emperor*. He opted for the *sonata* form for the main theme, constructing the majority of the soundtracks based on the melodic material of its exposition, development, and recapitulation. Thematically, The Sheltering Sky Theme track incorporates approximately five melodic themes that reappear in other tracks in modified forms. The melody of theme A from the exposition is

characterized by its highly lyrical nature, featuring dramatic octave jumps and a fragment of Dorian scale in G-minor:

Figure 13. The Sheltering Sky Theme. Exposition, theme A.

This leitmotif often appears when there are Port and Kit on the screen at the same time, and seems to be representing the dramatic love situation of the main characters and the misunderstanding between them. For example, right at the beginning in the scene when Port is telling about his night dream to Kit and Tenner, we can hear the leitmotif in the moment when she gets upset and goes away. The main theme is composed in a Western style aligned with the cultural background of the main characters.

In order to be able to analyze the other tracks it is necessary to extract the motives from the main theme, which we will hear again. The motives are the following:

Figure 14. The Sheltering Sky Theme. Exposition, transition to theme B.
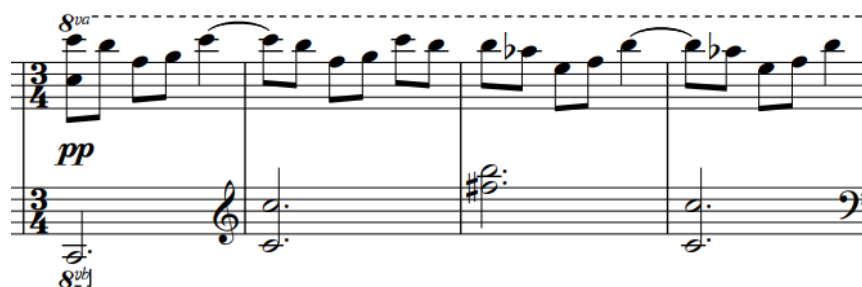
Figure 15. The Sheltering Sky Theme. Exposition, theme B.

The theme B is technically an inverted and modulated variation of the theme A. We can hear theme B at [00:40:30]. Its appearance there is subtle with a non-diegetic quiet sound of pianoforte on the background which creates an impression that it is somewhere inside the scene. In this moment, we also see Port passing through the hotel to check if his wife Kit had woken up after the long road. The viewer then knows that Kit is sleeping there not alone. Therefore, it is possible that the appearance of this melody is a signal of another critical moment for Port and his marriage in the context of the situation.

Figure 16. The Sheltering Sky Theme. Development.

At [00:31:50] (fig. 17), Port's Composition is introduced in a highly tense context, mirroring the intensity of the scene. Evidently influenced by Viennese expressionism, a style prevalent in early 20th century represented by such names as Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern and Alban Berg, the music features dissonance, dramatic shifts in dynamics, constant textural variations, distorted melodies and harmonies, and angular motives with wide leaps.[51] This non-diegetic piece that we hear in the scene appears as a foreboding omen. Initially the melody seems to have nothing in common with the established themes, but a closer examination reveals it to be a heavily distorted variation of the main theme, mockingly representing theme A and symbolizing a disruption in the relationship between Kit and Port. This distortion also contributes to the surreal ambiance enveloping their interaction. The scene then continues into another conversation between them, in which they literally decide to split for the next part of the journey.

[51]Theodor Adorno, *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928–1962*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Wieland Hoban, London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009.

Figure 17. The Sheltering Sky, visuals to Port's Composition.

There is a moment in the film that refers us to the American origins of the characters. It is when they sing a famous American song "Oh! Susanna" composed by Stephen Foster while riding bicycles in the middle of a North African valley (fig. 18). Apart from demonstrating the cultural contrast between them and the surrounding they are in, this diegetic music decision also serves to show us that they are in a rare moment of emotional intimacy, singing in unison, united by the song.

Figure 18. The Sheltering Sky. Kit and Port singing "Oh! Susanna".

However, when they come into physical closeness, both experience mental breakdown for individual reasons. In this dramatic moment, the main theme resurfaces, accompanied by the distant sound of *adhan* in the background. This represents a particular application of music from a theoretical standpoint, with the theme operating clearly on a non-diegetic external level, while the *adhan* sounds on a mediated level concerning both viewers and characters. Although the source of *adhan* remains unseen, it is presumed that the characters can hear it. In the film, the *adhan* sound serves as an element of soundmark, subtly reminding viewers of the characters' transient traveler status.

Next time we can hear the music of Sakamoto at [01:08:14]. It begins with a mysterious sound of the strings and Port looking thoughtfully at the landscape, realizing that the place where they stand is a cemetery of unknown people, without any information about them. Flute is playing the development line from the main theme (fig. 16) transitioning into theme B. In this scene, Kit falls on the ground and Port is standing over and looking at her, symbolically foreseeing his own death. Again, they lack understanding, she desires to settle somewhere and has a more practical approach, while he is in the midst of his existential crisis and, on a deeper subconscious level, has already taken a decision to leave this world. Starting from this point, the plot is taking a dramatic shift into existentialism and mysticism, which is enhanced by music, smooth camera movements and the editing. The duration of the shots is quite long, accordingly to the shifts in music. The African Sahara serves as a metaphor for an immense and desolate universe overwhelming with its vastness. It is a space that absorbs you with its presence but lacks intrinsic meaning.

Figure 19. The Sheltering Sky. Scene at the cemetery.

There is a curious short moment in the film of the literal intersection of music with the visuals at [01:09:39], when we see the unfinished music sheets of an Arabesque since Port is a music composer himself. On the level of sound, we hear nothing through, until the realm is changing into his delirium visions filled with the sounds of ethnic Algerian music. The three main characters represent the kinds of people cited at the beginning of the film: "*Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. Indeed, he would have found it difficult to tell, among the many places he had lived, precisely*

where it was he had felt most at home."[52] Hence, Port represents the archetype of the traveler, uncertain about his return and ultimately not returning; Tanner embodies the tourist, observing foreign lands while adhering to his own worldview; and Kit finds herself in between. As a traveler, Port lets go of his previous vision and is open to embrace a lifestyle and reality that differs from the one that he is used to. Therefore, during his delirium, he remains in the same environment, calmly witnessing a mystical dance performed by a possessed local woman.

Figure 20. The Sheltering Sky, Port's delirium visions.

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[52] Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky.*

During the episode of Port dying from the illness, the use of music is crucial. At first, we hear a lot of African music and pieces by Richard Horowitz, which connect us to Port's state, but once the couple reaches the French Foreign Legion and remains alone, there is a switch to Kit's state signed with the change of a soundtrack. As Port is dying, Kit is in denial, searching for help outside of the Legion and the soundtrack 'Market' resurfaces synchronized with the camera movements as well as the steps of Kit. This soundtrack links us with one of the final scenes at the market in a Nigerian village, after Kit leaves Belqassim's captivity (fig. 23). It is the moment of her total collapse as she breaks into a panic attack, which is emphasized with the music by a descending chromatic melody line together with the bass line chromatically moving upwards. This fusion of sound and image is an example of *synchresis*[53]. It evokes a feeling of anxiety and narrowness transmitting the feelings of the heroine Kit. This scene is edited with parallel montage, with the shifts of non-diegetic music (for the shots with Kit) and no-music (for the shots with Port in agony).

Figure 21. The Sheltering Sky, Port is dying.

