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Hitchcock and Von Trier: the Operatic Melancholia in Cinema

Abstract

The paper examines the usage of Richard Wagner's operatic inventions in 20th and 21st-century cinema and its representation of melancholia and love. The text describes the philosophical ideas that drove Wagner to create *Tristan and Isolde* and new means of musical expression, which were later used in film music. The first part discusses the use of Wagner's music in 2011 *Melancholia*, while the latter studies his influence on Bernard Herrmann's score for *Vertigo*.

Keywords

Herrmann, Melancholia, Music, Wagner, Vertigo

Introduction

Richard Wagner went down in history as one of the most important, if not the most important, composers of operas. His notion of leitmotiv changed opera and greatly impacted a new genre of art, which did not even exist during Wagner's lifetime—cinema. However, Wagner's contribution to changing the history of music goes beyond guiding the listener with themes—one of his most significant creations was the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, which changed how musicians approached harmony. The famous Tristan chord became probably history's most well-known and puzzling chord. To this day, scholars vary in their interpretations of the chord's function (Buranaprapuk 2018, 165-177). The ambiguity of the unresolved chord was a direct result of Wagner's discovery of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, who considered

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music the most important and metaphysical of all arts (Magee 2001, 171). Although the opera premiered in 1865, its themes and musical inventions remain relevant today, especially in cinema, where the Tristan chord is often used to represent melancholia and unrequited love. The article will strive to analyze *Tristan and Isolde's* influence on cinema and its representation of melancholia on examples of two films from different periods—Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* from 2011 and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* from 1958.

The Unbearable Melancholy of Existence

In Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia*, Kirsten Dunst plays Justine, a woman in deep depression. The film depicts her relationship with her family in the face of a mysterious planet approaching the Earth and threatening the very existence of life. The picture is divided into two parts, the first one being Justine's wedding. While she pretends to be happy and keeps up appearances in front of her family and friends, who pressure her into that state due to the amount of money and effort spent on the wedding, she displays many signs of melancholia, described by Freud in his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, such as "(...) painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity" (Freud 1964, 244). Justine's act is, to some extent, genuine since she is trying to find at least some element of happiness in what might be her last chance for it. It is probably partly fueled by her family's expectations, which are almost blackmail, paralleling her boss's pressuring his nephew into getting a tagline for a new marketing campaign out of Justine or else he will fire him. At various points of the party, she departs from her guests. She engages in activities that might comfort her: putting her nephew to sleep, bathing, or just going to bed, which shows her utter exhaustion. She even says she is trudging herself through this and feels that "a gray woolly yarn is clinging to her legs" (which was visualized in the prologue). She forces herself to go through the wedding as much as she forces herself to go through life. Her struggle is also imagined by references to paintings featured in the film and its prologue—in one scene, she looks through her brother-in-law's art books collection, and John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* and Pieter Bruegel's *Hunter in the Snow* can be seen. The first one is recreated in the film's opening with Justine as Ophelia. At the same time, the latter can be seen being destroyed in the collision with *Melancholia*, which reinforces its themes of the futility of human preoccupation with everyday life (Alpatow 1964, 94). She declines her husband's sexual advances only to cheat on him with a young new co-worker of a much lower professional position than hers.

Her behavior might appear irrational or ungrateful at first. Still, all her erratic decisions seem like a desperate attempt at achieving happiness, comfort, or at least a distraction. Freud claims melancholic transfer their negative feelings toward a subject of their pain towards themselves (Freud 1964, 247-249). Perhaps the same can be said about not only negative but other feelings and behaviors too; Justine's moves in the scene in which she has sexual intercourse with her new coworker are similar to the ones performed during CPR, which may indicate that the very act itself was a desperate attempt at bringing herself to life. Justine's struggle is reflected in the color scheme—the film's first half is bathed in a yellow, warm light, which might be associated with happiness or prosperity. However, all sources of light are artificial. Alternatively, it might be read literally since the color yellow might be interpreted as a sign of instability, insincerity, and marital unfaithfulness (Kopaliński 2012, 513), corresponding with the events on screen.

