

Whole-Tone Collections and Temporal Dislocation in Film Music

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This file includes the abstract, keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “Whole-Tone Collections and Temporal Dislocation in Film Music” by Zachary Cairns. This video-essay may be found at <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv105cairns>

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Abstract for
Whole-Tone Collections and Temporal Dislocation in Film Music

by Zachary Cairns, *SMT-V10.5*

Film composers have often drawn on the whole-tone collection to accompany dream sequences, partly because the intervals the collection contains provide a sense of stillness that seems well suited to depicting altered states of consciousness. But composers also use whole-tone collections as agents of **temporal dislocation**. Temporal dislocation refers to the experience of an intertwining of past, present, and future. There are three primary categories of temporal dislocation: **narrative dislocation**, where the film's narrative removes itself from predominant temporal mode of storytelling; **character dislocation**, where a character experiences an event that challenges their chronological understanding of past, present, and/or future; and **audience dislocation**, where the film challenges the audience's chronological understanding of past, present, and/or future. This video demonstrates these types of temporal dislocation through examples from *Jaws* (1975), *Back to the Future II* (1989), and *Star Wars: Episode IV* (1977). None of these films use a primarily whole-tone language, but they all turn to whole-tone collections for these specific moments.

Short Keyword List

Film music; John Williams; Alan Silvestri; Whole-tone collection; Temporality

Extensive Keyword List

Film music; Whole-tone collection; Whole-tone scale; Music theory; Jaws; Back to the Future; Star Wars; John Williams; Alan Silvestri; Ghostbusters; Elmer Bernstein; Bride of Frankenstein; Franz Waxman; Muppet Christmas Carol; Miles Goodman; temporality; liminal space

About the Author

Zachary Cairns currently works as Associate Professor of Music Theory at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. He received his Ph.D. in Music Theory from the Eastman School of Music (2010), an M.A. in Music Theory (2003) and a B.S. in Music Education (2000) from Penn State University.

Cairns' research interests have primarily been centered around the modernist music of the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev Thaw, in particular, the serial music of Edison Denisov. He has published in this area in *Music Theory Online*, *Gamut*, *Indiana Theory Review* and contributed to the collection *Analytical Approaches to Twentieth-Century Russian Music* (Bazayev, Segall, eds.). More recently, he also has been developing secondary research areas in the areas of rhythm and meter in rock music, and analysis of film music. He recently published an article on backbeat switches in 1980s-era rock music in *Music Theory Online*, and his film music studies currently are focused on the musical depiction of Russian and Soviet "villains" in Hollywood cinema during the years just before and after the collapse of the USSR.

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