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[53] Chion introduces the concept of "synchresis," which refers to the spontaneous and perceptual fusion of sound and image. This fusion occurs when sound and image coincide in time and space, creating a perceptual unity for the audience.

As well as music and editing, also the cinematography is displaying the contrast between the state of protagonists with the use of the shades of blue and yellow that are opposite on the color spectrum complementing each other. Bertolucci comments, "She has a kind of metamorphosis. In a sense, she becomes Port. She goes out into the desert, into the night, and she does exactly the kind of things that Port would have done in the past. In the film, we have seen her hiding behind the barricades of her trunks in hotel bedrooms, always protected by her belongings. Now she has a kind of osmosis with him. She gets the same drive that Port had for risk and adventure. After his death, he enters her mind again. It is an extreme proof of ultimate love to give up, in some way, her personality to become him."[54]

In the scene at [02:05:25], when she gets out from the captivity (fig. 22), music is diegetic, performed by the wives and children of Belqassim, who jealously want to get rid of Kit. In the book of Paul Bowles, the performance of musicians is symbolic and commenting, they repeatedly sing "*G igherdh ishÕed our illi*", which from one of the Berber languages might be translated like "when the clothes are unfolded, you will not leave, my girl".

Figure 22. The Sheltering Sky. Kit is being expelled from captivity accompanied by others singing.

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[54] Harlan Kennedy, *Bernardo Bertolucci - In Interview The Sheltering Sky*, "American Cinema Papers Archive", 1990.

Figure 23. The Sheltering Sky. Scene of Kit collapsing at the market.

At [2:11:35] 'Grand Hotel' soundtrack resounds, beginning with a pitiful melody by violins in a high register and picked up by contrabasses with a descending line close to *basso ostinato*. The bass and the structure makes it sound like *chaconne*, a dance of Latin American origin with solemn-tragic character that got diffused in European music in the 17th century. After this passage, the *development theme* and *theme A* from 'The Sheltering Sky Main Theme' is back with a new force. This musical gesture at the end gives a feeling or closure, a resolution. Theme A resounds while Tanner is running towards the car to see Kit and to find out that she has left again. The pulsating rhythm and melody speak for the excitement of Tanner, while themes of development and theme B are associated with Kit on the screen, as they sound much more anxious and indecisive. Kit walks away and starts to wander around, when she encounters the author who asks her if she is lost, she answers a short "yes". In existentialism, the individual is free and therefore responsible to create meaning in one's own life in spite of the angst, despair and emptiness. This also means that a person is free to destroy themselves, the result that have Kit and Port. The philosophy of existentialism infiltrated the last years of life of Ryuichi Sakamoto and he created a composition *fullmoon* for his album *async.* The piece is fully based on the quote from Paul Bowles translated into different languages:

"*Because we don't know when we will die, we get to think of life as an inexhaustible well, yet everything happens only a certain number of times, and a very small number, really. How many more times will you remember a certain afternoon of your childhood, some afternoon that's so*

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deeply a part of your being that you can't even conceive of your life without it? Perhaps four or five times more, perhaps not even that. How many more times will you watch the full moon rise? Perhaps twenty. And yet it all seems limitless."

Conclusions:

The Sheltering Sky is another example of a bridge between two different cultures, in which music plays a crucial role. Primarily, the music helps to establish the film's environment. Sakamoto in collaboration with Horowitz is using a diverse palette of sounds and melodies that enrich the cinematic experience. From the jazzy overture during the titles to echoes of Western classical music in the main theme and ethnic North African music, the music enhances the overall atmosphere. The interaction between the leitmotivs, the cultural background behind chosen pieces, the strategic use of silence and the fusion of Eastern and Western elements contributes to the musical landscape and goes beyond a mere accompaniment. Sakamoto's score becomes an integral part of the storytelling, adding a layer of emotional depth.

One of the Eastern musical elements applied in the film that gain a function of a soundmark is *adhan*, which serves as a reminder of where the protagonists are located and in which cultural and religious environment. The music mostly accompanies the scenes in synchrony, intensifying the dramatic on-screen events. In the first half of the film, the music exists mostly in the extradiegetic realm, operating on the mediated or external level by offering a comment on the situations or conveying the emotions of protagonists. All the off-screen score is written by Sakamoto, in which he employed a leitmotiv system for added depth. In the second half of the film the on-screen music increases significantly, functioning as a communication medium between the characters in specific scenes.

Sakamoto built his score on the music material of the main theme movement, for which he chose a *sonata* form. The motives from its exposition, development and recapitulation became the leitmotivs linked to certain themes and characters in the film. This way, theme A becomes the leitmotif of Kit and Port's fate, theme B appears in the moments of misunderstanding between them, and the theme of development refers to a more existentialist and thought-provoking line. Often the music is foreseeing the future events of the film, creating tension through the audio-visual conflict.

The film incorporates an extensive variety of traditional songs and ethnic music, deepening its connection to diverse cultural contexts.

3. 2. *Derrida* (2002)

Derrida is a documentary film by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering about Jacques Derrida, a French postmodernist philosopher of Jewish origins and the author of philosophy of deconstruction, which he developed after a close study of phenomenology, especially through the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The film is thought to be in the style of *cinéma vérité*, showing the life of the philosopher and questioning the limitations of biography. The director Kirby Dick often turns to this style because it enables a more intricate relationship with his subjects; moreover, he often integrates the footage of his subjects into his films. He also uses archival footage, music videos, documentary interviews etc. In 2002 *Derrida* won the Golden Gate Award.

Jacques Derrida was a former mentor and teacher of the co-director Amy Ziering from Yale University, and one of the most contradictory figures in the academic world. The main field of his philosophical work is language, writing, and structures. His method of deconstruction works with a text and has a bigger political purpose:

"*The idea behind deconstruction is to deconstruct the workings of strong nation-states with powerful immigration policies, to deconstruct the rhetoric of nationalism, the politics of place, the metaphysics of native land and native tongue… the idea is to disarm the bombs… of identity that nation-states build to defend themselves against the stranger, against Jews and Arabs and immigrants.*"[55]

He states that what unites the states, institutions and nations is the tradition – the same way of doing things, a shared language, a system of words and sentences. Deconstruction is a method of criticizing and unraveling a text solely through the text itself, transcending a logocentric paradigm. Derrida's central argument was that language is highly subjective – meaning varies from reader to reader, making a shared truth unattainable through a single theory, philosophy or institution. Much of Western philosophy tradition relies on binary oppositions where one term of concept is hierarchically above for possessing a greater truth than the other does. In *Of Grammatology* (1967)*,* he refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas that human nature has been corrupted by writing, highlighting the contrast between the naturalness of speech and the distancing barrier that writing introduces between two minds. According to the philosopher, writing subverts the language and alters the essence of words.[56]

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[55] As quoted in: John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 231.
[56] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "deconstruction". Encyclopedia Britannica, 21 Dec. 2023,

A few years before his death he granted permission for a film that predominantly focused on his own persona and only at the age of 49 did he allow to be photographed. The film captures moments like his visit to Mandela's prison, conference engagements, teaching sessions, and private conversations recorded on camera. Through its portrayal, the movie seeks to present the Algerian-born thinker not solely as a philosopher but also as an individual. During the fragments of interviews with Derrida, he covers such themes as his concept of future, the limits of biography of a philosopher and his concept of deconstruction. Apart from these abstract topics, he shares his views on love and unconditional forgiveness, tells us about his experience with racism and anti-Semitism as an Algerian-born Jewish person and shares some aspects of his personal life. Derrida as well offers some reflections on improvisation, psychoanalysis, narcissism and projections.