The film's second part is told from Justine's sister, Claire, perspective. She has to take care of Justine, who has regressed into almost a child-like state, unable to eat or even take a bath herself, while also dealing with her fear of doom in the face of the mysterious planet approaching the Earth. Around an hour and a half into the film, Claire observes her sister walk into the woods at night and lie naked to watch the planet approach. After that incident, Justine's condition improves significantly: she becomes far more independent, easily performing her everyday routine and showing overall calmness. From this point, the roles become somewhat reversed—while in the former half of the picture, it was Justine who tried to pretend and lie to her family about her state, in the latter, it is her family who lies. First, it is Claire's husband, John, who lies about the possibility of collision, firmly claiming that the planet will pass the Earth. There is no danger at all, but simultaneously, he prepares for potential malfunctions caused by *Melancholia*'s vicinity and is relieved when it seems that the planet has passed the Earth. When he discovers that the scientists are wrong and *Melancholia* is on a collision course, he commits suicide. Then Claire pretends in front of her son and Justine that John left for the nearby village, and she makes them breakfast. Ultimately, she breaks down and panics, while Justine remains indifferent to her cries and impending doom. Only after her nephew confides in her does she start showing her family compassion and comforting them in their last moments.

Justine seems liberated by the perspective of death, accepting it with peace and functioning in a paradoxically healthy manner. Her behavior is reflected again by the color pattern in that part of the film, dominated by cold white and blue hues, which are caused by natural light (in the diegetic

world of the film—most of the time, it is either the daylight or light provided by the planet at night). At its core, it is concordant with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who claimed that one's only way to end suffering is to renounce all desires and disengage from participation in everyday life. (Magee 2001, 167). Schopenhauer also believed in the importance of the sexual act, considering it the closest thing one can do to achieve revelation and transcend own physical barriers (Magee 2001, 170) —Justine's mental state has improved vastly after she looks at the planet while lying naked, a scene of an almost sexual nature.

The entire film is scored with only one piece of music, used in various scenes—Wagner's overture to *Tristan and Isolde*. At the superficial level, the piece seems to have been chosen because of its tone and development, starting with *pianissimo* dynamic and modest instrumentation, gradually building towards dramatic grandiose, allowing for illustrating Justine's solitude and personal struggle, as well as the events on the cosmic scale. Trier not only recontextualized the piece by dissociating it from the original opera but also continued to recontextualize it throughout the film, juxtaposing the same parts with new scenes and events.

Starting with the prologue, which is the longest unedited display of the overture, it seems that Trier assigned the solo cello voice to Kirsten Dunst's character—the opening *crescendo* for cello is in parallel by a fade in slow motion shot of Justine opening her eyes, while the first orchestral *forte* is juxtaposed against the image of the planets, another association repeated throughout the film. While it has to be stated that in some scenes, only brief, heavily edited fragments of the overture are used, probably to fill the silence in transitional shots, the links between Justine and cello and between the *Melancholia* and the seventeenth bar of Wagner's prelude are mostly consistent. The prologue, full of oniric imagery, ends with the collision of the planets, accompanied by the prelude's most dramatic point, reached after approximately seven and a half minutes, synchronizing the full orchestral chord, accented with a timpani and dark trumpet part with the moment of impact.

The association between Justine and the planet and their corresponding musical parts is visible again when Justine urinates on the golf course. Her departure from the wedding guests is again illustrated with the cello solo, and the orchestra picks up at the shot of the night sky, reflecting her point of view. Her facial expression and the more hopeful sound of music make it seem like she is bonding with the distant planet, reinforced again in the scenes of her messing up her brother-in-law's study and the guests at the

golf course, where the cello once again illustrates Justine's solitude and the shots of cosmic imagery, at which Justine looks through the telescope, are accompanied by an ascending woodwind motif. The most significant example of the bond between Justine and Melancholia, with their corresponding themes, is the scene where Justine lies naked and watches the planet. This time, the cello solo picks the ascending, romantic motif, merging the two, almost as a pair of lovers.

