

London Suburbs And Paris Lifestyles In Philip Saville And Mark Knopfler's Metroland: An Audiovisual Analysis.

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I. Introduction

Metroland (UK, FRA, ESP, 1997) is a comedy-drama film directed by Philip Saville, based on the novel by Julian Barnes. The film is set between the 1960s and the 1970s in two different cities at two different times: Metroland in 1977, a middle-class suburban region north-west of London; and Paris in 1968. The film's protagonist, Chris (Christian Bale), and his family live a lackluster life in Metroland, which is described in both the film and the novel as: "Cosy homes for cosy heroes. Twenty-five minutes from Baker Street and a pension at the end of the line" (Barnes 39). Paris serves as the film's second setting, the city of Chris' memories and youthful ambitions that represents the cultural and political ferment of 1968. These two social environments are not only represented by images and dialogues, but are also evoked by the film's soundtrack, which was composed and produced by Mark Knopfler. He has already written scores for films – *Local Hero* (1983, Bill Forsyth), *The Princess Bride* (1987, Rob Reiner) – in which two different realities clash. In *Metroland*, Saville creates a strong contrast between Paris and London: the Parisian past is experienced as a dreamworld, but the plot leads the protagonist to confront reality: is Chris to become a petty bourgeois? Is he to become what he used to detest when he was young? However, this awakening in the present London will not seem so traumatic; despite his utopian, juvenile intentions, Chris will realize that he loves his life as it is.

The purpose of this article is not to analyze the film in depth, but rather to understand how the director and the composer have recreated specific settings by means of a unified audiovisual strategy. Consequently, the analysis aims to demonstrate the power of audiovisual communication and music's ability to provide more information than images themselves. Indeed, according to Albert Jurgenson, we can make images say everything and also its complete opposite (93), while Nicholas Cook, analyzing Jean-Luc Godard's *Armide* (a short from the anthology film *Aria*), declares that "music and film intrude upon one another, and they do so centrally, not peripherally" (254); even if every chapter from *Aria* is a hybrid between opera and film, Cook's claim should be extended to audiovisual editing in film in general. Audiovisual editing is, in effect, an essential feature of contemporary cinema due to the mutual influence between cinema and music videos.

David Neumeyer provides an interesting historical account about film music studies from its origins to the 2010s. Before the 1970s, "rarely were studies of film music oriented toward methodological or critical concerns that would in turn promote scholarship production" (3). But later things changed: "film music studies are now firmly established in the humanities. [...] they are a node between disciplines, principally film studies, language and literature studies, media (communication) studies, and musicology (or music studies)" (Neumeyer, 5).

Unfortunately musicology is often treated like an ancillary discipline for multimedia studies, paradoxically even in the case of music videos, where visual images follow a pre-existing song (Del Castello 2014). This article resolutely advocates a musicological approach to the study of film music.

Michel Chion has been defending the principle of synchresis for thirty years. At the opening of his preface of the second edition of *Audio-Vision*, he states: "studying a film's sound and image independently of each other would make no sense. Still today in 2018, that is, over ninety years after the beginnings of sound film, cinema is routinely approached as a visual art [...] ignoring the modification introduced by synchronized sound." (XXI). More recently James Buhler sketched out the range of theoretical approaches that have been applied to the soundtrack over time "for determining the meaning, sense, and structure that sound and music bring to film and other audiovisual media" (16). The subsequent analysis of *Metroland* ultimately aims to contribute to such discussions.

Setting and Characterization: Historical and Symbolic Reenactment

The profilmic level recreates environments, making them credible for a specific place and time period. Music plays an instrumental role in this reconstruction. In *Metroland* the two settings are characterized by songs of a particular era as well as by original music by Knopfler.

For the 1977 London sequences, Saville used four songs that were released that year: "Alison" by Elvis Costello, "Peaches" by The Stranglers, Hot Chocolate's "You Win Again" and Dire Straits' "Sultans of Swing", even if it is the version that will be released a year later; he also depicts a punk concert with original songs by The Subverts performed for the film. The soundtrack is also suited to the context during the sequences set in Paris in 1968, from Françoise Hardy's "Tous les garçons et les filles" (1962), up to Django Reinhardt's "Blues Clair" and "Minor Swing", probably chosen for its cultural reference and for a clear parallelism with Knopfler's fingerpicking guitar.