Since the film is non-fiction, the use of music here differs from previous films scored by Sakamoto. The documentary tradition depends on its ability to communicate a sense of authenticity. Many filmmakers who followed the early *cinéma vérité* style or embraced observational documentary approach were skilled at creating the impression of authenticity, making everything seem like the captured events unfolded naturally, independently from the director's presence. The conveyed idea is that these events would have happened similarly, even if there were not a camera around.[57] The avoidance of artificial lightning and external microphones helps to make the subjects feel comfortable while shooting and therefore behave more naturally. When combined with the lack of voice-over or music, such techniques offer a form of authenticity. According to the rules of *cinéma vérité*, only synchronous or diegetic music is allowed in the film, in order to not contradict the apparent spontaneity and naturalism of the documentary aesthetic.[58]

While keeping to these rules in the fragments with Jacques Derrida on the screen, the directors deviate from them in the fragments with voiceover quoting the philosopher's works, anyway offering an impression through the union of visuals and music. This feature makes the film technically closer to the genre of docudrama. Therefore, all the time the music is only extra-diegetic, creating a sort of parallel abstract realm. The realm of philosophy, theories and ideas.

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[57] Holly Rogers, *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, Routledge, 2014, p. 1.
[58] Ibid., p. 2.

Figure 24. Derrida, opening.

Soundtrack list:

1.	Jd023
2.	Jd004
3.	Jd024
4.	Jd005
5.	Jd025
6.	Jd006
7.	Jd026
8.	Jd007
9.	Jd0027
10.	Jd008
11.	Jd002
12.	Jd009
13.	Jd001
14.	Jd010
15.	Jd002
16.	Jd011
17.	Jd003
18.	Jd012
19.	Jd018
20.	Jd013
21.	Jd019
22.	Jd014
23.	Jd020
24.	Jd015
25.	Jd021
26.	Jd016
27.	Jd029
28.	Jd017
29.	Jd022

Divided into 29 tracks engineered by Fernando Aponte and published by KAB America[59], the soundtrack of Sakamoto seems to draw no inspiration from the philosopher's everyday life, but from his concept of deconstruction and the philosophy of language. It is evident from the titles of the soundtracks that the music for this documentary is conceptually connected with the philosophy of Derrida, in particular the theory of deconstruction. Music and sound transcend a language by being able to overcome logocentrism. Each language transmits information using a 'signifier' and a 'signify' and has its limits due to many meanings and associations that are linked to a word. Sakamoto is most likely aware of it and therefore presents penetrating sonic portraits, which transcend the borders of human language and its intrinsic dualistic hierarchy. For these sound portraits, he applies the deconstruction to his work, creating a series of abstract but precise sounds.

Here he is inside the concept of atonality, which implies no use of tonality and therefore it cancels the hierarchy between the notes in a scale, and all notes become equal. The aesthetics of atonality are not so far from the aesthetics of minimalism, even if the last one does not require atonality. Still, many of minimalist pieces do not have an inclination to major or minor keys and sound rather neutral, which makes this kind of music perfect for a documentary. For example the cult experimental documentary film *Koyaanisqatsi,* directed by Godfrey Reggio and scored by Philip Glass, in which the music, along with the visuals, is supposed to guide a viewer toward a hypnotic state. Something similar is happening in *Derrida*.

By the year when Kirby Dick and Amy Zierling started to produce the film, Sakamoto had already reached his minimalism-inspired phase; therefore, the soundtrack for the film has some minimalistic traces like, for instance, the repetitive patterns and layered textures.

The segments featuring voice-over employ the combination of elements—words, sounds, visuals and motion (both camera and subject movements)—to effectively communicate a message.

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[59] "KA+B America Inc." is the international management team and publishing entity for Ryuichi Sakamoto.

Figure 25. *Derrida*, some of the fragments of the passages where the soundtrack is applied.

These segments are perceived as transitions or codas, facilitating the shift from one topic to another. Frequently the camera captures Derrida engaged in his daily activities, or viewers are offered to reflect on the message while observing a footage in motion, such as scenes of the view from a moving car or train. The reverberation effect adds volume and a feeling of spaciousness to the picture, while the experimental technique using *concrète* materials adds some realism. Some tracks are composed with the noises of piano hammers or by plucking piano strings, others with tapping the piano body etc.

Derrida is one of many documentary films scored by Sakamoto. The result extends well beyond the conventional role of a soundtrack, providing a purely auditory experience while significantly enhancing the realm of philosophical ideas in the film. The tracks are fluid, enigmatic and have a deconstructed sound. This work belongs to the electronic ambient phase of the composer's creativity.

3.3. *The Staggering Girl* (2019)

The Staggering Girl is a short experimental film (35 min.) in a genre of psychological drama directed by a renowned Italian director Luca Guadagnino, who often collaborates with important music artists for his works. The movie is produced in collaboration with Pierpaolo Piccioli, the creative director of Maison Valentino, and therefore is also demonstrating the robes of the luxury brand. Guadagnino's films often feature the shades of horror genre and are highly psychoanalytically based, filled with allusions to Freudian and Jungian theories about the subconscious. *The Staggering Girl* is not an exception in it. The story suggests a mysterious and tense atmosphere, which is achieved through cinematography, editing and of course music and sound.

Apparently, the director has been feeling admiration for the works of Sakamoto since his youth: "*In 1987, I went to see The Last Emperor, which is Bertolucci's nine-Academy-Award winner. I've been blown away by the movie and by the soundtrack, which was David Byrne, Cong Su, and Ryuichi Sakamoto. I bought myself the CD, I played it and played it. That Sakamoto, I think probably nobody knew that I was listening to him because I basically was listening to Sakamoto in the solitude of my bedroom. I did it because it was a sort of deep inspiration for me, again.*" [60]

The soundtrack for *The Last Emperor, admired* by Luca Guadagnino, belongs for the first half of the composer's career, which had different aesthetics at that moment. In 2019, Sakamoto was already in his ambient and experimental second half of career. The surrealistic aesthetics of *The Staggering Girl* movie met with the ones of the composer in that period:

"*I go through music in a way that has to do with my instinct, by the way. I like the concept of piano as a dialogue. There's a great, beautiful album by Ryuichi Sakamoto called Back to the Basics, in which the great, legendary Sakamoto reflects on his own roots that you see in Ravel; he creates this beautiful piano poem that is completely inspired by that great French musician. I found, in that work, the sum of what I feel is piano for me, which has to do with dialogue.*"

Synopsis:
Triggered by a stranger's secret confession, Francesca returns to her childhood home in Italy to convince her ailing mother to follow her to New York. As daughter confronts mother, ghosts of Francesca's youth return in a whirlwind of pain, memory and fulfillment.

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[60] Matthew Schnipper, *Luca Guadagnino on the Music of His Movies, and Why He Had to Have Sufjan Stevens for Call Me by Your Name*, Pitchfork, 2018.