The rule is broken only near the film's end when Claire realizes the collision is unavoidable and panics. The cello illustrates her frantic drive in a golf cart (paralleling Justine's beginning), and the orchestral parts are synchronized with the hail caused by the planet's proximity. Perhaps the change was supposed to link the feelings of Justine from the beginning of the film. Claire's from the end, but considering other editing choices in the movie, often involving cutting significant amounts of the overture, the director might have been driven purely by aesthetic reasons.

The last time the overture is used is at the film's end. However, the music is mixed very quietly at the beginning, making it barely audible under the rumble caused by the incoming planet. This time the piece is also edited to synchronize it with the visuals, and the collision is once again accented by the orchestral blast, tying it to the prologue. While the planet and Justine seem to have been assigned their parts of the overture, the piece itself uses the same arrangement, although sometimes edited, to illustrate different images, starting with a cosmic scale catastrophe in the prologue and then going through small personal tragedies, shifting between the awe and wonder evoked by the beauty of space, and illustration of solitude, grief, and almost romantic desire.

It might seem that the choice "generalized" the meaning of the overture—instead of expressing the melancholia of two lovers who cannot be together, it stands for melancholy in a much broader sense. However, it was precisely the discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy that led Wagner to the creation of *Tristan and Isolde*—the lovers' woe was indeed a metonym of a broader, metaphysical sense, in which one cannot ever be happy in the physical world of objects and only renouncement of one's wishes and acceptance of the noumenal realm can bring peace. Schopenhauer believed in Kant's differentiation between the physical world, consisting of space and time, calling it the phenomenal world, and the noumenal world, which consisted of things, or in Schopenhauer's view, one thing, since multiplicity would require time and space as well, that cannot be perceived or understood by the human mind, although one can never be sure if it exists. Accord-

ing to the philosopher, happiness is unachievable since even if one's desire is fulfilled, another takes its place. (Magee 2001, 152-166), Reflected by Wagner both in music and libretto: from the very beginning of *Tristan and Isolde*, if a part of a discordant chord is resolved, another one takes its place (Magee 2001, 206-210), and his protagonists curse the phenomenal world, in which they could not be together, and wanted to transition into the noumenal world, where they would unite in nothingness—they wished not so much to join in death or the afterlife, as to unite in non-existence (Magee 2001, 218-222).

The director's choice of music seems to be an intentional reference to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially considering other allusions to it present in the film—when the perspective of incoming obliteration crushes Claire, Justine indifferently responds that Earth is evil and it will not be missed. Schopenhauer claimed that the phenomenal world is cruel, considering low and selfish impulses drive people, and nature is equally filled with other living beings' suffering (Magee 2001, 166). The prologue of the film, filled with surreal imagery mostly depicting the effects of Melancholia entering the Earth's orbit, also references his philosophical distinction of realms in its Blue Ray's chapter selection title—"Space and Time."

The Melancholy of Obsessive Love for an Ideal

Trier's approach to musically communicating melancholia and the philosophical subtext was as straightforward as possible. However, Wagnerian ideas were often implemented more subtly. For many composers, the Tristan chord became a shorthand for communicating melancholia or unrequited desire. For Bernard Herrmann, the more general version of the Tristan chord, which is every half-diminished chord, was so deeply engraved in his musical language, especially in his collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock, that Royal S. Brown (1994, 151) called it the "Hitchcock chord." However, a specific film exists where Herrmann quotes the chord in its original form and references Wagner in other ways, underlying the operatic drama and themes of desire, melancholy and tragic love.