The film's original music includes Knopfler's song "Metroland" and the instrumental "Metroland Theme". Like the film and the novel, the lyrics are organized into three parts (here, verses): the first one evokes the dream of living "away from Metroland"; the second refers to the Paris experience; and in the third, the newfound peace in Metroland comes to light. Three other instrumental songs are associated with 1960s Paris: "A Walk in Paris", "She's Gone" and "Annick", the leitmotif of the eponymous character played by Emma Zylberstein. "Down Day", however, creates a bridge between past and present; it is deviously played between voice-over sound and inner sound, so it resembles an old memory emerging from the protagonist's mind. Finally, the song "Brats" marks the scenes of the period preceding the departure for Paris.

Saville makes a significant use of the optical tracking shot. I suggest that the use of this technique should be connected to 1960s European art cinema. Pier Paolo Pasolini was among the first theorists to consider the optical tracking shot an essential device for directors like Jean-Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni (1967-1978). Instead, Saville used it as a sort of time-bridge. The first zoom of the movie takes place in the first flashback that brings the protagonist and the audience back to the Sixties (00:05:34). Saville created a recurring motif in his movie to relate to the 1960s in Paris and he did that in agreement with Knopfler, because Claude Lelouch used the zoom in *Un homme et une femme* (1966) in tandem with Francis Lai's music. The instrumental theme of this soundtrack can be compared with "Annick". Lai's tune is A-B-C. The theme opens in the key of D major by repeating an open fifth. Knopfler makes a similar intro in a similar key, G major. The parallelism is palpable.

It is thus clear that Saville and Knopfler have recreated 1960s Paris through a homage to a French masterpiece of the period. The historical reenactment is not limited to the sets, costumes, hair-styles and songs, but is also evoked by film score and filmmaking techniques which often correspond to one another. For instance, during the first optical tracking shot, we can hear Annick's theme while Chris is having a flashback about her. Although Saville's mastery in the use of the zoom might come from his career in television, where zooming was a common technique, in *Metroland*, it primarily evokes the aesthetics of European cinema. Another benchmark for Saville could have been John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar* (1963), another story of a person who tries to hide the bleak monotony of everyday life in the middle class.

It's 1977 in the previous scene, and Chris has casually found some pictures of Annick, his French ex-girlfriend. Awake in bed next to his wife Marion played by Emily Watson, a zoom frames him in the foreground in order to display the thoughts that upset him. Now it is Annick's voice that speaks and, in the next shot, she has replaced his wife at his side (00:37:05-00:38:34).

The surprise effect is only illusory: a careful look at the zoom shows us that we are back in the past before Annick makes her vocal and visual appearance. Thus, the filmic element (the optical tracking shot) suggests the exchange of temporal levels before the profilmic element (first her voice, then the presence of Annick on the bed).

3. Long shots and the "Vegetable Garden" and "Tennis Court" Scenes.

Contrary to his juvenile intentions, Chris has become what he used to define as "bourgeois". Conversely, his friend Toni (Lee Ross) is still rebellious and unconventional. In 1977, Toni comes back from the United States and visits Chris at home. In the vegetable garden scene (00:14:38-00:15:53), Toni sarcastically reveals to Chris what he really thinks of him. The second scene is set in 1963 and reveals what Chris originally intended to do when he was young: get away from Metroland and never conform to middle-class complacency.

The first frame in this sequence is a long shot of some houses in Metroland (Fig.7). It is not just a transition and establishing shot, for it announces the theme that will develop in the following scene. The streets are not framed, just like the doors of the houses, we can only see grating windows and roofs hidden by the foliage; nor can we see the sky. The composition suggests a sense of claustrophobia; it is how Toni perceives Metroland: an oppressive neighborhood that suppresses human ambitions, almost like a prison for souls. The cicadas' chirping is an environmental sound, while the barking dog symbolizes the attack that Toni is about to launch.

The movie's first shot creates a reassuring and fabulous atmosphere thanks to the suffused sax of the "Metroland Theme" and Jean-François Robin's cinema photography: it is dawn, there is peace and serenity, and a pastel sky evokes openness.

With Toni's arrival Chris's life is suddenly pervaded by the insecurity of the present and the ghosts of the past. The establishing shot of the vegetable garden scene denotes a sense of confinement. A first attempt to escape from this prison occurs at the night-time punk concert. The transition between the latter and the awakening consists of three shots with a strong Kuleshov effect: Chris is about to fall asleep and is completely drunk; there are horses and the sky in the background, then Metroland is framed in long shot. Chris's and horses' snort become intertwined and create a sound-bridge, thus comparing the characters to animals, as several directors of the past did. Metroland is still tainted by a sense of claustrophobia, but not imprisonment: the windows do not have grates, and Chris is still restrained by Metroland's world, even after his transgressive evening.