The score of Sakamoto for the film consists of 11 tracks:

1.	"The Staggering Girl"	1:04
2.	"Woman in Yellow"	5:19
3.	"Woman in Yellow II"	1:27
4.	"Casa"	1:23
5.	"Woman in Yellow III"	1:37
6.	"Night Garden"	1:30
7.	"Tony"	6:10
8.	"Tangling"	1:04
9.	"Roma"	1:25
10.	"Dance"	3:30
11.	"Dance – Ambient version"	1:42

Since the movie plot is oneiric and not linear, Sakamoto's music captures and enhances it with the choice of effects and the layered texture. The reverbed piano sound in 'The Staggering Girl' that appears non-diegetically in the opening scene (fig. 26) contains the minimalistic melodic patterns that move in minor thirds and major seconds, forming tritons with a syncopated rhythm. This combination creates suspense since triton is a dissonant interval in music and it resurfaces off-screen.

Figure 26. *The Staggering Girl*, opening (up), ending (down); the veil that evokes memories.

'Woman in Yellow' has an oneiric ambient sound, matching synchronously with the visuals and adding surrealistic feeling to the scene in which the protagonist is following the enigmatic stranger wearing a yellow coat. This scene is set in New York but the stranger's phantom is appearing also in Rome, just like the memories from her youth evoked by meetings with old friends, places and objects. These memories do not seem to bring her joy or pleasure and the music, which appears in these moments, emphasizes her neurotic state.

'Woman in Yellow II' appears the next time when Francesca anxiously follows the woman after a high society gathering in Rome.

We can hear 'Woman in Yellow III' while on the screen she is in her bedroom having flashbacks again. This soundtrack combines the previous 'women in yellow' and an element from 'The Staggering Girl', which gives us a hint that the stranger lady might be a projection[61] of Francesca, a part of herself which she wants to unite with but is also afraid of. This time the strange woman is there in her nap, and as Francesca wakes up, she starts looking at a veil, which she painted when she was an adolescent. This element of a veil is important in the film, as it appears it covers the multiple sequences of opening and closing doors to the dimensions of past and present. It visually unites the young and adult versions of herself (fig. 26). While memories look similar to imaginative thoughts, putting them in a sequence through editing helps emphasize their strong bonds.

Before that, as she is just approaching the house where she grew up and in which her blind

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[61] Projection in psychoanalysis is a concept introduced by Sigmund Freud, and later integrated by Carl Jung. It means a defense mechanism of a psyche by which people attribute to others what is in their own minds.

mother still lives, we can hear the 'Casa' soundtrack. It is rather calm with a shade of melancholy, conveying the feelings of Francesca.
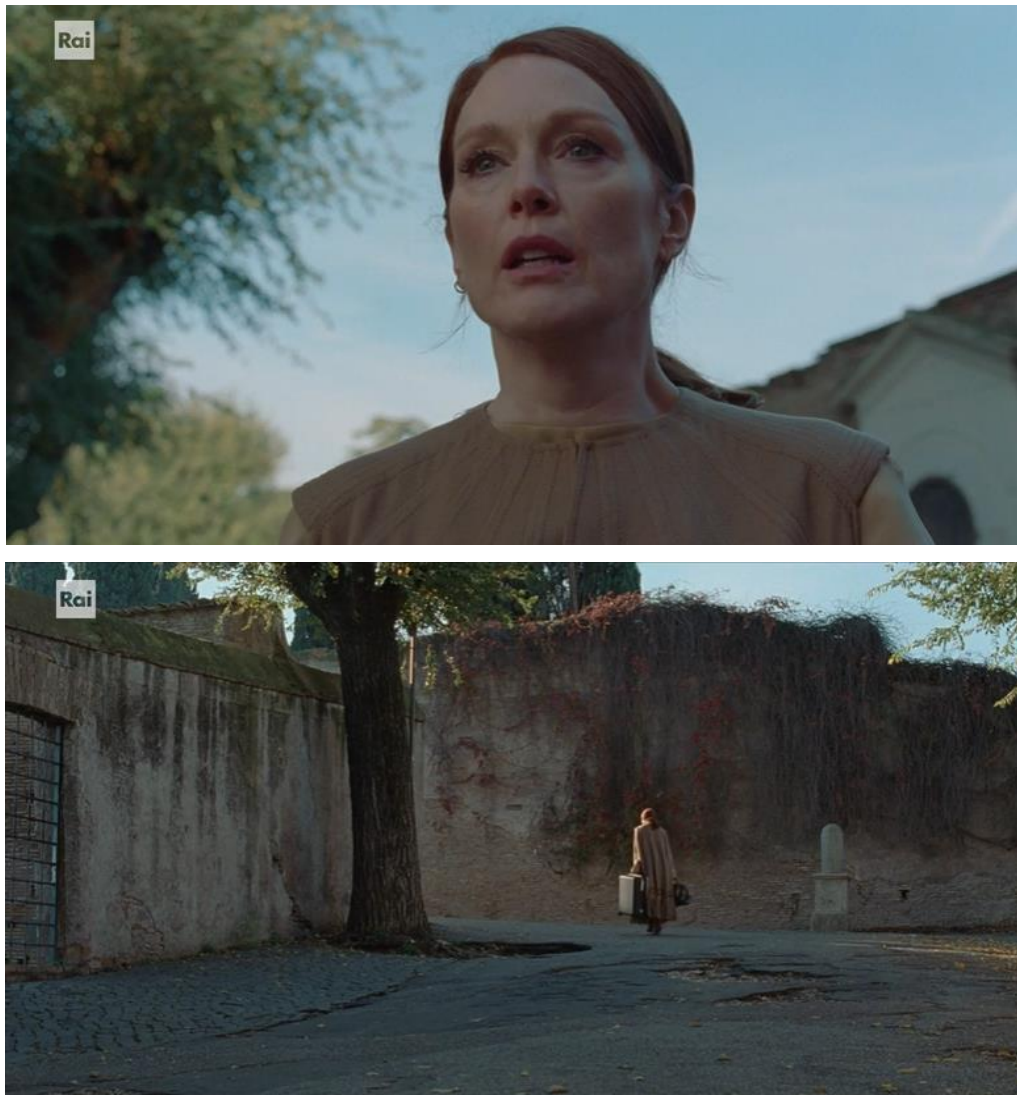

Figure 27. *The Staggering Girl*, Francesca's return home.

'Night Garden' is a development of the first soundtrack, same music material but with a different instrument choice. Now instead of a piano, strings are playing, giving a more emotional and intense sound. This scene opens with the protagonist in a garden at night. This situation provokes more memories in her, so we see a fragment of a party in her past and the soundtrack comes across with the on-screen sounds of chatting, drinking and Italian pop-music in the background.

A short track 'Tony' resounds as Francesca is speaking with her mother and remembers a boy from her youth called Tony. The music implies the comicality and lightness of this memory through the *staccato* technique in strings performing a homophonic melody.

Figure 28. *The Staggering Girl*, final scene.

The last scene of the film is the culmination, to which we are smoothly led by music and camera movements. The young version of Francesca, her mother and the mysterious woman unite in a dance in the garden as the adult Francesca is watching, and the soundtrack 'Dance' accompanies them creating the so-called filmic crescendo. Together with other female figures, they move with joy displaying the *haute couture* Valentino dresses. The soundtrack does not have a dramatic or overly cheerful sound; it is rather on a neutral side, as it seems to be a moment of a catharsis for the protagonist, in which she unites her subpersonalities.