In 1958's Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, James Steward plays Scottie, a detective who can no longer work in the police force because of his acrophobia, which reveals itself during a rooftop chase after a criminal and leads to the death of a fellow officer. He is then hired by his former friend, Gavin Elster, to follow his wife, Madeleine, whom he claims is "possessed" by her grandmother's spirit, Carlotta Valdez—either in a literal or a psychological sense

—and might therefore commit suicide, just as her grandmother did. Scottie falls in love with Madeleine, who kills herself by jumping from a church tower, an act that Scottie cannot prevent because of his acrophobia. He then descends into deep melancholy until he meets a woman stunningly resembling Madeleine—Judy. The two start dating, and Scottie slowly transforms Judy into Madeleine by changing her clothes and hairstyle. When Judy wears Madeleine's jewelry, Scottie figures out that Gavin hired Judy to play the role of his wife so that he could have an alibi for murdering the real Mrs. Elster and frame it as a suicide. In order to reveal the truth, Scottie forces Judy to confess the scheme at the crime scene. When she finally does so, and the man is willing to forgive her, a sudden appearance of a nun startles Judy, who falls to her death.

In *Melancholy and the Act* (Žižek 2000, 659-660), Slavoj Žižek describes the correlation between anamorphosis and melancholy. He claims that the melancholic confuses the loss with the lack—one mistakenly believes that he has lost an object that was in his belonging, while in reality, this is false since the melancholic lacks the object from the start. The supposed loss only covers the lack: "In short, what melancholy obfuscates is that the object is lacking from the very beginning, that its emergence coincides with its lack, that this object is nothing but the positivization of a void or lack, a purely anamorphic entity that does not exist in itself. Although denied access to the suprasensible domain of ideal symbolic forms, the melancholic still displays the metaphysical yearning for another absolute reality beyond our ordinary reality subjected to temporal decay and corruption; the only way out of this predicament is thus to take an ordinary, sensual material object (say, the beloved woman) and elevate it into the absolute." This interpretation helps to explain Scottie's behavior, who sees Madeleine as an almost supernatural being who transcends time itself (underlined by green, ghostly color and light associated with Madeleine) and tries to do everything to transform mundane and vulgar Judy into a woman who is the embodiment of an ideal for him. This ideal also allows us to interpret Bernard Herrmann's score structure, starting with the overture.

The film's opening shows defragmented parts of a woman's face: first the mouth, then the eyes, changing from black and white to crimson red. Then the camera closes on one of the eyes, and the animated spiral appears in the pupil. The rest of the credits show various animated and rotating spirals, which are the essential visual theme of the film, repeated in different layers, mostly visuals (Žižek 2013, 225-226) enumerates a couple of them: a curl in the hairstyle of Carlotta Valdez and her granddaughter, Madeleine; the spiral

of the stairway in the church tower; the circular shot spinning around Scottie and Madeleine. The pattern does not end there: spirals are visible in the stump of a cut-down tree, with different ones marked for different years, which “possessed” Madeleine, now as her Spanish grandmother, remembers as different events from her life; and in the scene in which Scottie follows Madeleine in his car, they drive in circles, creating another spiral. Even the film’s symmetrical structure (Schroeder 2002, 243), in which Stewart’s character retraces his steps, resembles a spiral. This visual symptom represents obsession, and, as Žižek puts it, “the self-enclosed temporal loop in which past and present are condensed into the two aspects of the same endlessly repeated circular movement.” (2012, 226) is also reflected in the soundtrack. The title sequence begins with an ostinato consisting of two parallel and opposite movements, an arpeggiated e-flat minor seventh chord, at the same time ascending and descending in different voices and layers of orchestration (Schneller 2005, 191), and ascending trills of the string section illustrate the appearance of the spiral itself. The suite also anticipates the rest of the events—the most critical melodic material of the film can be found in the opening credits. The love theme is present not only in its complete form but also in the ostinato, which changes from e-flat minor to A-flat Major (which is the first chord of the love theme), and in the horn blasts, which play a descending major second interval, D–C, also connected with falling. What is interesting is the fact that the love theme in its complete form enters the credits not in the opening shots to accompany Madeleine’s face, but when the woman disappears and is replaced by the spiral, now filling in the entire screen—this suggests that Scottie’s love is more connected with his obsession and melancholy than the woman herself, corresponding with Žižek’s comment on elevating the lost object to the state of absolute. It not only shows that Scottie is in love with a dead woman (as Hitchcock stated himself, Stewart’s character wants to go to bed with a dead woman (Schroeder 2002, 240)) but, in fact, with a woman who does not exist.