At the end of the film Chris overcomes his fears. In the goodbye scene between the two friends (01:34:40 - 01:35:58), we find another long shot of Metroland. Here we can see the sky again, while Toni asks Chris: "Are you going to spend the rest of your life here?" Chris replies: "I like my life". Then follows a shot that is finally freed from oppression and claustrophobia: a low-angle extreme long shot in which we can see the sky. These shots recall the matte paintings of the final scene of *Marnie's* Alfred Hitchcock (1964). According to Gianni Rondolino (57-59), when the protagonist overcomes the psychological obstacle, it is symbolized by a ship, the shot loses the sense of oppression and claustrophobia.

In *Metroland's* vegetable garden scene, camera movement in the second shot matches the two actors' choreography; they are framed in a medium full shot and move from right to left. They talk about the garden, but when Toni dives into the burning issue, they stop and are framed in close-ups edited in shot/reverse shot (Shots: 3-9).

Chris then starts to move (Shot: 10), while Toni teases him (Shot: 11). Chris goes to the doorstep with his hands in his pockets and his head held high (Shot: 12). The acting then favors proxemics and body language: his hands in his pockets suggests a blockade against Toni's attack, while his head held high demonstrates the pride of his choices. The fact that Chris is standing on his doorstep points to his desire to defend his position, his family and his own world.

During this shot, the first notes of "Brats" can be heard with a sound-bridge that is recurrently expedient in this film. A fade, which marks an important temporal change, takes us to the next frame and the tennis court scene (00:15:53 - 00:17:33). Once again, the optical tracking shot introduces the Sixties: Metroland, 1963, in the middle of a tennis court during a men's doubles match. In the long shot, we can see Chris and Toni sitting beyond the grounds and the court. A distinct separation between them and the bourgeois who play tennis is diegetically marked by a wire fence as a distinction between two perspectives of life (Fig. 12). A slow zoom shows the boys from a closer perspective.

While the two boys criticize the English middle-class and dream of becoming boulevardiers in Paris, there is a cut to the tennis ball that has bounced out of court and ended up at their feet (Shot: 21). The reverse shot on the same axis as the first zoom (Shot: 22) marks a strong contrast between the tennis players and the boys: shot and reverse shot on a 180 ° line symbolize bourgeoisie and anti-bourgeoisie, two opposite perspectives.

One of the players kindly asks the boys to throw the ball back to him. In sync with the drum break, the ball is framed again with an eyeline match (Shot: 24). Toni is disgusted and looks at the ball (Shot: 25) in the silence of the soundtrack. The musical break coincides with the scene's climax, which increases its effectiveness. The player then decides to retrieve it himself (Shot: 26), while the music starts again.

The song, as featured on the album, is here cut in order to favor the audiovisual synchrony: three choruses less (all the Choruses B) and two bars less for the repeated intro. "Brats" chorus is just a musical flow that reflects the excitement of the dialogue, whereas the intro is useful as an introduction to the events in which it is used.

The audiovisual editing is usually built on the musical rhythm, while Saville (probably with the editor Greg Miller) gives the tennis court scene the audiovisual rhythm in another way: the optical tracking shots bring us to different types of shots (medium close-ups, close-ups, chokers, reverse angle shots) in correspondence of the musical structures (intro, chorus A, chorus B, break).

The approach of the climax is organized according to optical tracking shots in relation to the musical structures and the diegetic events. Saville regularly looks for alternative solutions rather than editing in order to interact with the sound. For example, at the party he opts for a 1'40" -long take where Chris, Toni, other people and the same camera movements follow in the same guarded way the notes and the lyrics of "Peaches" by The Stranglers (01:16:59 - 01:18:39).

"Brats" is a clear homage to "Night Train", a twelve-bar blues standard. The song's title and symbolism refer to trains and stations: the brass recalls the whistle of the train whereas the circular progression

of the bass recalls the continuous movement of the trip. James Brown used to enumerate a list of the East Coast stations, recreating a choreography inspired by the movement of the train. Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames from his debut in 1963 used to cite London stations. This is the link between *Metroland* and Knopfler's musical choice, inspired by "Night Train".