Conclusions:

The music in this film is quite abstract and does not have a function of conveying a specific narrative plot, it is here to express what is subtle, accompany the visuals and create suspense. It plays the role of a signifier of emotions, and a provider of a rhythmic continuity between shots. Sources of all of the tracks are invisible and some of the tracks are inaudible, in other words not thought to be noticed as they subordinate themselves to a dialogue and visuals. The soundtracks are often subordinated to dialogues and visuals and the overall mood provided with music is dreamy, mysterious and somewhat neurotic as the psychological state of the protagonist.

3.4. *Minamata* (2020)

As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, Ryuichi Sakamoto got seriously involved in eco-activism, promoting anti-nuclear ideas and encouraging the search for solutions to environmental issues. In light of his strong humanist stance, it is unsurprising that he accepted the collaboration with Andrew Levitas, an American filmmaker and artist, for his film *Minamata*:

"*Before accepting the offer, I patiently asked the American director why a U.S. citizen would now make a film themed on Minamata disease. (The director said) the nuclear accident in Fukushima played a large part. He said the structures of the problems were the same. The Minamata issue started before the war but was covered up on many occasions. Those in vulnerable positions are always sacrificed. He wanted to cast a spotlight on Minamata again to raise the issue.*"[62] Sakamoto and Levitas do not have a long great story of collaboration like in the case with Bertolucci but the director seem to be convinced about Sakamoto's role in his film:

"*Ryuichi was my dream collaborator — he would be on any film — but on this mission in particular, there could be no one else. The music quite literally needed to represent both the*

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[62] Interview with Ryuichi Sakamoto conducted by Atsushi Komori, *'Criminal' to keep creating nuclear waste, Ryuichi Sakamoto says*, "The Asahi Shimbun", 2021.

absolute best of humanity as well as the worst. In my opinion, Ryuichi was able to elegantly ride this razor's edge and deliver on this concept entirely."[63]

The film plot centers on William Eugene Smith, an American photographer who captured the consequences of mercury poisoning among the residents of Minamata in Japan, which is caused by industrial pollutants discharged into water sources with the operations of a chemical company Chisso. The story is based on real events and includes famous photographs of Smith, which he shot for Life magazine.

The cue list for the film looks like this:

1.	"Minamata Piano Theme"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:50
2.	"Into Japan"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:58
3.	"Landscape"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	4:17
4.	"The Boy"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:10
5.	"Chisso Co."	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:07
6.	"Boy and Camera"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:34
7.	"Hidden Data"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:12
8.	"Blow Up"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:51
9.	"Rally and Persuasion"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:45
10.	"Meeting"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:07
11.	"Offer"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:31
12.	"Commitment"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	4:35
13.	"Fire"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:02
14.	"Sharing"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:23
15.	"Rising"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:44
16.	"Chisso Gate"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	4:23
17.	"Arson Man"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:25
18.	"Suicide"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	1:47
19.	"Mother and Child"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	2:29
20.	"Coda"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:46
21.	"Icon"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:46
22.	"Coda"	Ryuichi Sakamoto	5:46

The film opens with the titles accompanied by a sound of running water and a soft female voice singing a lullaby for her ailing daughter in a bath (fig. 36). This is a moment of preparation for taking the renowned photograph of William Eugene Smith *Tomoko and Mother in the Bath*, which frames the film into an integral piece through opening and closing it. A lullaby is always a symbol

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[63] The script by Andrew Levitas in the liner notes for the vinyl release of the soundtrack.

of intimacy, innocence and mother's love, and this lullaby here appears like a hymn to humanity in this technogenic context, bringing the viewer inside the intimate space of the photograph and demonstrating the scale of the tragedy and the force of unconditional love transcending sufferings.

Figure 29. *Minamata*, arrival at Minamata.

The electro-ambient track "Into Japan" follows the protagonist as he is arriving in Minamata in Japan (fig. 29). It is a balanced atmospheric track, which contains human voice-like sounds, holding notes still. Together with the drone footage of Japanese landscapes, it forms a perception of spaciousness and adds volume to the picture. The distorted sound of the violin conveys the idea of suffering and a broken harmony in the place. At around 00:19:40 we can hear the sound of an

accordion incorporated into the soundtrack as one of many layers of sounds, although the source is on-screen, a boy who is playing accordion on the street.

"Landscape" and "The Boy" tracks sound like a continuation of the previous one but with even more breathy voices, real-time strings, and random glitch-hop riffs reminding the noises of an industrial environment. The reverbs and echo effects transfer us into a dimmed catastrophic environment of Minamata. Since from the point of view of the screenplay, this act technically plays the role of exposition, the music is soft and introductive as well.

Figure 30. *Minamata*, the first protest scene.

The plot of the film is based on the confrontation between the company discharging toxins and the people who are suffering from it, the photographer is supposed to be just an observer, although he ends up confronting the powers of the company on the side of the people too. The first time there is an open protest on the screen, we hear "Chisso Co." track (fig. 30). It starts silent and grows more dramatic as the events become more tense. The function of the soundtrack in this scene is to build tension and add drama to the scene as the two sides start to fight. The cinematography in *Minamata* is a big signifier, as it conveys many messages. This way the scenes are prevalently dark and poorly lit conveying the state of despair, while the film color editing tends to be with a yellow or green tint, which in this context can be subconsciously associated with disease and toxins (fig. 29, 30, 31).

Figure 31. *Minamata*, cinematography examples.

In scenes where Eugene captures the local life through his photographs by walking around the coast, a distinct yellow color tint dominates the *mise en scène*, portraying the tranquil family life of the locals on a sunny day. The combination of warm colors and simple life might be perceived as pleasant; however, the presence of tense music in the non-diegetic space contrasts with it, helping the viewer recognize the abnormality of the situation (fig. 32).

Figure 32. *Minamata*, Eugene capturing life in Minamata, examples of yellow coloring.

Some acousmatic sounds resurface during the film from time to time. For example, the sounds of war through the blocked ears are similar to what a shell-shocked person would hear, which come up together with the images in black and white, symbolizing the recalling memory of William's professional life. This sound is supposed to be from his subjective perception of reality, so it is in the mediated level and incorporated into the soundtrack by Sakamoto. According to Chion, the opposition between what is visualized and the acousmatic provides the basis for the fundamental audiovisual notion of off-screen space.[64]

At [00:48:00] – [00:50:00] the acousmatic sound of the alarm overlaps with "Hidden Data" track in a scene when the main characters discover the truth about the cause of Minamata disease and

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[64] Michel Chion, *Musiques, Médias, Technologie,* Flammarion, "Dominos", Paris*,* 1994, p. 73.

its symptoms. Since their actions are not quite regulated officially, it is a strained situation and the high-pitched one-note sound along with heavily reverbed glitches and noises of falling objects. Such artificial industrial sounds convey this mood as well as complement the visuals with non-verbal information.

The sound of the camera shutter is another significant one in this film, whose function is quite simple but important. For instance, at [00:49:43] it can be examined at different levels: firstly, it serves as a means for transition between the scenes; secondly, it coincides with the sound of a firing gun masked under it and thereby transforming it into a sonic metaphor representing the fight for human rights.