Similarly to the old operatic practice of presenting the essential themes in overtures, film scores of the Golden Age of Hollywood often used that technique—for example, Miklos Rozsa *El Cid* (1960) or Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s *Sea Hawk* (1941). Bernard Herrmann was among the first composers who used that technique, implementing it in his 1941 film debut, *Citizen Kane*, and scoring the film’s prologue with a motif foreshadowing the reveal of the “Rosebud” mystery (Cooke 2008, 204). However, this can also be interpreted as a melancholic confusion of the loss and the lack—Herrmann’s love theme enters the scene a long time before Madeleine does. It also shows

how much Madeleine is engraved in Scottie's brain—the harmonic material played in the same way as the illustration for the spiral or the visual representation of Scottie's obsession.

Schneller (2005, 193-195) points out that the opening title of *Vertigo* also allows associating love and death in another way: the ostinato is also the harmonic foundation for the chord appearing whenever Scottie is experiencing his acrophobia (illustrated by the famous visual effect in the film), consisting of two chords play on top each other: e-flat minor and D Major. The chord relation is similar to the harmonic material from the love theme, only transposed up a tritone and played in a sequence, not simultaneously. Schneller also points out that the chords are perfectly symmetrical if superimposed and spelled enharmonically, with A being the axis, which again plays to the symmetrical form of the film and the notion of walking around in circles—as described by Schroeder (2002, 243-244): Scottie hanging on the ledge—sees Madeline for the first time at “Ernie’s” restaurant—follows her to a flower shop, museum, and a rented apartment—Madeleine falls into San Francisco bay—Scottie rescues her, falls in love, the two share a kiss—Madeleine tells Scottie her dream—Madeleine climbs up the stairs in the church tower and falls to her death leaving Scottie “suspended.” In the second half, Scottie has a nightmare and falls into melancholia wandering around the places connected to Madeleine—Scottie meets Judy—follows her to her apartment—the two date at “Ernie’s”—the two kiss—the two return to the church tower—the woman falls to her death, leaving Scottie “suspended” again.

The symmetry is also present on a smaller scale—for example, in the scene in which Madeleine, rescued from drowning, wakes up at Scottie's apartment, visual and musical symbols are paralleled in other scenes: throughout the film, Madeleine is associated with green—she drives a green car and is wearing a green dress the first time Scottie sees her. When he meets Judy for the first time, she is also wearing green, and when she is transformed fully into her Madeleine, she is lit by a green neon light. Scottie, on the other hand, often wears a red tie. When he first sees Madeleine, in the shot from his subjective perspective, the red wallpaper becomes more intense just for a couple of seconds (once again juxtaposed against Madeleine's green dress and later paralleled with a shot of Judy's dark profile against a green background,), and it is the red ruby necklace that leads the detective into discovering Elster's scheme. However, during the discussed scene, the colors are reversed—Scottie is wearing a green sweater, while Madeleine is wearing (his) red bathrobe as if the two were mutually imprinting on one

another. The woman asks for her hairpins to tie her hair in a bun, while later in the film, Scottie insists on tying the hair up to complete Judy's transformation. The first scene is scored with Madeleine's theme; however, there is a short passage for woodwinds, starting with the Tristan Chord (although one octave higher than in Wagner's overture). In the transformation scene, Herrmann uses the love theme but also quotes the same passage for woodwinds.