The majority of "Night Train" versions are blues, jazz or rhythm and blues. Aside from the train reference, Knopfler had to compose a leitmotiv for two brats in *Swinging London*. So he opted for a rock'n'roll rhythm that endows the song with a dynamic verve. He goes on to portray these brats with the insertion of sarcastic laughs that refer to the pranks they used to do on the train to *Metroland*. Moreover, the structure of "Brats" is very complex compared to both the traditional blues and the different versions of "Night Train". For example, it has a six-bar intro built on the "Twist and Shout"'s bridge in six bars with crescendo, included for the first time in the 1962 Isley Brothers' version, but mostly known for the Beatles', released in 1963. The Fab Four used to play this song at the height of their concerts and the audience would go in rapture.

In short, Knopfler recalls a famous musical background in order to evoke trains, subways, but also youth, pranks, anti-conformity and irreverence. These suggestions activate the typical viewer's mind receptors and strengthen the sense of images and lines. In another scene in which Chris runs down the stairs to catch the train, we cannot hear the first chorus, but the second with a sax and piano counterpoint. This choice leads to two effects: the action begins in medias res and the audiovisual rhythm becomes frantic.

4. Is Musicology Necessary for Film Music Studies?

In 1968 Paris, the romance with Annick is going pretty well. Their love' making is accompanied by a romantic theme played on the sax. And yet the song, "She's gone", is about abandonment. In the next shot, Chris asks his employer how he can know if he has fallen in love. This is followed by his first encounter with Marion, who will later become his wife. They meet at the garden of Palais Royal under the statue *The Pâtre and the Chèvre* by Paul Le Moyne; it is an allegory in which Marion plays the role of the shepherd leading the goat back to the barn.

A subdued version of "She's gone" is performed by a piano solo while Chris joins Marion and his friend in a cricket match, despite the fact that he has just declared he does not want to feel English. Images contradict words, and the music foreshadows Chris's fate. When his relationship with Marion starts, the same leitmotiv returns, revealing a link between the love scene with Annick and the encounter with Marion. When we realize that Chris is starting to fall in love with Marion, the "Metroland" intro sneaks in the scene in a low and subtle way, just like Marion sneaks into the relationship between Chris and Annick. It is the musical sign that suggests that Chris will return to London.

When Annick leaves him, "She's Gone" returns in its original version. The leitmotiv of separation is now clear and creates a link between three occurrences: Chris and Annick's last love scene; the encounter with Marion; the final detachment.

The last scene set in Paris is on a bridge over the Seine. The lyrics let it be understood that Marion and Chris were discussing to go back to London. He has no intention to do so, he screams, he says he loved Annick who was everything for him and that he is going to stay in Paris, he wants to be an artist and does not want to go back to "bloody England," he does not want a wife, he does not want "bloody kids" and so on while screaming loudly.

However, the lyrics tell us, "dreams have a morning after and run for cover in the light of day". Two elements bring the action back to London: first, a slight guitar arpeggio based on "Metroland"'s notes and "Down day"'s intro, in turn also based on "Metroland"; second, a track to Marion's hand drawing near Chris's. As we have seen, there is a contradiction between what he says and what we see and hear; this time it is as if Chris had just said "No," while the music reveals, some seconds before the image that he actually meant "Yes." The music is thus a cinematic element not only to conjure up emotions, but to clarify the plot. Music communicates with images, sometimes providing different or additional information more than images themselves or characters' lines do. More than once Saville and Martin anticipate a scene with music or sounds on the entrance or the cut of a scene' transition (or a sequence's transition) and they apply this technique at the most remarkable key-points of the plot to connect the events by means of music, sounds or voices and especially to support moods and characters. But this is the only case in which there is such a sharp contrast between what we see and what we hear.

The final scene is set on the street outside Chris's house. It is late at night, and Chris, who suffers from insomnia and often takes a walk to reflect on his life and the meaning of life in general, imagines he sees Annick, whose heels he can first hear as she walks on the opposite sidewalk, cue to the dreamy notes of her theme. In a semi-POV shot, Chris turns to his own sidewalk. We cannot see Marion yet, because she is concealed by Chris's silhouette, her coming appearance announced by the notes of "Metroland". Once again sound (first noise, second music) announces the image.

Image is nonetheless preponderant in the handling of space, because the sidewalks symbolize two different environments, with two different women, two different cities and two different states of mind: on the one hand, his youthful spirit, his antibourgeois ideal, the boulevardier life, the art, the philosophy; on the other, his family, his peaceful life, his maturity, his job, his own home, his true love.

In conclusion, image and music reinforce each other to better express the meaning of the filmic work. *Metroland* is a good example and shows a unified audiovisual strategy. So, an exhaustive analysis of the film cannot be separated from the music analysis. The film is a multifaceted work of art: we have to consider it all to enjoy it as a whole and we have to consider it as an audiovisual work to understand its real sense.

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