Leitmotivs and reoccurring music material are not as diverse in *Minamata* as in other film scores by Sakamoto. The main theme titled 'Minamata Piano Theme' (fig. 33) is in *G minor* and possesses a lyrical character. This theme is also present in other tracks like 'Commitment' and 'Coda'.
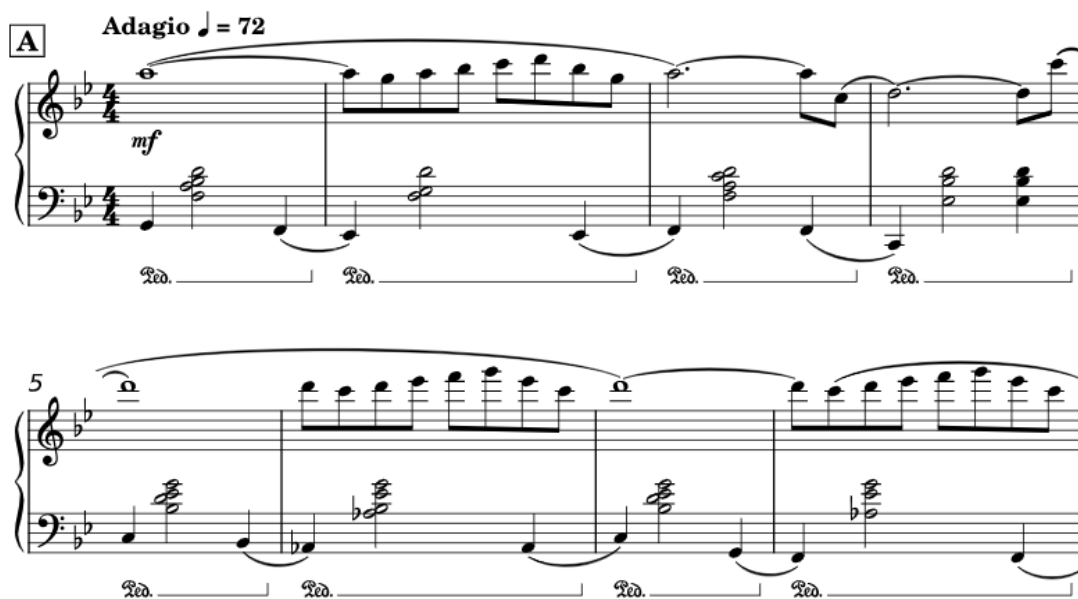
Figure 33. Minamata Piano Theme.

'Commitment' appears in the non-diegetic space at [1:07:06] and extends until [1:11:29] coinciding with various on-screen developments. During this sequence, Eugene makes a sharp decision to develop all the photo negatives taken in Minamata, and a flashback occurs depicting the moment in which he refused the corrupted offer from the chief executive officer of Chisso Company. The musical accompaniment to these events incorporates the main theme, which is complemented by a marching melodic line in the middle of the track and adds a strong reminiscent connection to *The Last Emperor'*s 'Open the Door'. In both instances, this marching musical motive is applied during an emotionally charged moment of expressing strong determination.

The other recurring motive is the comforting and melancholic melody of the 'Boy and Camera' track. The timbre of the prepared piano[65] gives it a soft touch and the opulent cello sound adds an intimate feeling, just as the moments themselves are in which this music appears in the film.

'Sharing' is another version of this motive but slower and sounds at [1:21:10] during the moment of Eugene asking permission of the suffering families to spend time with them and let him photograph their personal lives for the greater good.

From this moment the next act of the story begins, it is the redemption part of the screenplay, introduced by the uplifting sound of 'Rising'. The pulsating rhythm with ascending harmonies and crescent dynamic force helps to stimulate a feeling of returning strength after the disheartening events. In the on-screen space, we see the process of Eugene taking photos, which is communicated to the viewer through the scenes turning from color to black and white. Starting with scenes of posing for the photos, the passage arrives at its culmination with people protesting in front of the gates of Chisso Company and it is completely synchronized with the soundtrack. This point [1:24:30] is signed with the resurfacing 'Chisso Gate' track.

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[65] A prepared piano is a piano that has had its sounds temporarily altered by placing bolts, screws, mutes, rubber erasers, and/or other objects on or between the strings.

Figure 34. Minamata residents posing for Eugene synchronized with the 'Rising' track in the extra-diegetic space.

The second protest scene is notably more dynamic. Dominated by the people's collective anger, it launches with the diegetic sounds of loud and chaotic chants, gradually merging with the extra-diegetic soundtrack. With time, the diegetic noises diminish until completely inaudible. This deliberate effect creates dissonance, metaphorically representing the overwhelming anger. The dissonance between sound and visuals constructs a virtual space for the viewer, fostering a sense of alienation from the events and positioning them as an observer —a documentarist, mirroring Eugene's role in the scene.

Figure 35. *Minamata*, second protest scene.

Following a sequence of other intense events in the resolution act, the movie revisits the initial scene where a mother cradles her child in a bath, singing a lullaby (fig. 36). This time it is in color and it is noteworthy that only in these two scenes does a live human voice sing diegetically, creating a narrative frame that conveys a message of hope for humanity. The sound of 'Mother and Child' track with a peaceful mood of a prayer confirms this message. Stylistically it is reminiscent of Protestant church music, in particular an organ prelude for a Lutheran choral chant from the Baroque era. This track indeed features organ timbre and homophonic harmonic structure, which is typical for such a chorale. Often in cinema, the music of Lutheran composers is used as a symbol of meta-spirituality. Ryuichi Sakamoto did not use a pre-existent piece but composed an accordingly styled original one for this scene. It carries a specific emotional message that creates an atmosphere of universal tragedy, spiritual contemplation, and religious assessment of what is happening.

Figure 36. Minamata, 'Mother and Child'.

The resolution part is accompanied by the 'Coda' track until the end of the film. As mentioned earlier, it is based on the main theme (fig. 33) and it is a variation of it. The return of this theme in the end is logical, as it is the point at which everything about Minamata gets in its right place.

<u>Conclusions:</u>

The film *Minamata* weaves its narrative through a masterful use of sound and music to create a profound emotional impact on the audience. The soundtrack by Ryuichi Sakamoto does its role and starts with a gentle piano theme including various elements like atmospheric battles between sequencers, rhythmic beats, and minimalistic melodies. It accompanies the story of Eugene Smith, an American photographer documenting the impact of mercury poisoning in a Japanese town.

The music enhances the classical structure of the screenplay of this film, which consists of seven main points: the setup, the catalyst, plot point one, the midpoint, the despair, the redemption, and the end. This means that the sound is mostly implicitly synchronized with the narrative, except for some few moments.

The film's cinematography also plays a pivotal role in conveying messages, with prevalent dark and poorly lit scenes reflecting despair, and the yellow or green tint subtly associating with disease and toxins. Acousmatic sounds, such as war-like sounds through blocked ears, alarm and camera shutter, provide a subjective, mediated perception of reality, contributing to the film's audiovisual dynamics.

Sakamoto's use of leitmotivs, while less diverse than in some other of his works, establishes a strong connection with the film's themes. The 'Minamata Piano Theme' serves as the main motive, recurring in other tracks. In terms of diegetic and non-diegetic spaces, the music in this film is mostly extradiegetic; among the diegetic pieces is only a lullaby, which adds a layer of deep meaning, and a boy playing accordion on the street of Minamata.

This is a prevalent electronic work of Sakamoto, which allows him to extend the range of timbres and rhythms to express the film's idea, but this fact also makes it harder to provide a classical musicological analysis with the search for leitmotivs and themes. The soundtrack has a character of *concrete music,* experimental technique of musical composition using recorded sounds as raw material.