Madeleine's theme shares more resemblances with *Tristan and Isolde's*. The theme consists of wandering phrases of groups of four eight notes, starting on the second strong beat of each bar, with the third note ligatured between the bars, thus eliminating the first strong beat in the next bar, adding to Madeleine's delicate aura. Schneller (2005, 193) claims that it allows for creating movement without reaching a definite end, resembling the Tristan prelude, which also consists of similarly built phrases, constantly modulating without reaching a final resolution. Schroeder (2002, 242) points out that besides the similarly built phrases and the six-eight meter, Herrmann also uses analogous suspensions and structure. He also notices that in both cases, a similar transformation of the rhythm in the phrases (from equal eighth notes to dotted notes) appears and that Herrmann borrows the Tristan chord and its resolution.

According to Schneller (2005, 196-198), the theme undergoes a thematic transformation in a Wagnerian fashion, slowly becoming the love theme, culminating in the scene where Madeleine falls from the church tower in the middle of the film. Herrmann augments Madeleine's theme using three-four meter harmonic and melodic material from the love theme (D-C step over an A-flat Major chord). Then, he modulates the theme even further, chromatically condensing the four-note figure, constantly climbing up almost frantically. However, despite his claim, the merge between the two themes begins earlier. The first hint of the love theme, aside from the opening credits, is heard when Scottie drives Madeleine to the forest, where he experiences Madeleine behaving as Carlotta for the first time. Then, when she wanders into the beach, the first and the second augmented section can be heard during her conversation with Scottie, and when the phrase reaches the sound D, it loops itself around the D-C interval until Scottie kisses her, which is scored with the return of the first augmented section and a triumphant C Major chord counterpointing the incoming waves. However, the love theme finally replaces Madeleine's theme in the church scene, which also encompasses all the thematic material developed for the film—the ten-minute sequence is preceded with a short statement of the love theme, fore-

shadowing the things to come. The E-flat minor seventh chord, the same that was played as an ostinato at the beginning of the film, is played when Scottie answers the door and sees Madeleine. The conversation is scored with Carlotta's theme, a simple harmonic progression underlined with a Spanish Habanera rhythm (Schneller 2005, 196), which was hitherto played when Madeleine was looking at her grandmother's portrait or talking about her dreams and visions, and the drive to the church is underscored with the theme that played when Scottie was following Madeleine. At the site, Madeleine's theme merges with the love theme, and Madeleine's run up the stairs is illustrated with a pulsating motif and chords from the opening rooftop chase.

Schneller (2005, 194) points out that the merge between the themes happens because Elsner's plan finally comes to fruition, and it is here that Madeleine's past meets the present, and her dream is fulfilled. Indeed, the church becomes a place that condensates time itself, becoming the axis of symmetry for all events in the film. Madeleine meets her fake past here and her authentic future when she repeats the fall at the end of the film. The same can be said about Scottie—from this point, Madeleine is gone, leaving him only with a melancholic, obsessive memory of love and of a woman whose death he could not prevent because of his acrophobia, which leaves him helpless for the second time.

After the apparent suicidal death, Scottie is treated for melancholia with classical music. However, as his friend Midge points out to his doctor, the therapy is ineffective. Broken Scottie wanders around the streets of San Francisco, visiting where he used to see Madeleine. He still sees her in the faces of random strangers, only to realize, upon a closer look, that they are not Madeleine. The love theme illustrates Scottie's melancholia—the establishing shot of the city panorama is initially illustrated with a lyrical and joyful melody when suddenly a solo French horn plays the love theme, and the string section joins in. In other scenes, when Scottie thinks he sees Madeleine, the theme is interrupted before fully developing. For example, when he realizes that he mistook a stranger for Madeleine, his disappointed look is underscored with the first chord of the love theme, but in a different position and orchestration, creating a stark dissonance.

Madeleine's theme appears only in a defragmented form in this part of the film, giving way to the love theme—the fight between the two themes is heard in a scene in which Scottie walks Judy back to her room, and her profile is covered in the dark, while the room is lit by a green light from the street, mirroring the scene at Ernie's, where Scottie first saw Madeleine.