Chapter IV. Exploration of Sakamoto's Innovative Approaches and Influences

4.1. Identification of unique features and contributions of Sakamoto's film music

The analysis of the selected film scores in Chapter III traced the trajectory of Sakamoto's composing style. Throughout all of the changes that stand in the instrument choices, varying themes and motives to adjust them to the screenplays, and switches between different sound design styles, certain consistent features thread through his body of work, uniting it with the cohesive identity. These very features that help to recognize Sakamoto's touch are the subject of this final chapter of the thesis.

The extremely limited amount of primal sources set a big challenge for this research and forced me to create a synthesis of my own knowledge and analytic skills. While analyzing the scores it is important to remember that they never arrive at the film in their pure form, as they become a subject to artistic changes of directors, producers, and sound designers during the process of filmmaking. Therefore, it is always a collective work. In order to identify the unique features of Sakamoto's music and his contributions to the narratives, I will attempt to consider his scores separately from the narratives in search for musicological patterns and interconnections, as well as together with the narratives to identify his way of working with the storytelling musically that leads the audience to a cathartic outcome. The following are the main features or the pillars on which Sakamoto stands as an artist and film music composer.

ADAPTIVITY AND AUTHENTICITY

The selected films display his ability to adapt to the story and a director's vision of the film, and at the same time remaining within his own framework. It is typical for a film composer to form a tandem with one or two directors but Ryuichi Sakamoto took his own path, following his artistic intuition and collaborating with many different directors and in different genres but almost always with a tendency to choose to score films in a genre of psychological drama. In a collaboration with Bernardo Bertolucci, Sakamoto followed the director's indications which definitely formed his filmic musical style for the period of the 80-90's. *The Last Emperor* is an epic biographical drama which demands a relevant approach, consisting of a rich orchestra composition and a system of leitmotifs. On the other hand, *The Sheltering Sky* is a more intimate psychological drama. Nonetheless the different scales of the settings, both of the films explore the inner world of the protagonists and require sensitivity from the musical accompaniment.

In *Derrida* a noticeable shift in the approach and style is evident, as the composer adapted his sound designs to suit the documentary's essence, reflecting the main idea of the film. The score has the character of a soundscape. Here he revisits his electronic roots but with a new intention of creating an audio dimension for the documentary about a philosopher. This project belongs to his phase of life before 2014 when he was diagnosed with cancer. This year became a milestone for a profound inner transformation which naturally shaped the trajectory of his creative life as well.

The surrealistic *The Staggering Girl* and *Minamata* required a more structured approach, so Sakamoto used the leitmotiv system as a pivot again yet adding a lot of electronic elements to the cues to align the sound with the filmic style of the directors. His ability to adapt to the film's narrative and a director's artistic vision made him highly requested, but the projects that he chooses can also tell us about him as a person and as an artist, as they must be the stories that resonate with him one way or another.

PSYCHOLOGISM

Typically for Sakamoto, the films that he scored explore the themes of cultural identity, displacement, and personal transformation against the backdrop of exotic locations. They often exhibit a high level of psychologism, where the music serves as a window into the inner workings of the characters' minds and emotions. Sakamoto's compositions are delicately intertwined with the narrative and they often align with the emotional arcs of the characters, enhancing the audience's empathetic connection with their psychological journey. This phenomenon may be explained by the *emotional contagion hypothesis* ideated by Jerome Bruner and Leonard Meyer, which suggests that music has the power to induce emotions in listeners by mirroring the affective states depicted on the screen.[66]

Additionally, the *associationist theory* of Michel Chion and Claudia Gorbman states that viewers form associations between music and specific emotions or characters, reinforcing the psychological depth of the narrative. Audiences often rely on the music in films to help them understand what is happening, then they tend to question less and just go along with the narrative. Claudia Gorbman states, that film music makes viewers less critical and more relaxed by guiding them into what characters are saying or doing when it is not clear and helps viewers feel emotionally connected to the characters and scenes by using related tunes. This connection makes viewers see the whole story as one piece, even if there are some inconsistencies. Sakamoto's music is intertwined with the characters' internal states, serving as a sonic reflection of their turmoil of

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[66] Stephen Davies, *Musical Understandings: And Other Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, OUP Oxford, 2011, p. 48.

catharsis, as was exposed in the analyses of the films in Chapter III.

Musically speaking, he expresses human psychological states through the means of music, for instance, by using pulsating rhythms in a fast tempo to express excitement or agitation like in "Rain*"* from *The Last Emperor*; slow sensual chromatic melodies to communicate complicated feelings of confusion, despair and grief, as for example in "The Baby (Was Born Dead)" from *The Last Emperor* or "On the Hill" and "Dying" from *The Sheltering Sky*; applying neoclassical approach to express an anxious state of mind as in "Port's Composition" from *The Sheltering Sky*.

According to the Expressive theory of Claudia Gorbman from her *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, music communicates nonverbal emotional cues that transcend linguistic barriers, and Sakamoto's ability to convey complex psychological nuances through his compositions works with the expressive power of film music in shaping viewers' emotional responses and deepening their understanding of character psychology.

Overall, the composer's ability to infuse his scores with psychological depth aligns with key principles of film music theory. Speaking with the terms of Sergio Miceli, mentioned in the first chapter, Sakamoto tends to choose implicit synchronization points between music and film, underlining sentiments more than events and actions. The accompaniment often comes on the mediated level, which gives it the feature of subjectivity and links it with a character in the film. This may serve as an argument to prove the high level of psychologism in his film scores.

ECLECTICITY

Sakamoto's film music stands out for its rich tapestry of cultures, reflecting his background in ethnomusicology and his open-mindedness to diverse musical traditions. This cultural diversity adds depth and richness to his compositions, making them more interesting and engaging for audiences. By incorporating elements from different cultures, Sakamoto creates music that is both universal and respectful of diverse origins. This cultural fusion not only enhances the emotion of his film scores but also reflects the composer's desire to promote cross-cultural understanding through music within the realm of cinema. Drawing from his classical training, Sakamoto exhibits a mastery of form and structure, as has been seen in Chapter III from the analysis of the scores for *The Last Emperor*. There he applies the leitmotiv system, typical for Western classical music, at the same time using the melodies based on pentatonic scales, which is the main feature of Chinese music, played by traditional Chinese instruments together with a classical symphony orchestra.

For *The Sheltering Sky*, Ryuichi Sakamoto chose to use sonata form for the main theme, structuring the majority of the soundtracks around the melodic material introduced in its parts. Apart from this choice based on his classical background, so is the choice of instruments trusting the performance to a symphonic orchestra, while some of the themes are played by piano. Since

the plot is set in North Africa, all of these Western features are balanced by the elements of local music, Islamic chants, and other parts recreating the soundscape of the places. Later on, he switches to more modern settings that do not require the involvement of traditional music, therefore he experiments a lot with crafting the soundscapes. The connection with traditional sounds in the mentioned films is crucial for the impact on the viewers as it carries most of the semantic load.

Such a variety of settings requires a profound mental journey to the layers of different cultures and a capacity to open one's mind to them in order to create a fusion of traditional and electronic music. His repertoire encompasses traditions from Okinawa, Indonesia, and Brazil, and his early fascination with English rock and French Impressionism remains evident. This blend of influences is mirrored in his piano compositions, which offer a reflective exploration of his iconic film scores and electronic classics. From his roots in rock to his embrace of global sounds, Sakamoto's music embodies a journey of cross-cultural exchange and artistic evolution.