The former theme “loses” the battle to the latter, underlying that the detective can never appreciate Judy for whom she is, always haunted by the image of the dead woman. The theme appears in its complete statement in the scene in which Judy’s transformation is complete. Once again, Herrmann uses both the Tristan chord as well as some other harmonic material from the prelude (Schroeder 2002, 243), often accenting non-chord tones, with the theme reaching its highest point when Judy, now as Madeleine, walks out from a bathroom, seeming almost translucent because of the neon light, which makes her seem a ghost materializing, coming back to life, as she approaches Scottie and becomes more visible. The theme uses elements of the augmentation from Madeleine’s theme, which explodes into a lush rendition of the love theme but never uses its original version.

The theme itself is built in a way mirroring Madeleine’s fate: it starts with a rising three-note figure, each in an interval of a third: E–G–B, creating an e-minor triad, then goes again up a third, reaching D. Not only does it resemble the opening chord (e-flat minor with a major seventh—e minor with a minor seventh), but its upwards motion resembles climbing up the stairs. Then the melody goes down from D, once again using the D–C interval connected to falling, but then makes another step to B and then a leap of a perfect fifth down—the most considerable interval parallels a sudden fall. The harmonic material also resembles Wagner, with similarly suspended minor intervals. The scene ends on a triumphant C Major chord, paralleling the kiss at the beach.

The theme comes back in the film’s last scene, where Scottie drags Judy to the top of the church tower and forces her to confess to impersonating Madeleine. Once again, the augmentation of Madeleine’s theme comes back, but this time it is ominous and starts to sound romantic only when the couple embraces each other, and just before it can transform into the complete statement of the love theme, it is interrupted when a shadowy figure of a nun enters the scene. Judy falls, and Scottie is left staring down again, accompanied by a haunting rendition of the love theme, ending on a C Major chord, with low brass giving it a dark timbre, underlying the irony of Scottie’s situation.

Scottie’s melancholia is fueled by his obsession over a dead woman—his behavior is opposite to what Schopenhauer considered the way of avoiding suffering: he is withdrawn from everyday affairs but cannot let go of the images that haunt him. When he starts to feel better around Judy, he cannot have sex with her. As Žižek (2004, 158-162) points out, he is repulsed by her physical proximity, also fantasizing about the illusionary ideal embodied by

Madeleine. As Hitchcock himself said (Schroeder 2002, 240-241), the scene where she completes her transformation is played in such a way as if Scottie tried to undress her instead of dressing her up. The inability to achieve sexual intimacy is another parallel to *Tristan and Isolde*, where the lovers also could not consume their love.

Vertigo combines melancholia, death, love, and obsession, swirling in a spiral, visually and thematically represented throughout the film. However, the visuals and the words cannot communicate all the elements in such a seamless amalgamation as music can. So great was Hitchcock's trust in Herrmann that he would order his sound editor to fade the noise in the scene to leave room for the composer and say that certain scenes would play out depending on Herrmann's score (Cooke 2008, 2006). The composer said that Hitchcock only finished sixty percent of the film, with another forty being Herrmann's task. In the case of *Vertigo*, one might add that Wagner should also be included in the percentage (Brown 1994, 148).

Conclusions

The article has strived to show the relevance of Wagner's inventions and themes in different eras of cinema and different forms—direct quotations, recontextualizing the music, and the more subtle ways of using his harmonic and thematic idioms. The first part analyzed Lars Von Trier's usage of the overture and its famous Tristan chord in a context of personal drama juxtaposed with a cosmic-scale tragedy, uniquely combining the two. The second part analyzed how Bernard Herrmann used the Tristan chord and other references to the opera in his score of *Vertigo*.

Quotations from *Tristan and Isolde*, as well as the Tristan chord itself, became a musical signpost for signaling melancholia, which would be immediately recognized by musically savvy viewers, often deepening their interpretation of the film due to intertextuality of the reference and understood on a subconscious level by people without the musical knowledge or training. Many other examples exist of the influence of Wagner's famous opera on cinema. However, the ones mentioned in the article are probably the most representative, *Vertigo* being the most prominent usage of his inventions in the cinema of the 20th-century, while *Melancholia* constitutes the most important and radical example in the current century.

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