BRIDGE BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST

From the previous point, we come to this one: Ryuichi Sakamoto is a phenomenon of a musical mediator between Western and Eastern cultures. Being himself a Japanese composer living permanently in New York and working with many renowned Western directors as well as the Japanese ones, he is indeed a bridge for intercultural communication. His music showcases this feature and seems to be almost egoless, especially in his latest works, which again recalls his already mentioned *adaptivity*. While the concept of the cultural West and East is very complex and contradictory as there is no fixed geographical border between the two regions, it is more about a mental belonging to a paradigm, and Sakamoto seems to belong to both at the same time. The clearest example of this is The Last Emperor, where the complex and unusual for Western ear Chinese music is presented in a simplified form in a fusion with the familiar sound of symphonic orchestra and the appearings of some quotations of Western folk songs.

Sakamoto, being himself influenced by European classical music composers, believed that music is interconnected and has the power to transcend the linguistic barriers, becoming something universally relatable and shared by people around the globe.

ELECTRONIC ELEMENTS

Through *Derrida*, *The Staggering Girl* and *Minamata* we can see the composer's shift to electronic music, possibly reevaluating his synch-pop past for instance in "Dance" soundtrack for Guadagnino's short film, or in a deconstructed electronic soundscape for the documentary about Derrida, experimenting with *concrète* materials, noises of piano hammers and heavy reverberation.

In *Minamata,* tracks like "Landscape" and "The Boy" are built with an emphasis on ethereal voices, and sporadic glitch-hop elements, reminiscent of industrial noises. The deliberate use of reverberation and echo effects further immerses the listener in the somber atmosphere of the town of Minamata. In these examples Sakamoto employs electronic elements to enhance the emotional resonance of the films' narratives, underscoring his ability to seamlessly integrate innovative sound design techniques into his evolving musical repertoire.

Equipped with a microphone, he would go out on the streets of New York or forest paths to capture the rich tapestry of natural or industrial sounds. This affinity for raw environmental noises resonates with the principles of concrete music, a genre that prioritizes real-world sounds over traditional musical notation. Concrete music explores the auditory textures of everyday phenomena, transforming them into musical elements. The blurring of musical and environmental boundaries highlights the intrinsic musicality of any sound source. Concrete music played a crucial role in shaping electronic music and laid the groundwork for modern music techniques. Sakamoto integrates electronic elements into his music, using synthesizers, electronic beats, and experimental sound design but at the same time using the traditional orchestration, creating a balance between electronic and organic sounds. The use of electronics contributes to the ethereal and otherworldly atmosphere of his scores.

EXPERIMENTALISM

Throughout his career, Sakamoto has continuously pushed the boundaries of sound, exploring various techniques to create unique auditory experiences. Often he would incorporate found sounds and unconventional instruments into his compositions, especially in his later phase of life. These can range from everyday objects like kitchen utensils to field recordings of natural phenomena. While applying electronic editing, he experiments with different timbres, frequencies, and sonic textures. In his musical collaborations he plays with the elements from jazz, classical, ambient, and pop music for his compositions.

His fascination for technology and sound art is evident in his experimental sound designs. He explored the creative potential of new technologies such as computer-generated algorithms, algorithmic composition and interactive audiovisual installations, for instance his Improvisation for Sonic Cure[67], where the composer extracts profound meditative sonic patterns from different solid objects and a piano. In terms of film scores, he uses experimental sound design as a medium of storytelling and expression.

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[67] *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Improvisation for Sonic Cure*, Voluntary Garden Online Concert: Sonic Cure.
The performance was originally broadcast on February 29, 2020, by UCCA x Kuaishou.

FROM LEITMOTIFS TO ABSTRACTION

At the beginning of his film music career, the scores appear to be melodically rich with traditional orchestration. The system of leitmotifs served him as a solid base for scoring the films. Each of the themes is associated with a certain character or setting in the narrative and evokes certain emotions in a viewer. These motives serve as musical signatures, instantly recognizable to the audience, whether it is a haunting melody representing a character's inner turmoil like "Open the Door" theme or a triumphant motif accompanying a heroic moment like "First Coronation" theme in *The Last Emperor*.

However, as Sakamoto's career progressed, he began to explore more experimental and abstract approaches to composition, moving away from the structured confines of the leitmotif system. He embraced a more fluid and unconventional form of musical expression. Rather than relying on recurring motifs, his composition became characterized by atmospheric textures, ambient soundscapes, and minimalist arrangements, as evident for instance in *Minamata*. This shift towards abstraction allowed Sakamoto to break free from the constraints of narrative association and explore the pure emotional resonance of music. This approach encourages listeners to engage with the music on a deeper, more introspective level, inviting them to explore the nuances of mood and atmosphere without the guidance of explicit leitmotifs. This also allows a more open interpretation.

SYMBOLISM

The symbolism of his works lies in a complex relationship between the sound and the context where it is placed. The cultural fusion in his music can be seen as a symbol of the intersection of different cultures and the harmony that can arise from their fusion. Many of his compositions evoke imagery of nature, using sounds such as flowing water, bird calls, or wind to create atmospheric textures. This symbolism reflects a deep reverence for the natural world and a concern for environmental issues. Apart from this, the idea of "perpetual sound" which was born in his creative mind through his extensive interaction with the piano, symbolizes eternity. Observing the piano's transient nature, with its sound gradually fading into the surrounding environment, Sakamoto felt a longing, admiring instruments like the guitar or violin for their ability to sustain sound. Motivated by this, he committed to the quest for the perpetual sound, complementing the flow of film and adding a touch of vibrancy.

While considering his film scores, we should also take into account the aspects of timing and the visual. The music or sound appears at a certain time in a visual and rhetoric situation, and each of the aspects provides some information, which opens a door into a possible interpretation. For instance, "Open the door" from The Last Emperor is a symbol the perpetual imprisonment of the

Emperor, of the borders of the walls of the Forbidden City and his strive for freedom. More often than not, it is the main film themes that have leitmotiv function that begin to symbolize something in the film.

SYNCHRONIZATION

When Sakamoto collaborates with filmmakers, he tailors the score for the measure of the film and its scenes. To do so, he follows the synchronization principle, which according to Sergio Miceli can be distinguished between two types – implicit and explicit (more in Chapter I). Most of the times, the composer tends to apply implicit synchronization, underlining sentiments more than events and thoughts more than actions. Using the framework of Martine Huvenne's Audiovisual Chord, this type of synchronization works through narrative enhancement which lies in the audio complementing the visual storytelling, adding layers of meaning. To achieve this, Sakamoto masterfully manipulates the harmonic structure, rhythms and timbres. Sometimes explicit synchronization would be utilized to achieve the effect of emotional amplification on the viewer, for instance in a scene from *The Last Emperor* (see p. 35), where the audial line is synchronized with the visual line through the power of silence. In moments like these the rhythmic and temporal alignment creates a dynamic and engaging experience. In any case, Sakamoto gives a lot of importance to the right timing and precision.

Overall, the approach of Sakamoto to film scoring is characterized by adaptability, authenticity, and commitment to pushing artistic boundaries, making him a pioneer figure in the world of film music.

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